

## Zuydersee.

### Stavoren.

**A**mong the commercial sea-towns of Holland 6 centuries ago Stavoren took the first place. The ships of its merchants covered the seas, and imported the productions of all zones. Such an extensive commerce raised the wealth of this town to an unknown extent. It is true there was here, as elsewhere, many poor; but the number of the wealthy outnumbered them. But also high-life, luxury, and magnificence, the usual companions of great riches, did not fail, because in foolish pride and ruinous zeal, one tried to excel the other in brilliancy, in the exhibition of valuables, splendid, extravagant feasts. The legend relates, there were many houses, like palaces, built with marble, the interiors ornamented with the most artistically inlaid-work, covered with the richest stuffs, and provided with the rarest furniture, and the doors instead of iron, were bound with precious metals.

But of all the Stavoren merchants none could compare in riches with the Virgin Richberta. The good fortune, that each of her speculations was richly rewarded, and not seldom with unexpected profits, seemed to show in her, to what degree she could lavish her gifts on a mortal, and how long allow her favours to be enjoyed.

The commercial fleet of the Virgin merchant visited the remotest seas, not only returned each time with the richest profits, but with the most expensive wares, with ornaments, pearls, and precious-stones, which were employed in the palace of their mistress, and shone on its walls.

Such unexampled good fortune the Virgin Richberta could not support with indifference, with which alone she could have enjoyed it; and if it is true, what a wise man says, that great misfortunes are easier to be borne than immoderate happiness, Richberta was destined to be a glaring proof of the truth of the assertion. Her pride kept step with the increase of her riches, and she showed it both by contempt for her fellow-creatures, and satisfying it by the most luxuriant, extravagant feasts, which she gave less to amuse and gladden the town, than to give her guests opportunities to admire the ever new splendour of her apartments, be astonished at the foreign costly food and wine, and envy the giver.

At one of these extravagant senseless repasts, offering nothing to the mind, and leaving the heart void, a strange guest was announced to the Virgin Richberta. He came from foreign countries he sent her word, had seen many royal countries, and the splendour of their courts, and had come to admire Richberta's riches of which fame had reported miraculous.

The flattered mistress begged the stranger to take a seat at her side; he appeared to be still a robust old man, in the picturesque costume of the Orient, his conduct was dignified and noble, and stepped to Richberta, expecting the welcome from her hands, which according to the usage of his country was given symbolically by the offering of bread and salt. But there was no bread on the luxurious table, which groaned under the burden of rare, palate-exciting dishes, and from which the simple nourishment of poverty was banished.

Silently the stranger seated himself, and in taking refreshments he related agreeably and instructively of his travels by land and water, of foreign nations and their customs, of his changes, his pleasures and misfortunes, of the perishableness of earthly goods, and the mutability of human happiness.

Every ear listened to the sounding words of the enigmatical guest; but not the Virgin Richberta. Her vanity could not expect anything else than that the stranger should be loud in his praises of her riches, the brilliancy of her feast, and would make comparisons giving fresh nourishment to her pride; but he was silent on such subjects, till finally, demanded by herself, he confessed only by kings to have found such splendour and extravagance; the more singular, he concluded, to miss here, the best and noblest

what the Earth produced. In vain one tried to obtain a fuller explanation of the strange guest; he remained dumb, and on being questioned too pressing and importunate, he disappeared and was not seen again.

Richberta's pride and curiosity equally excited, allowed her no more quietude. She possessed in valuables all that could be mentioned, produced by Land and Sea; however the very best should be wanting? She asked scholars and soothsayers, sent for magicians and dream-interpreters; but none knew to name what she had not long possessed.

In her restless desire for the very best she had ships equipped, to cruise all seas and lands, and not to return till it had been found.

The commander of her fleet put to sea, undecided whither to direct his ships. One part he sent to the East, and another to the West, while he himself with his ships relied on the favour of the winds. It happened, that by a leak, a part of the provisions was spoiled, and although there was no want of meat, wine, and other objects of luxury, the flour and bread had become unfit for food, and the want of it was soon felt most severely. In this need the commander recognized clearly, what he was obliged to consider the most delicious and best; not the spices and perfumes of India, the pearls from the bottom of the sea, the gold from the deepest diggings,

but the simple everywhere thriving gift of Nature, the indispensable, inestimable nourishing, and reviving bread.

He recognized now the sense of the obscure words, spoken by the stranger, and his resolution was quickly taken. He steered to a Baltic harbour where he took a full cargo of the finest wheat, with which he sailed to Stavoren. Scarcely arrived, he appeared before the Virgin Richberta, who had not expected him so quickly, and announced to her, that he now knew, what was the most luxurious and best of all possessions; he had found it, and in abundance brought with him. He then related to his astonished mistress, how he had obtained this knowledge, how the mysterious guest could only have meant the failing bread, and as he therefore believed, had executed his order in the most satisfactory manner.

But Richberta was not of this opinion; she cast reproachful looks at the confounded servant, and painfully suppressing her rage, she asked him, on which side of the ship he had taken the cargo; she was answered it had taken place on the right side. Well then, answered the haughty Richberta, I command you to cast the whole cargo into the sea from the left side.

In vain were all representations against this order; uselessly the faithful servant appealed to her heart, in conjuring her, not to annihilate the rich gift of God, but at least to relieve the wants

of the poor with it; uselessly he sent crowds of needy persons to her to soften her hard proud feelings; all was in vain, and before her eyes, she had the rich wheat cargo which could have given bread to so many, thrown into the sea, amid the howlings and cursings of the multitude.

The bottom of the sea had received the cargo, but the grains became a sowing of ruin. Germinating in the mud, and shooting up, continually covered with new earth, shot up a forest of stalks without ears, in unnatural growth always higher, like sea fungus and spiders to the surface of the water, and as the oft moveable mass of the earth therewith found a support, an immense sand-bank was formed before the harbour of Stavoren which no human power was able to break through. The numerous ships of the town, also those of the rich Richberta did not more find an entrance to the port, and were the sacrifices of the raging waves. Commerce and riches were destroyed, and continually recurring strokes of fortune precipitated the proud Virgin Richberta from the pinnacle of her splendour and happiness into want and misery.

But the sea, to which an accustomed creek had been closed, raged with ever new anger against the bank, and during the storm of a dark tempest it broke through the dikes, flooded the town, and tore it with the foundations hastily into the sea, like a long wished for booty.