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**Illustrations of northern antiquities, from the earlier  
Teutonic and Scandinavian romances**

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Child Axelvold

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## CHILD AXELVOLD.

WE consider this piece as a very favourable specimen of the old narrative ballad, equally simple, perspicuous, and satisfactory; where nothing seems to be wanting, and nothing redundant. The natural passions are sketched with a masterly and chaste hand, and the more interesting features are marked with such happy dexterity, that, in the successive scenes, as they pass in review before us, every thing seems to be alive, exactly in its place, and acting its proper part; and there is in the whole a propriety, neatness, and elegance, which is deserving of all approbation.

As one of the most affecting passages (where Child Axelvold's mother takes off her coronet) derives its beauty entirely from fashions and usages now little thought of in this country, it may not be improper here to subjoin some such account of them, as may tend to illustrate the text.

The MAIDEN CORONET, or tire for the head, although of various forms and qualities, according to the taste or condition of the wearer, was uniformly open at the top; and no one covered her head, till she had forfeited her right to wear the coronet, chaplet, garland, or

bandeau.<sup>1</sup> This was the case in many parts of Scotland, till within the last twenty or thirty years. The ballads and songs of the northern nations, as will be seen by the specimens we have produced, abound with allusions to this very antient usage; and every body in Scotland knows

“The lassie lost her silken snood,  
A-puing o’ the bracken.”<sup>2</sup>

Of the coronets worn by the peasant girls in Livonia, Courland, Esthonia, Lithuania, &c., a curious assortment has been sent me by my learned and zealous friend, the Reverend Gustav von Bergmann, pastor of Ruien, in Livonia; and some of them are very picturesque and elegant. The older ones, worn by brides on their wedding-day, are simple bandeaus of dyed horse-hair, curiously plaited, diversified, and figured, which will be referred to elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> The others are of cloth, silk, velvet, &c., tastefully ornamented with beads, spangles, gold and silver embroidery, precious stones, artificial emblematic flowers, &c.; and some raised before in form of a retroverted crescent, and tyed with a ribbon behind. One, which seemed of very antique workmanship, I have seen upon a Lithuanian damsel, which was a solid, radiated, open crown of gilt brass, lined with royal purple velvet, perfectly orbicular, resting upon the top of the head, (where the Scottish maidens used to wear the *cockernonie*;) and held on by a fillet tyed under the hair, which was plaited down the back, and adorned with a bunch of different-coloured ribbons at the end, as is the fashion all over that country, as well as in a great part of Russia. No entreaty could in-

<sup>1</sup> To this purpose is the Lettish (*Livonian*) metrical adage:

Visseem schihdeem mellas galvas  
Visteem gnihdu pilnas;  
Kurrai meitai mitschka galvá,  
Ta irr veena mauka.

<sup>2</sup> “Every Jew has black hair full of nits; the girl that wears a close cap is a w——.”  
<sup>3</sup> See, in the subsequent part of this volume, the notes on “Sir Lave and Sir John.”  
<sup>3</sup> The ends of the hairs are turned inward, which makes it very uneasy, as no lining was originally allowed. The moral intended to be conveyed by this is simple and obvious.

duce her to part with it, although as much money was offered as might have been a temptation. But whatever were her reasons for prizing it so highly, they must have been good; and to give her coronet, for love or money, to a young man and a stranger, would have been a transaction of most inauspicious omen; so I left her, much more pleased with her scruples and her delicacy, than I could have been with the possession of the relic which I was so desirous to obtain.

This metal crown seems to be an humble relative of the golden one worn by the mother of Child Axelvold, which was probably substituted, in a more ostentatious age, by the richer Asiatics and their descendants, for the more simple, significant, and elegant garland of flowers, which the Greeks borrowed from them, or retained after their separation from them. This ornament the Greeks called *μίτρα*, with an allusion, we suppose, to the radiated crown or circlet which surrounded the head of Mithra, the God of Fire, and to the *Apollinis infula*, and *εἶμα θεῶν*, worn by his priests, and those who officiated in his sacrifices.—As Venus, as well as Freija, was originally the same as Mithra, that is, *the power of vivifying and fecundifying heat*; this crown was, at the first entrance upon her mysteries, dedicated by the bride to that goddess:

τῇ Παφίᾳ σφάνους, τῇ Παλλάδι τῆν πλακαμίδα,  
 Ἄρτιμιδι ζώνην ἀνθετο Καλλιρρόη·  
 Ἐυρέτο γὰρ μητρῆρα, τὸν ἦθελε, καὶ λαχὴν ἕβη  
 Σώφρονα, καὶ τεκίαν ἄρσιν ἔτικτε γένος.

*Agath. apud Sched. syngr. 1. c. 4.*

“Callirhoe dedicated her *coronet* to *Venus*, her *hair* to *Minerva*, and her *girdle* to *Diana*; for she had found the suitor whom she loved; she had obtained the prudent youth; and becoming pregnant, she had brought forth a man-child.”

In this statement we have been the more particular, because the translators of the Greek poets, who abound with elegant allusions to the nuptial ceremony of taking off the bride's *coronet*, generally inter-

pret *μίτρην* by the *zone* or *girdle* (of plaited rushes,) which, among the Greeks and Romans, was not properly a *virgin zone*, because it was to be worn by the *wife*, till it became too short.

In later times, the unbinding the *coronet*, and unbuckling the *girdle*, in putting the bride to bed, were so nearly connected with each other, that the *zone* and *coronet* were sometimes put for each other, and *μίτρην* applied to the former, as in the *Argon. of Apoll. Rhod. B. 1, l. 287* :—

— ἢ ἔπι μίτρῳ  
Μίτρην πρῶτον ἔλυσα καὶ ἕστατον.

This may be partly accounted for from the circumstance of the *zone* being otherwise related to the *coronet*, as an astronomical and mythical emblem.

The Jews still retain the usage of the nuptial coronet : “ A mulieribus quoque et virginibus in peculiare cubiculum [sponsa] NON VELATO CAPITE, passis capillis deducitur; festivæ cantilenæ nuptiales coram illâ canuntur; illam in pulchro sedili collocant; crinem illi pectunt; capillosque in elegantes cirros et cincinnos distribuunt; magnificam vittam imponunt, &c.—Singularis est mulierum in hoc capillorum comtu lætitia, quam elegantibus cantilenis, saltatione, ludisque omne genus testantur, ut sponsam exhilarent: magno id enim habent loco, Deoque gratissimum et acceptissimum opus esse censent.”— See *Buxtorfi Synagoga Judaica, a B. filio aucta, &c. 12mo. Basil. 1680, p. 629.*

Writing “ De honestate copulæ conjugalis,” among the Sveo-Goths of his time, Olaus Magnus, (Lib. xiii. c. x.) says: “ Est et alia ratio continentiæ, quod die desponsationis suæ, coronata diademate imaginis Divæ Virginis (quod dono parochianorum pro tali effectu reman-

\* Οὐ μὲν δεξὴν ἡμελλεν ἔπι δεξιῶν θυμὸν ἰαίον,  
Οὐδ' ἄρα παρθεναὶν Μίτρην ἀχχαρτοῦ ἔγνωσαι.  
Mosch. Europ. l. 73.

This is only one of many examples.

net,) incedere valeat [sponsa] inviolato pudore. Prætereà spe bonâ ducuntur, ut quæcunque sponsa tali diademate amicta fuerit, nunquam a fide mariti fecunditate prolis, et morum honestate confirmata discedet: imo ut hæc a Deo novi conjuges consequantur, doctrinâ parentum admoniti, per aliquot noctes et dies à carnalibus lasciviis sese refrenant. —

— “ Prætereà mos est, ut aliquot delicatiora fercula in lecto sedentibus nuptis exhibeantur, ut iis cum astantibus brevi morâ vescantur: tandemque, valedicentibus amicis, suâ pace fruuntur. Sequenti tamen die, nova nupta, CRINIBUS ABSCONSIS, affabili incessu convivis argenteos scyphos electiore liquore repletos, in signum quod materfamilias effecta sit, liberaliter propinat.”

Among Christians, Our Lady, the Queen of Heaven, was the successor of the Syrian Astarte, (who held in her hand a *crucifix*,) the Greek and Roman Venus, &c., and the Gothic Freija; and to Our Lady the maidens continued to dedicate their *virgin* garlands, as they had formerly done to her predecessor. This has been in a great measure done away by the zeal (whether discreet or otherwise) of the clergy; but a usage of so long standing had too fast a hold on the prejudices of the people to be easily abolished; and the walls of the country churches in Livonia and Courland still display multitudes of garlands and votive chaplets of flowers, ever-greens, and aromatic herbs, which, after having been carried to the grave on the coffins of the deceased, have been nailed up there by the parents, relatives, or lovers of *maidens* who have died in the parish. This pious offering, not being suspected of a heathen origin, has been indulged.

The Abbe Fortis informs us, that a Morlach girl, who has been convicted of having “lost her garland,” has her *mitre*, or *head tyre*, torn from her head in the church by the clergyman, in the presence of the whole congregation; and her hair is cut, in token of ignominy, by some relation;—a barbarous and indecent brutality, which, like our

\* The learned archbishop informs us, that the newly-married wives were accustomed to sleep for several nights with a naked sword between them and their husbands.

catty-stool, is much more likely to make the unfortunate object cease to be ashamed of vice, than to recall her to the ways of virtue.

In the island of Zlarine, near Sebenico, according to the same author, one of the bride-men (who by that time is generally intoxicated) must, at one blow, with his broad sword, strike the bride's chaplet of flowers off her head, before she is put to bed. This is to indicate the violence which is necessary before the lady will resign her virgin honours. The same farce<sup>1</sup> of violence, and a sham-fight between the friends of the parties in carrying off the bride, (as is the custom among the New Hollanders,) has long been in use, and is still kept up among many of the Vandal nations: "Moschovitæ autem, Rutheni, Lithuani, Livonienses, præsertim Curetes,<sup>2</sup> quos ritus maximè plebeie conditionis, in nuptiis celebrandis observent, matrimonia absque sponsalibus per raptum virginum saltem contrahunt.—Quicumque enim paganorum sive rusticorum, filius suus uxorem in animo habet, agnatos, cognatos, cæterosque vicinos in unum convocat, illisque talem isto in pago puellam nubilem versari, quam rapi, et suo filio in conjugem adduci proponit: hi commodum ad hoc tempus expectantes, ac tunc armati equites suo more unius ad edes conveniunt, posteaque ad eam rapiendam proficiscuntur. Puella autem, quoad matrimonii contractionem libera, ex insidiis operâ exploratorum ubi moretur per eos directa, plurimum ejulando, opem consanguineorum amicorumque ad se liberandam implorat: quod si consanguinei vicinique clamorem istum exaudierint, ipso momento armati adcurrunt, atque pro eâ liberandâ prælium committunt, ut qui victores istâ pugnâ extiterint, his puella cadat." (Ol. Mag. Lib. xiiij. c. ix.)

The same writer informs us, that among the Swedes, at the marriages of the nobles, the *spear*, (an appendage also of the Roman *Juno*,) which was a necessary implement in the furniture of a marriage cham-

<sup>1</sup> This, 300 years ago, was no farce, and the contest was often a bloody one.

<sup>2</sup> The Curish and Livonian songs still retain the memory of this violent carrying off of the bride, which was then done without the consent of the party or her friends. It is now not permitted, because the poor *slave*, in marrying, must now not consult his own liking, but the will and convenience of his master. The *dead letter of the Law* says, "the slave is free to choose;" but who is to enforce the execution of such a law?

ber, was next morning thrown out of the window, in the sight of all the guests, to indicate that the arduous deed was now atchieved, and all violence between the parties at an end; at the same time that the bridegroom, to shew how well he was pleased with his choice, specified the *morning gift*, or jointure which he settled on his wife. This is the *morning gift* alluded to in "Skiön Anna,"\* and which we frequently meet with, under the same name, in our antient laws and records.

At how early a period these indelicate indications of delicacy began, we will not pretend to say; but we consider their being found among the inhabitants of New Holland as at least a presumptive evidence, that they are among the oldest usages of which any traces are preserved; perhaps as old even as the fashion of uniformly walking on the hind legs.

\* "See vol. ii. p. 103, of Popular Ballads and Songs, from Tradition, Manuscripts, and scarce Editions, with Translations of similar Pieces from the ancient Danish Language, &c. Edinb. 1806," in 2 vols. 8vo., printed by Ballantyne.



## CHILD AXELVOLD.

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH KEMPE VISER, p. 176,

FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1591.

*De Kongens mænd ridè paa voldè,  
De bedè baadè hiorè og hind ;  
De fundè under den lind saa grøn  
Et saa lidet kind.  
( Udi loftet der sofer stolten Elinè. )*

THE Kingis men they ride till the wold,  
There they hunt baith the hart and the hind ;  
And they under a linden sae green  
Sae wee a bairn find.  
( *I the loft whare sleeps she, the proua Elinè.* )

That little dowie up they took,  
Swyl'd him in a mantle blae ;  
They took him till the kingis court,  
Till him a nourice gae.  
( *I the loft, &c.* )

And they hae carried him till the kirk,  
And christen'd him by night ;

And they've ca'd him Young Axelvold,  
And hidden him as they might.

They foster'd him for ae winter,  
And sae for winters three ;  
And he has grown the bonniest bairn  
That man on mold mat see.

And they hae foster'd him sae lang,  
Till he was now eighteen,  
And he has grown the wordiest child  
Was in the palace seen.

The kingis men till the court are gane,  
To just, and put the stane ;  
And out stept he, Child Axelvold,  
And waur'd them ilka ane.

" 'Twere better ye till the house gang in,  
And for your mither speer,  
Nor thus wi' courtly knights to mell,  
And dare and scorn them here."

Up syne spak Young Axelvold,  
And his cheek it grew wan :  
" I's weet whaso my mither is,  
Or ever we kemp again."

It was the Young Axelvold  
Thought mickle, but said na mair ;  
And he is till the bower gane  
To speer for his mither there.

" Hear ye this, dear foster-mither,  
What I now speer at thee,  
Gin aught ye o' my mither weet,  
Ye quickly tell it me."

"Hear ye this, dear Axelvold,  
 Why will ye tak on sae?  
 Nor living nor dead ken I thy mither,  
 I tell thee on my fay."

It was then Young Axelvold,  
 And he drew out his knife:  
 "Ye's tell me wha my mither is,  
 Or it sall cost thy life."

"Then gae thou till the ladies' bower,  
 Ye hendly greet them a';  
 Her a goud coronet that wears,  
 Dear mither ye may ca'."

It was then Young Axelvold  
 Put on his pilche sae braw,  
 And he's up till the ladies' bower,  
 'Fore dames and maidens a'.

"Hear sit ye, ladies and maries,  
 Maiden and courtly fre;  
 But and allerdearest mither mine  
 I' the mids o' you should be."

All sat they there, the proud maidens,  
 Nae ane durst say a word;  
 But it was proud Lady Elinè,—  
 She set her crown o' the board.

"Here sit ye, my right mither,  
 Wi' hand sae saft and fair:  
 Whare is the bairn ye bure in dern,  
 Albe goud crown ye wear?"

Lang stuid she, the proud Elinè,  
 Nor answer'd ever a word;

Her cheeks, sae richly-red afore,  
Grew haw as ony eard.

She doff'd her studded stemmiger,  
And will of rede she stuid :

“ I bure nae bairn, sae help me God  
But and our Lady gude !”

“ Hear ye this, dear mither mine ;  
Forsooth it is great shame  
For you sae lang to heal that ye  
Was mither to sic a man.

“ And hear ye this, allerdearest mither,  
What now I say to thee,  
Gin aught ye o' my father weet,  
Ye heal't nae mair frae me.”

“ To the king's paläce then ye maun pass ;  
And, trow ye well my word,  
Your dear father ye may ca' him there  
That has knights to serve at his board.

“ And do ye till the kingis ha',  
'Fore knights and liegemen a',  
And see ye Erland the kingis son,  
Ye may him your father ca'.”

It was then Young Axelvold  
Put on the scarlet red,  
And in afore the Danish king  
I' the kingis ha' he gaed.

“ Here sit ye, knight and child, and drink  
The mead and wine sae free,  
But and allerdearest father mine  
I' the mids o' you should be.

“ Here sit ye, dearest father mine :  
 Men me a foundling name ;  
 And a man like me sae scorn'd to be,  
 Forsooth it is great shame !”

All sat they then, the kingis men,  
 As haw as ony eard,  
 But it was Erland the kingis son,  
 And he spak the first word.

Up spak he, Erland, the kingis son,  
 Right unassur'd spak he :  
 “ I'm nae thy father, Axelvold,  
 Sic like thou say'st I be.”

It was then Young Axelvold,  
 And he drew out his knife :  
 “ My mither ye sall either wed,  
 Or it sall cost thy life.”

“ W' knight and squire it were foul scorn,  
 And deadly shame for me,  
 That I should fater a bastard bairn,  
 A kingis son that be.

“ But hear thou this, Young Axelvold,  
 Thou art a prince sae fine,  
 Then gie thou me, my wife to be,  
 Elinè, mither thine.”

And glad were they in the kingis court,  
 W' lyst and mickle game ;  
 Axelvold's gi'en his mither awa ;  
 His father her has taen.

It was the Young Axelvold  
 Gae a dunt the board upon :  
 “ I' the court I was but a foundling brat ;  
 The day I'm a kingis son !”  
 (*I' the toft whare sleeps she, the proud Elinè.*)

## NOTES ON CHILD AXELVOLD.

"That little dowie up they took."—P. 361, v. 2.

In the Danish :

"Togde de op denne lille *Mard*, &c."

*Mard*, the Danish editor says, means a *pretty girl*, a *doll*, and the editors of "Fair Midel," say, it means either a *male* or a *female*. We have resolved to err upon the safe side, in rendering it a *dowie* (little doll;) as that is the name commonly given, in Scotland, to a child before it has got any other; and, indeed, till it is of an age to be put into short petticoats. The truth is, that *maar*, *mard*, or *maard*, has these significations only in a metaphorical sense; and in its direct import, is neither more nor less than a *martin*; an appellation which, if directly rendered, would have little beauty or meaning for such of our countrymen as have not, like us, experienced the severity of a northern winter, and can have little conception of the association of ideas by which a martin, from the recollection of the comfort derived from its skin, naturally suggests an object of favour and endearment.

Thirty degrees of cold (by Reaumur's thermometer,) and a cloak lined with *vair*, or martin's fur, has given us a light upon this subject which we had in vain sought for in glossaries and commentaries.

It is amusing to observe how the same circumstances suggest the same associations of ideas to different nations, who can for several thousand years back have had no connection or intercourse with each other. Thus Mr Hearne observes, that among the North-American savages about Hudson's Bay, the *names of girls* are chiefly taken from some part or property of a *Martin*; as the *White Martin*, the *Black Martin*, the *Martin's head*, the *Martin's tail*, &c.

" All sat they there, the proud maidens,  
 Nae ane durst say a word ;  
 But it was proud Lady Elinè,—  
 She set her crown o' the board."—P. 363, v. 16.

There is something peculiarly characteristic and affecting in this conduct of "Burd (gentle) Ellen." Surprised, confounded, and abashed, and unable to utter a word, she mechanically, and almost unconsciously, divests herself of her maiden coronet and stomacher,<sup>1</sup> which she feels that she must now no longer hope to wear; and then, in her confusion and embarrassment, stammers out a disavowal, which we presume those only will blame who are sure that, in the same situation, they would not have done as much.—The different deportment of Child Axelvold, in the presence of his nurse, his mother, and his father, is finely marked.

" It was the Young Axelvold  
 Put on the scarlet red, &c."—P. 364, v. 24.

The term *red*, as applied to *scarlet*, in the Scottish, Danish, Swedish, and Teutonic Romances, is not, as has been supposed, a pleonasm; for scarlet had formerly the same meaning as purple, and included all the different shades and gradations of colour, formed by a mixture of blue and red, from indigo to crimson. Cloths, silks, and samites (velvets) of this description the Scandinavians had from the Mediterranean, either directly through piracy, in plundering the *Dromounds* of the Moors,<sup>2</sup> or through their intercourse with Italy and Spain. They were worn only by people of condition; and the quality of the colour designated the rank of the wearer. Thus we find in the foregoing ballad, "the king's men" dressed in *blue* mantles, which were also of *scarlet*, in which blue was predominant; whereas Child Axelvold no sooner learns that he is of *royal* extraction, than he dresses himself in *red scarlet*, or *royal purple*, before he goes into the presence of his father to challenge his birth-right. Such a challenge was warranted by the manners of the age, in which the claims of royal blood, when justified by royal virtues and accomplishments, were often allowed, without illegitimacy being objected to them.

<sup>1</sup> See the notes on "Sir Lavè and Sir John," in the subsequent part of this volume.

<sup>2</sup> See "Orkneyinga Saga," p. 298, and "Forsøg til en Afhandling om de Danskes og Norskes Handel og Seiluds i den bedenske Tid," in Suhm's "Samlede Skrifter," vol. viii.—The ostentatious manner in which the northern sea-rovers were accustomed to display the fruits of their adventurous valour, on their return from a successful expedition, on a matrimonial visit, or on any other occasion of pomp and pageantry, gave rise to the "silken sails," "gilded anchors," "gilded masts," "gilded sail-yards," &c. &c., which one meets with in the Scottish and Danish Ballads; the barbarous pomp of which is perfectly Gothic, and has no connection with purely oriental manners, or oriental fictions.