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Far off, there is a land, where the unbroken fields of snow stretch themselves drearily and without end, towards the ice-bound pole. There, for two-thirds of the year, gloomy night, ancient mother of all things, reigns oppressively over the half-ripened harvests, save when the pale midnight sun casts its oblique rays into the pine forests, and illuminates them as with streams of flowing silver. The sea breaks upon the rocks of the sounding coast, and awakens myriads of polar birds, who wheel and scream in the air like so many spirits haunting the desolate heights, whilst the mists, hanging about the cliffs, twist themselves into gigantic and fearful shapes, which fills the minds of the human dwellers there with a mysterious awe. There too the ages of the Sagas and the Heathen have left their stupendous traces. Every mountain, every vale, almost every tree, has its tradition of spectre and transformation, and even while you walk the level field, deep rumbling subterranean sounds tell of the great cauldrons of the giants, and of the far-stretching and brilliant grottoes beneath where the elves have their home, and the fiery gnomes forge their terrible weapons of war. But it is not all cold and desolate. To the south, the sun in the summer time warms the valleys and woods into summer-bloom; the air grows soft and balmy; the brooks are unlocked from their frozen sleep; the snug little farms are astir with the sounds of cattle and farmers afield; and the heavy mosses which cling about the firs, blush with their rosy and purple wild flowers. But the days of the blossoms are few and short, and the friendly rays darted by the shining southern skies fly swiftly back to their more genial home. Yet the people there, both south and north, have warm sunny hearts; if nature repels them by her outward aspects, they find so much the more what is beautiful and lovely within. The glow and brilliancy of fancy, the depths of imagination, the ever present verdure of love, the melting fire of affection, compensate for the want of the dazzle and heat of tropical climes.

From that land, many long years ago, the speaker or cockle of adventurous mariners, put forth into measureless seas of ice, seeking for settlements in Greenland. The courageous youth Bjorna first, afterwards Lief, and still after him, Kalefne.—Along the coast, between the cliffs, winding through the hundred islands of the strand, like the sea-mews, they skimmed the seas. Through foaming breakers and through whistling storms they sailed, outrying the south-west wind, but the much sought for Greenland they did not find.—They found instead a more distant land—a land whose shores no longer nurtured the ice-bergs, but were white with silver sand, whose surface was overgrown with wood, where the day and the night were of almost equal length, and where they eat the luscious grape and Indian corn under the noble Masur or spotted maple tree.—Then on the Dighton rocks they carved the hieroglyphics of their short stay, and went back to their northern home never again to return. Though to them the dangers of the ocean were a sport, and the wild whistling of the tempests music, and the mad heavings of the sea a dance—they never more returned. They have slept for long eras beneath the snows.

II. LITTLE VALA AND THE BIRDS.

Centuries we say had fled, when a daughter of that bold northern race, a child, was playing among the flowers of the forests that skirt the ancient capital of Manheim. She was blue eyed and flaxen haired, and skipped along the ground with limbs as lithe and flexible as those of Kulnesach, the reindeer, when he flies across the frosts. She sought the deep groves where she had come to know the name of every plant—the ladies mantle, and the silver weed, and the wild strawberry—and where she can talk with every bird, from the robin and darling to the linnet and nightingale. As she walked along, a subdued murmur of tiny voices sounded from the grass, the spires of which bent to each other as if to hold some sweet converse. The flowers exhaled their richest and most exuberant odors; the purple rays of the setting sun fell upon the dark brown shadows of the forests, here and there throwing far into the dusky glades, a silver beam of light, in which a many-colored butterfly and myriads of sparkling flies were sporting—Note upon note of enchanting melody floated upon the air; and a strange half real, half heavenly elation excited her mind, and gave a quick spring to her steps. She recalled many a gay and grim legend of the mountains and fields; of the alfer who dwell in the middle of the oaks; of the warfs who shape the flashing dwarf crystals, and of the too fascinating Necken, whose inaudible songs accompany the babbling of the brooks. Brushing the diamonds of dew from the bushes of the wild rose, she penetrates to the inmost thicket of a glen, overhung with moss-grown trees, and surrounding a fountain—the fountain of Uller, as she called it, whose source is in the distant Rain Valleys. There she took a seat upon a velvet rock, and called her favorite birds, each by its own gentle name which she had given. The linnet was Lofna, after her who had power to reconcile divided friends; and the nightingale she called Siona, because she awakens the first sweet feelings in the breasts of youths and maidens; and the lark she called Hlyn, as she could sing away all the tears from the eyes of the unfortunate. These, and a thousand others, came flitting about her, hopped nearer and nearer, and eyeing her askance, at last timidly circled round her head and coquettishly played with her locks. In a voice sweeter than their own she sung to them:

Hither, sweet minstrels, come hither to me,
And carol your loves from the beech nut tree;
In dresses of russet and crimson and white,
Whose colors were dyed in the dawn's golden light—
through the winding shades of your leafy home,
some finches, some sparrows, some seven-sleeps,
come!
and pour on the tides of the tuneful breeze,
rich gushes of many voiced harmonies.

To which all the feathered tribes, flitting down from their secluded retreats and their airy outlooks, quickly joined in reply:

Who calls us away from our silent repose,
On the dew-spangled branch of the fragrant rose;
The stalk of the mullen, the curl of the vine,
The soft silken lap of the wild columbine?
'Tis Vala, the Sybil, the gay child of song,
Who wanders the thickets and mosses among,
To learn the sweet art that is hid in your throats,
Then yield her, ye warblers, your richest of notes.

Scarcely had she closed when still other troops upon troops flocked around, which, listening attentively, at last poured out their hearts in powerful streams of melody. The woods rang, and echoed and re-echoed with the bewildering chorus. Vala listened to the infinite modulation, sound rising upon sound, note entertwining with note, now distant, now near, now swelling like a gale, and now tinkling like the bell of a goat herd on the Alpine peaks, till her whole being was bathed and borne upward by the thousandfold harmony. Reverently, absorbed, with breathless awe and adoration, she listened, till overcome by her ecstacy she dissolved into tears. Then the birds crowded more closely than ever about her; they watched her with their round bright eyes, hopping anxiously from spray to spray, as if they knew and sympathised in her distress. One by one they approached and sang their cheerfullest songs; the thrush whistled from the thornbush; the robin chirruped in the fir-tree; the linnet carrolled from the sprigs of the ash; while the lark filled the whole woods with profuse trills and outpourings of sound. Vala laid for hours in this swoon of ravishment and bliss; but what her dreams were then, whither her mind wandered, what glorious scenes she saw, what sweet communion with the spirits of the bird heavens she held, no one knows, and a spell was upon her that she would not tell. She came gradually to, but the night had advanced and warned her to return; yet as she went, while the shadows were gathering fast, she sighed to herself, "Oh why was not I a bird, that I might fly away, when dark winter comes, to summer realms, where they sport and sing forever." Then a deep, mysterious voice said to her from the air, "Thou shalt be a bird;" but in her distraction she heard it not, and hurried on gloomily to the cottage where her parents dwelt.

III. SORROWS AND SAGAS.

The dark winter soon came, and the birds went away; but our little Vala flew not with the birds. She sat lonely and drooping by the lambent fireside, and longed ardently for the return of the spring. Near the pine torch on the table, sat the father, ruling the big copy-books to be used by the children of the small school he taught in the village. Ever and anon he would look up from his work, take a whiff from his painted pipe, and, casting a glance at the idle girl, mutter that she would never earn her oatmeal, much less a coriander cake. She is more idle than the dogs who sleep in the pastor's kitchen. Then, the mother—the excellent housewife—as she sipped the curdled milk into a pot, with a huge silver spoon, in preparation for the next day's morning meal, would heave a sigh. She, too, lamented the dreamy idleness of the child, but mother-like, thought some good would come out of it. The girl grew more sorrowful still, and the tears trickled down her cheeks. "Away with you to bed," shouted the father, who proceed reading a word or two out of Atterbom to himself, and did not wish to be disturbed. Vala stole noiselessly to her solitary room, and, as she was accustomed to utter all her emotions in song, she took a seat by the window, where she might look at the pale moonlight as it fell upon the red fir cones, and sung:

Ah me, what aileth
My sorrowing heart,
How sore it waileth,
Some nameless smart.

In this, mine anguish,
God! pity take,
Who in rood did languish
For my poor sake.

But the good mother from below, who heard her voice, and knew from the tone that it was a plaint of distress, ascended the stairs soon after, and sought to beguile the chill of her woe, by stories of the old Scandinavian past. She would talk of Alvater, creator of gods and men, who held the least as well as the greatest of his creatures in his complaisant arms; of Fraa, the mild and bounteous, whose look was an eternal spring, and who loved to hear the prayers of mortals; of Baldar, the beautiful, brilliant as the white lily, god of eloquence and just decision; and of Bragur, who strikes the chords of the golden Telyn, while his wife, Iduna, keeps the apples of immortal life. Rousing her interest thus, the good mother would branch off into the more fearful & more fantastic traits of northern mythology. Then she would tell of Thor, the thunderer whose hammer struck along the skies, crushed thunder out of every object; of Gerda, the daughter of the ice-giants, whose shining white arms stretched out of the windows of the north, set the whole heavens ablaze with lights; of Heimdal, who guarded the seven colored bridge to the skies, against the evil giants; who could hear the grass grow and the wool on the backs of lambs; and finally of the fair sisters, the Normas, who sit at the foot of the wondrous ash, Igdrasill, whose roots are deep down in the gloomy kingdom of Hela, but whose top reached to the highest Heaven. Thus the mysteries of life and death, and of much that is after death, were darkly shadowed forth to the child, as they had been to the childhood of the nation—to take in future time a clear significance.

Yet mingled with these obscurer traditions were given truths from a far better source—such as the immortal bard of Firthiof's Saga, chounts to the "Children of the Lord's Supper," when he tells them, that

"Love is the root of creation; God's essence: worlds without number
Live in his bosom like children; he made them for this purpose only,
Only to love and be loved, he breathed forth his spirit
Into the slumbering dust, and, upright standing, it laid its
Hand on its heart, and felt it was warm with a flame out of Heaven."

All this the good mother breathed over her child, and then repeated in a tone half recitation and half song, to a wild northern air, this Charm to Rest:

High o'er the summits
Broods Peace,
Among all the branches
Thou see'st
Scarcely a breath;
The birds are asleep in the nest;
Wait thee now—thou too shalt rest,
Calmly as death.

Under the influence of this, the gentle Vala, composed, cheered and comforted, sank into a soft sleep, only to dream of Gladheim the Palace of Joy, and Wingolf, where the perennial fountains flow.

IV. THE STRANGE LADY.

Spring came at last, and the summer, and with the latter, the mid summer's eve, a day peculiarly dear to the good people of Northland. It was a day of merriment and happiness, when all classes dressed in their holiday attire, might have been seen streaming towards the high festival trees. Their houses were decorated as for a fete. In the interiors the floors were strewn with fir twigs, mingled with blossoms and the leaves of flowers; while the outsides were hung with evergreen boughs, and branches woven in interminable wreaths around the door-ways and windows.

In the centre of the village, the point to which all the various groups were tending, they had planted tall trees, which, stripped of their bark, were wrapped round with many colored strips of paper. A thousand nameless objects dangled in the wind from their outstretching arms, empty egg-shells which clattered as they swung, little flags waving merrily, clippings of paper, windmills, dolls gravely treading the thin air, and all making sport for the youngsters, who gathered in multitudes below. There too on small poles were suspended sweet meats and play things, to which the eager longing children bent their eyes, as the happy groups in Germany do about the Chistmas Tree.

Merrily the music sounded from the flute, the cither and the harp; heartily the young men and the maidens, whirled away in the waltz, which Schiller so beautifully compares to the winding dances of the stars. The old women chattered and gossipped; the old men laughed and sipped their home brewed ale; while the children, in the maddest mirth, gamboled and frolicked over the green grass of the plain. But the loudest in her mirth there, and the wildest in her antics was the little girl that had made so many friends among the groves. She ran and leaped with the fastest, screamed with the loudest, danced with the gayest, and when the boisterous sports were done, she gathered the little circles round her, and sung with the sweetest grace, and at the same time the archest drollery, her Song of the Birds.

Come, children, away,
From the dance and play
To the groves!
Where the flowers are springing,
And the little birds singing
Of their loves.
Tralla—tralla—lira, lira, la!
How the merry little rout
Through the branches flit about,
Tralla, lira la!
And split their swelling throats
With a rubadub of notes,
Te wee—tiskadee—wobble—wobble—cha!
Tralla, lira, lira, la—lira la!
Chirrup, chirrup—pewee!—to whoo!
Chatter, whistle, warble, cuckoo!
How the insects glitter,
And the green leaves twitter,
Tral la, lira la!
While the starling and the wren, and the linnet sing,
And the alfer dance in the fairy ring,
Come away!—Come away!

As the echoes of her sprightly voice died off in the distance, the birds in the copse seemed to catch and prolong the strain, which they mingled with the vesper hymn they were then sending up, with the fragrance of flowers, into the evening glow. All the children, entranced, yet amused and provoked to laughter by her imitations, broke simultaneously forth into clappings and shouts of applause. "Again, Vala," they cried, "again, Yngoba; thy voice is clearer than the bird, brighter than the lark's, when, from the dewy depths of the sky, he heralds the morn; and richer than the nightingale's, from the darkling shadows of the woods, lamenting the thorn in her breast." The elders, attracted by the noise, came nearer, and soon formed part of the group.

Vala, nothing loth, but pleased with the pleasure she had given, remarked with a charming simplicity, "I am so happy that I can sing; I learned it first from the birds. Well, now, listen to a Story of the Neck."

She then sang as follows:

As the last red glow of twilight
Fell from the darkening skies,
I sat by the crimson ocean,
And saw the gray mists arise.

I saw the yellow foam curling,
From the water's gentle swell,
I heard the mysterious music,
Of the sea-snail's pearly shell.

Out of the billows, a maiden,
Begirt with the green sea-grass,
Arose with her tresses dripping,
And gazed in a silver glass.

She gazed in her silver mirror,
And she combed her golden hair,
While she sung the song of the Necken,
To a wild and wondrous air.

She sung of her coral dwelling,
In the ocean-caves below;
I felt a resistless longing,
Down in those caverns to go.

I felt that my feet were gliding,
Along the sands of the shore,
I knew that mothers and sisters
Would find me on earth no more.

No burst of approbation followed this legend, which was sung with as wierd and and wondrous an air as it ascribed to the Neck; but the whole circle stood breathless, with their faces black and their eyes staring as if they had been smitten suddenly with some great dread and sorrow. The girl, too, overcome by the emotions of her own song, cast down her head.—The blood had fled from her cheeks, her look was wild, and she trembled in every limb. "*Ach, Gott in Himmel,*" exclaimed a little lady, who suddenly appeared in a brilliant dress of changeable satin, adorned with jewels and chains, and ornaments of all kinds, and who, elbowing her way through the throng, was the first to break the silence—"*Ach, lieber Gott,* but can she always sing so?" Rushing towards the girl, she caught her up in her arms and gave her a thousand kisses. "Dearest angel, daughter of all the Lichtelfs, can you sing more like that?" "Oh, yes indeed," replied she, the solemn, mysterious expression still remaining upon her features, "I can sing all the songs Odin taught Volthar, when he hung him nine days in the wind, pierced by a sword. 'Twas on the tree whose root mortals dare not name. No king's daughter, no son of men can sing them, but they only whom the Aser love, who have drank of the honey dew, and read the runes. Nine songs I know," she continued in an elevated inspired tone,—"yes, twelve which Dain, the dwarf, and Asvid the giant, and Dwalin, the elf, and Voluspa, the prophetess, have heard, yet beside them no other. The first is for help in time of need; the second for medicine; the third blunts the swords of our enemies; the fourth breaks the chains of evil love; the fifth directs the flying hour; the sixth charms away anger; the seventh puts out the flame of burning houses; the eighth turns beasts into men; the ninth disarms the witches when they fly through the air; the tenth stills the winds; the eleventh raises the dead; the twelfth awakens true maiden's love. Ha! ha! ha!"

Then the girl laughing sternly, ran away, calling her companions after her as she went. But the strange lady followed at the top of her speed, shouting to the valant troop to come back: "Vala, thou eldest born of Freia, come back. Vala—I will get thee gold and silver, and precious stones. Thy path shall be strewn with flowers, and the young men and the old men shall call thee blessed." After awhile Vala ran back.

"But who are you?" asked the girl.

"Oh!" replied the stranger, "I am the queen of the enchanted Realm, which hangs between the heaven and the earth, where the spirits of light and beauty have their home. In the world it is, yet above it—a terrestrial Valhalla, whose midnight is more gorgeous than its noon, and the commonest people glitter in all the magnificence of kings and queens. There dwell the heroes of all time, whose praises are struck on golden harps by the immortal Bards, while the Valkyrias of poesy, music and the dance, carry round their foaming cups of delicious mead. There the wretched are made glad, the dull lively, the prosaic ideal, and the common place glorious. No kingdom of earth is so cold, none will last so long; it began before Odin; it will live longer than the gods. It is everywhere in time, and omnipotent in space; and when the wolf Fenris shall have swallowed the Past, the gay and beautiful and sublime creatures of our world will still flourish and bloom!"

Vala, who had hung with rapture upon this description of a new and wonderful World, sprang suddenly into the arms of the Lady, exclaiming, "Oh, take me there dear lady, take me there; 'tis of that world that I have dreamed since I was a child.—Where is it, and what is its name?"

"Lichtalfheim or the Temple of Mingled Delights, by the initiated; though vulgar mortals, in their profane speech, have called it the Theatre!" resumed the lady.

"The Theatre!" shrieked now the pious mother. God in Heaven protect us. The Theatre; 'tis the black home of Loki! 'Tis the lowest hall of Niflcheim, where the serpents coil and hiss. Come hither, my child, and pray to be forgiven for having thought of that wretched abomination."

But the child did not go, she clung to the Changeable Lady; she insisted that she must see the new world; she expostulated with her parents; she wept; she stormed; she gave them no peace thereafter, but in vain.

At last, after several months, when they found she was pining away, they consented, with sorrowing hearts, that she might pay a visit to the strange lady, and her magical haunts, should she ever again be found. Scarcely had they spoken when she appeared. Again they were reluctant, but teasing, importunate Vala prevailed, and finally set out. We will not describe her ardent joy, as she approached the sacred premises; nor yet her acute disappointment and sorrow, when she was told by the Arch magician that long years of toil would be necessary to fit her for a reception as one of the enchanted people. She was told that far away lived a song-smith, a stern but powerful Kobold, who could alone prepare her to be initiated into the celestial arts and mysteries.

V. THE SONG-SMITH.

Vala's parents were poor, and it was only with infinite difficulty and sacrifice that they procured the means of sending her to the far off forges of the Song-smith. But her hopes were bright, and she consoled them in their sore distress and need, with rain-bow promises, that she would send them back mountains of gems. They smiled at her excited fancies even in the bitterness of their distress, and parted from her with drooping eyes.

She traveled over seas, over mountains, over plains, over dales, and at last arrived at an immense and populous city of the Gnomes, which glittered in the sun light with a thousand pinnacles and spires. She was without friends and alone; her soul sank within her as she saw the gay crowds pass by her in the thoroughfares. The gorgeous palaces of the genii rose on all sides of her, in overpowering splendor.—Brilliant plates of glass covered their fronts; ornaments of gold were wreathed about the high broad doors; the columns were of marble and porphry, and the interiors were furnished with the richest silks, tapestries and porcelain. But, alas, this magnificence was not for Vala. She was doomed to work out her hard apprenticeship far away in the distant dens of the great city, where the dirty gnomes and the black-alfer, hideous, begrimed and distorted, were incessantly manufacturing the indescribable splendors of the more fortunate spirits. There, amid filth, discord and rioting, she selected a little cell where she might rest and sing unobserved.

Early the morning after her arrival in the Gnome city, she arrayed herself in her tastiest garb, and set out for the shop of the Song smith. He lived in a spacious hall that seemed to be constructed entirely out of the lungs of mortals, save that the floors were of box-wood, the sleepers of brass, and the beams of cat gut. It was elastic like India rubber, and could be inflated or collapsed. On the sides stood confused crowds of inanimate figures, most of them grotesque and monstrous, but a few graceful and pleasing. They were inanimate only when left alone; but if a stranger touched them they gave out the fearfulest sounds that were ever heard in the witches chorus on the Brocken—sighs, shrieks, gibbors, hisses, wails and roars. They would scream like an infant in agony; they would howl like brutes in their rage; they would chatter like ghosts in the cold moonlight; and they would groan and whistle and tramp like tempests in a wood. But let a friend and familiar approach them and suddenly their hideous screechings would change into the sweetest eolean harmonies that ever floated around Odin's crystal throne. As Vala entered, she trembled in her inmost nerves. She could hardly reach the high stand where the tall Song-smith sat in the midst of the instruments of his trade. He was gloomy and dark, and his eyes shot forth a strange unhallowed fire. "What do you want?" he asked, in a soft southern tongue, but with a severe and repulsive accent. "I want to be taught all your art and mystery," was the modest, half articulated reply. "Sit down then and sing there," rudely continued the Smith. Vala, almost sinking with agitation, essayed to sing an old rhyme about Sir Ulef and the Elves; but she was too much frightened to get beyond a single stave. The gloomy old Kobold frowned "Hum!" after a time, he said, the strange fire radiating from his eyes, "what baroque and develish stuff is that? It will not do; you have no manner, no style, no *aplomb*, no *tout ensemble*—no—ah, but yet you have a voice—go home, and come to me in three years! adieu." Saying this, he bowed her down stairs. Poor Vala! The Peri, driven from the gates of Paradise, could not have been more sadly wounded and grieved and cast down than she was when she heard this dread sentence, coming like a moan from the immeasurable voids. The sweet fancies of a life were turned into wormwood and gall. Her rainbows of hope had suddenly vanished into thick night. A black, utterless despair covered the earth and the heavens. Her limbs scarcely bore her to her little dark cell, when she flung herself upon the bed and wept aloud in all the desolation of an inconsolable anguish. But it was not for herself that she wept: she thought of her parents far away on the Earth, struggling wearily under the load of poverty; she thought of her brothers and sisters doomed to long lives of graceless, unrequited toil; she thought of the disappointment that would come upon all who had conceived so much from the promises of the Changeable Lady. Oh, she said, it would be so beautiful to sing, so beautiful to console the old and bowed down broken hearts, so beautiful to scatter treasures among the poor, when I return among the mortals.—But now, I am forced down into the dark halls of Elidmir; I walk alone through the pale realms of Hela, whose palace is Misery, whose table is Hunger and whose servant Delay; Mitgard, the snake, encompasses me, and Nidhoggur, the dragon, with gnaw forever at the roots of my joy. Indeed, indeed, I shall wander, like Run's daughter, the dolorous with pale hair, from rock to rock, seeking warm human hearts that I may clasp to my cold bosom.

In the midst of her repining, a canary, who hung a prisoner at the casement, warbled a farewell strain to the setting sun. She sprang from her bed, took the bird and laid him close to her white breasts. The sound had revived grateful reminiscences of the hours that she had formerly spent in the wood. Who, dearest Consoler, she said, taught thee to sing but the Alfater of whom the good mother speaks? Hast thou any Song-smith; hast thou then years of apprenticeship: hast thou the *aplomb* and the *tout ensemble*, and all the other horrible things? No! no! no! Then she put aside the bird and took up the cither, which was her constant companion, and sung this rhyme, which she had heard her father sing in earlier days, the music of which, perhaps more than the words, was her inspiration. Perhaps, too, in the closing stanza there was something suited to her own condition.

In dreams I go back to childhood,
I shake the years from my head;
How the [illegible] draw me homeward,
Which I left so long since dead.

High o'er the [illegible] there glimmers
A castle which stands alone;
I know its broad towers and turrets,
Its gates, and the [illegible] stone.

From rude armorial [illegible]
The lions look friendly and [illegible]
I greet the familiar old objects,
As I hasten the court-yard thro'.

There lies the Sphinx, at the fountain,
There the gray fig tree gleams,
There, in the casement's shadow,
I dream my earliest dreams.

I walk in the silent chapel,
I seek my ancestor's grave,
There is it and there from pillars,
Hang the old helmet and glaive.

My eyes, thro' their mists, see legends,
But, ah, can read them no more,
The clear, from the painted window,
The light falls broad on the floor.

Home of my fathers, now plainly,
I see thee now, face to face,
Yet thou from the earth last perished,
The plough goes over the place.

Be fruitful, I bless thee, oh field,
The dearest yet saddest to me,
And I bless him doubly, who ever
May drive the plough over thee.

For me, I will fold up my feelings,
Will take my harp in my hand,
And over the earth as I wander,
Go singing from land to land.

The last verse was sung in a voice, so plaintive, and yet so passionately sweet, that it arrested one who was passing below in the street. "*Per dio,*" he said to himself, "but Dante's Beatrice never sang so divinely amid the choir of Paradise!—Who can it be? I must see." He ascended to the room and entered. It was the Song-smith himself—and the song, was one that had, years before, been made out of the incidents of his own mortal life.* He caught the girl in his arms; he smothered her with kisses, he showered whole skyfulls of praises on her; in short, there was no bounds to his enthusiasm. "Come," he said, "come live with me, I will teach thee all I know; I will make thee the wonder of the world—a Mara—a Sontag—a Malibran." "No," answered the modest maiden, "I hate your Niflcheim; and I will never sing in it more." Then she tore herself petulently away.

She was as good as her word, and she never sang there, though the whole city afterwards rose in a mass to shout her welcome.

VI. LICHTALFHEIM.

But in the inscrutable decrees of the Nornen, who sit at the pools of fate, poor Vala was destined to go through her wearisome but fruitful years of discipline among the gnomes. They were years of toil, of pain, and of struggle to her—years when she had to battle incessantly and with stout heart, against the Black-Spirits, who malignantly sought to seduce her into their own infernal realms; who plied her with the poison draught of false praise, and drove her to madness with the ring and clatter of their foul discords. But she fought on resolutely to the end; until she was summoned to attend the mysterious ceremonies of that magical Lichtalfheim, for which she had so often yearned. Her way thither led through a dreary lawn; no fresh dews fell upon the grass; no golden beams from the sun bathed it; and the perfume of flowers was changed into noxious exhalations. High walls, whose loopholes gleamed ever and anon with many colored balefires, rose on every side of inextricable passages and lanes, soft with the mud and rubbish of a deluge. In the midst of all stood a dingy Dome, sacred in the daylight to silence and the rats; but in the evening, eager, tumultuous crowds pressed round its fantastic front, some in rags, and some in jeweled dresses of ermine and silk. As she approached, a little boy, with a link, beckoned her to a small door in the rear, which she entered, and, threading her way up endless winding stair cases, and along dark corridors, she came full upon a great open space, which had the look of an immense gloomy cavern. Strong smells of burning sulphur had paint puffed out from its huge black jaws. Such another confused, wonderful cave of the imps she had never seen. It seemed as if all the objects of creation had been taken apart and flung there in heaps. Faint lights flickered at long intervals on the columns and walls, only serving to render the darkness more visible, and the forms more hideous and grotesque. In one place the trees stood on their tops; great feudal castles projected down from the midst of cities, hung like Fata Morgana in the air; carriages rode on the roofs of Swiss huts, and the vast ocean wrapped itself round a piece of gilt furniture. In another place, periwigs, skullcaps, and coffins were irregularly mingled with stew pans and furnished armor. A motley crowd of all imaginable personages moved busily through the opening—cardinals, kings, mermaids, ghosts, and Jack Puddings; gauze angels with little wings chatted with green snakes and salamanders; fearful sepulchral figures were smoking pipes on the stuffed bodies of elephants; clowns twigged the nose of a sleeping Belshazzer; and little undressed children sat eating lollipops from the cratur of Mount Etna. Then frightful, discordant noises arose—screaming and snoring and wailing—as if all the familiars of the Song smith had made this their Walpurgis rendezvous.

Whoop, scream, clatter, smash,
Kettles thunder, cymbals clash;
Trumpet, flute and violin,
Swell the preparation din,
Fiddles shriek, and oboes sigh,
Bassoons echo from the sky,
Small drums madly roll and bang,
Viols sob and howl and twang,
Demons all from lowest hell,
Who tell their fiend-wold's dreadful knell.

But scarcely had Vala time to note her own surprise, when a bell sounded like the silver bell of the alfer, and all the particolored figures glided away to their dens; the jar and tumult ceased; the trees and houses and water falls rose into their natural positions, and a broad flood of light poured suddenly in on all sides, as from ten thousand stars. Then she felt that she was at last near what she had long sighed for; then a mighty presence, like some deep master-passion hovered about her; she inhaled a rapturous inspiring atmosphere; her head swam with wild dizziness of delight, and her whole being was roused into a ravishing strength and excitement. She raised her eyes, and she found herself in a moment by some unpresentable and powerful enchantment, back into the early ages of Gaul; the sacredoaks of the Druids rose gloomily with their deep shadows around her; the altar of sacrifice burned in the woods; the crescent moon hung in the dark blue skies; the mystic wreath was on her brow; and her bosom swelled and palpitated with the fiercest contending impulses and passions. She had been transformed by a solemn charm into a priestess and a mother. A Roman general had won her most passionate love, he had left her, the base one, for another, and, now, the fierce warriors and gloomy, vengeful, elders of her nation demanded at her hands, his life. Oh, then, how love and wrath, and superstition and pride battled in her rent heart. How she plead with him in wollan strains, so soft that they might have charmed the evil spirit out of Laki; how she threatened him, in the harsh roll of gongs. In the yearnings of an infinite despair she raised the knife over her sleeping children; in the prompting of an infinite love, gave herself for their sakes to the flames. With what proud dignity, with what heart wringing pathos, with what natural tenderness and sweetness, with what wild fire and fearful energy, she went through the various parts of her new life, who shall describe? And, when she fell in the dread temple of Irminsul, in that final agony of love and self-sacrifice, it seemed as if a tempest had dragged the sphered moon from its sky. She fell, apparently never to rise again. But, suddenly a roar, like the crashing of Thor's hammer, and lightning flashes from ten thousand eyes, restored her to her own natural life. She rose from the funeral pile pale, trembling, timid; a myriad of upturned delighted faces greeted her from the air—each step of her foot pressed innumerable wreaths and clusters of flowers from the solid earth; jeweled hands waved her the warmest greetings of ducal and royal hearts; a soft shower of golden rain enveloped her; and multitudes of voices, on the breath of kisses, proclaimed that henceforth and forever her name should be written in the Immortal Runes. Then a stream of happiness poured into her soul such as mortal had never known—such only as the dwellers in Ashgard feel when they ride with the heroes on the plains of Ida.

VII. THE DRAGON SHIP ELLIDA.

Once immersed in the witch element, Vala soon became its mistress, the bewitchingest of its many witches and fays. Her charms were more powerful and seductive than all that is told in the eastern fable of Schecrazade, or the northern sages of Arne Magnusen. Now a simple, tender, devoted peasant; she subverts the wiles of the famous devil, Robert of Normandy; then an orphan or subtler girl, she entrances the great army of the Tyrol; again she sports with Puck and Ariel and Robin Goodfellow, where the wild Bermudas ride, and anon she raises buried nations of Asia from the tomb. Wherever she waves her wand and speaks the magic words, new glories and splendors spring from the clouds. But now, in the midst of her triumphs, the old scenes of her incantations find her no more; she disappears—and her worshipers are inconsolable for her loss. She is out upon the seas, which roll her to some distant land. The angry negers of the tempests flap their pursuing wings behind her; the hundred footed trolls lash the waters into fury, with their twisted and scaly tails, huge sea crabs and walruses lift the seething billows from their backs, and dash them down again fearfully into the briny deep; but what wrecks the courageous Vala. Her dragon ship, Ellida—whose iron jaws eat living coals, and whose lungs emit red-hot smoke; whose broad white wings sweep the clouds from the sky, and whose feet are swift revolving wheels, walks fearlessly over the backs, of all the monsters of the deep; in vain they breath their rage, and weave their spells; she flies a race with the tempest and leaves the sea-gulls behind. The brave Ellida glided, like the phantom ship of the Flying Dutchman, towards the setting sun; and soon Vala saw a new earth arise out of the opening fogs, gigantic in its grandeur, and resplendant with the beauty of groves. It stretched from the dark vast ocean, to where the bounds were lost in the golden mists of evening. On the north rose lofty palaces, thousands of miles in breadth, which shone like crystals in the sun; to the south waved tropical forests and palm groves, where birds of exquisite and gorgeous plumage strayed, and awful mountains, covered with stately pines, were upheaved to the everlasting snows. Fields, luxuriant with corn that might have filled the granaries of Empires; orchards red and purple with the richest fruits; magnificent cities busy with trade, and bursting with vast accumulations of wealth; cataracts thundering from their steeps; an incomprehensible activity of life; a prodigious greatness of structure; a rushing sound of multitudes advancing as if they knew not whether; ten thousand nameless signs and agencies of some new work begun in fresh Creation heaving out of chaos—all these so new, so strange, so grand, bewildered, and oppressed Vala with a profusion and weight of emotion that she had never before felt. This is, indeed, a new earth, she exclaimed, whose inhabitants fly thro' measureless spaces on the backs of flame breathing griffins, and talk to each other from the most distant extremities of their globe in the tongue of the lightnings."

As she approached the shore, there was heard behind her a roaring, and a clamor as of ghouls, mingled with hissings and wild sobs. A fearful quaking came over her, that seemed bodeful of the crash of worlds. Then a voice said, "Behind you is the Past, look!" and she looked and saw a vast black cloud drawn over the east.—Far back, in the dim vista, deep down in the dread abysses of its many foldings, dubious phantoms and spectres wandered and vanished. Foul-Faiths and Bloody-Rites, and Lies and Oppressions, and the Agonies of Battle, all monstrous and oppressive Things, flapping their heavy wings, like vultures in vain struggle against a storm were swallowed up by that tremendous

* Perhaps; but the editor would remark that he more likely stole it from the father of Peter Schlemyl.—*Tribune.*