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THE NORTHERN SAGA

*By the same Author*

THE WHIRLIGIG OF TASTE  
THE STORY OF MYTHS  
A BOOK OF CAMBRIDGE VERSE  
SUGGESTIONS (Literary Essays)  
RECONSIDERATIONS (A Second Series  
of Literary Essays)  
THE RELIGION OF OUR  
NORTHERN ANCESTORS

# THE NORTHERN SAGA

BY

E. E. KELLETT

No part have these wan legends in the sun  
Whose glory lightens Greece and gleams on Rome;  
Their elders live—but these, their day is done;  
Their records, written of the wind in foam,  
Fly down the wind, and darkness takes them home.

SWINBURNE.



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## PREFACE

FEW story-tellers are to be compared, for directness and simplicity, with the old Icelandic sagamen. In their unforced art and freedom from sophistication they remind us of Herodotus and of the Hebrew historians; while in the width and sweep of their themes they are not unworthy to be set beside Homer himself. There is a peculiar sense of relief when one turns to them after a course of modern realistic and psychological novels. In them we have no probing after motives, no complicated spiritual conflicts. The passions of the heroes are violent, but they are natural. The social life they describe is free, vital, and almost Homeric, and allows full play for those passions to express themselves in act. Disguise and hypocrisy are rare: the men appear as what they are. We read these stories, and see humanity as it is when stripped of the trammelling garments of convention.

No translation can give an adequate idea of the brief, staccato, but vigorous style of these tales. Those who desire to enjoy them to the full should undertake the pleasant task of learning the language. But in the present little work I have tried to suggest something of the effect this literature has had upon myself, and I trust that my failure has not been too conspicuous. I have chosen a few specimens from widely different ages and styles; and to aid in their comprehension I have prefixed a short account of the conditions which gave birth to this astonishing literature.

E. E. K.

## CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	9
✓ I. THE STORY OF ROLF KRAKI . . . . .	72
II. THE STORY OF KORMAK . . . . .	77
III. THE TALE OF GEIRMUND HELL-SKIN . . . . .	96
IV. THE SAGA OF HORD, OR THE STORY OF THE HOLM-MEN . . . . .	100
V. THE TALE OF GRETTI AND GLAM . . . . .	120
VI. THE TALE OF THIDRANDI . . . . .	126
VII. THE TALE OF HALLBJORN HALI . . . . .	132
VIII. THE TALE OF BJARNI . . . . .	135
IX. THE TALE OF LODIN . . . . .	138
✓ X. BRAND THE GENEROUS . . . . .	143
XI. THE BURNING AT FLUGUMYRI . . . . .	147
XII. THE STORY OF VIGLUND . . . . .	155
XIII. MASTER PIERS . . . . .	181
XIV. THE THREE COMPANIONS . . . . .	193
APPENDIX . . . . .	201



## INTRODUCTION

LIKE other great forms of literature, the Northern saga arose from a peculiar and short-lived social condition. The Elizabethan drama sprang from circumstances which are not likely to be repeated, and the attempt to reproduce it to-day simply results in an arid and artificial mimicry of what was, with all its faults, a living and spontaneous growth. The Homeric epic (like the Teutonic epic, of which *Beowulf* is almost the only surviving specimen) was the natural product of a certain stage of society which has utterly passed away; and Virgil's imitation of Homer only brought forth something totally un-Homeric. The case is similar with the Northern saga—except, perhaps, that the conditions which gave it birth were even more remarkable than those which bred a Homer or a Shakspeare.

Towards the end of the ninth century there arose in Norway a state of affairs not unlike that which prevailed in Palestine about the end of

the period of the Judges. Hitherto the heads of families had been able to live, not exactly every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, but under his own fells and on his own land. Everyone did that which was right in his own eyes, restrained only by the sword of his neighbour or by his own caution. It was a patriarchal system, adapted to an early age, but unfitted to meet the needs of an advancing civilisation. The Saul who put an end to it was the great King Harald Fairhair, who, during a reign of seventy years, devoted himself to the task of destroying the power of the nobles and consolidating that of the king. It was a necessary task, but a stern one, and it demanded as much ruthless unscrupulousness as was needed by the early Stuarts against the Douglasses or by Richelieu against the Montmorencys. Harald is said to have sworn an oath never to cut his hair till the task was accomplished; and accomplished it at last was. Sturdy was the opposition: at the great sea-fight of Hafrsfirth<sup>1</sup> there were the most astonishing feats of valour on both sides. Harald planted his 'Berserks' in the thick of the fight, and these enchanted heroes acted up to their repute; but on the other side Onund Treefoot,

<sup>1</sup> About 872. Celebrated by a poet called Hornklofi.

having lost a leg, plunged the stump into a cauldron of boiling tar, staunched the flow of blood, and fought on. At length the 'bonders' fled. Even so, all opposition was not entirely crushed; but finally the chiefs resigned the hopeless struggle. Those that stayed in Norway were fain to acknowledge the supremacy of Harald; those that still clung to the ancient 'liberty' took refuge in Orkney or Shetland, the Faroes or the Hebrides, and often sought by piratical raids to avenge themselves on their conqueror. But thence also the indomitable determination of Harald routed them out: he gathered together, we are told, a mighty armament, and—not once only, but twice—swept the Northern seas so thoroughly that ere long scarcely a single Viking was left to trouble them.

No wonder, at such a time as this, that the harassed 'bonders' looked eagerly towards a country which, though partially within the Arctic Circle, promised to be less inhospitable than a Norway ruled over by a Harald. Some years before this a Swedish sailor named Gardar, crossing from Pentland Firth, was driven by a storm far to the north-west. After many days he lighted on a certain country, in which he stayed through the whole winter, and which

he discovered to be an island. Returning east, he 'praised the land much'. He was followed soon by a Viking named Naddad, who, being outlawed in nearly every country of the North, was glad enough to hear of one where a man could act as he pleased. Naddad and his men called the place Snow-land. Shortly afterwards a third famous Viking, named Floki, wishing to discover the land of which Gardar had spoken, hallowed three ravens after the old heathen fashion, and let them loose in succession from his ship. The first flew back at once; the second fluttered for a short while and then returned; the third flew straight for the land to which men would go. Floki, following the raven, reached the island. There he climbed a mountain to get a view of the country, and saw that the firths were full of sea-ice; wherefore he called the land Iceland.

From that time the land began rapidly to fill. Great chiefs came over with their families, and settled there, following the rude sailing directions which were all that the most skilled navigators could give before the mariner's compass was known. 'First, you steer for the Faroes, and then you leave them to the south at such a distance that the sea shows half-way up the

cliffs; and then you sail on until the whales and sea-fowl are met with.' When the would-be settlers drew near the shore, they adopted equally primitive methods in choosing their place of landing. Thus Ingolf, one of the earliest of the immigrants, having made a great sacrifice before leaving Norway, consulted the oracle as to his destination. The oracle bade him go to Iceland. Accordingly, he took with him his household goods, and the two sacred pillars that were at the head of his high-seat. As he sighted the Iceland coast, he threw these pillars overboard, resolving to settle where they touched the shore. A year later they were found at Reykjavik, and there he built his home. Later came Onund Treefoot, Geirmund Hell-skin, Thrand the Sailor, and others of Harald's enemies.

Not, of course, that adventurers of this kind were the only settlers. Men came—nay, as Vigfusson has clearly shown, they *had* come already, even before Harald Fairhair began his reign—from all the scattered parts of the Norse world: from Ireland, from Man, from England, from Scotland, from Wales. Highest of all, in rank and splendour, was Aud 'Djupaudga', the Deeply Wealthy, widow of Olaf the White, King of Dublin. After the death of her husband, and

the slaughter of her son Thorstein in some Irish rising, she came with a great company of her retainers to Iceland, and settled in Broadfirth, perhaps the most fertile part of the new country, and the seat of the most famous sagas. Her brother-in-law, Helgi the Lean, occupied large tracts in the north, and other relatives settled in south and east. From these great ancestors sprang the vast majority of the chiefs around whom the stories cluster. Indeed, many scholars have seen in the infusion of Irish blood brought into the Norse stock by Queen Aud and others one of the main factors which help to explain the sagas. In any case, from her came the indomitable pride which would yield to nothing, not even to death itself. As the old queen felt her end coming, on the day of the marriage of her youngest grandchild, she 'greeted her kinsfolk with great courtesy, and saw to it that the feast was lordly and magnificent. Then she walked with a quick step out of the hall, and men said how stately she still was. And next day Olaf went into her sleeping-chamber, and she was sitting up against her pillow, and she was dead. Everyone thought it a wonderful thing, how Aud had kept up her state and her pride to the very day of her death.'

Within about a couple of generations since the first settlement the whole island—that is, the strip of coast-line which alone has been found habitable—was occupied and parcelled out among a number of great families of the various kinds we have described. There were no towns in our sense of the word, but scattered hamlets, surrounding the great houses of the chiefs; the dwellings of the small farmers who were in more or less of dependence upon the nobles; the cots of the thralls, and the ‘sheilings’ or huts in the hills among the sheep-runs, which of course were abandoned in the winters. The names of the chiefs are all known to us from the *Land-náma Bók* of the historian Ari—an indefatigable investigator, born in the eleventh century, who collected and set down all the information he could get as to the settlement from the ‘skalds’ or bards of the great houses. His work is as interesting as that of Herodotus, and as accurate as a gazetteer.

The Norsemen were not the first inhabitants of Iceland. When they arrived there they found in several places books, bells, crocks, and the like, which showed that the ‘Papey’ or Christian hermits from Ireland or Scotland had been there before them. But these old saints had all

died, as perhaps they hoped to die, in these distant retreats. The Norsemen were heathen, nor did they learn Christianity for more than a hundred years from the first settlement. Their ideas, their customs, and their superstitions were all 'of the old fashion'; and their poems and stories exhibit corresponding features. During the summer they busied themselves in Viking raids, in visits to Norway, in fishing, in farming, or in frightful feuds with their neighbours. An Icelander fought with Athelstane against Anlaf and Constantine at the battle of Brunanburh; another assisted Ethelred the Unready against the Danes. But—and this is characteristic of Iceland—both these dauntless and unscrupulous heroes were poets, and recorded their loves and hates in song. For in Iceland there are four months in every year in which the sun is scarcely visible, and in these months there is little to do but to tell the deeds done during the summer. 'The holy Bede', says Ari, 'speaks of a land called Thile, where there is no day in winter, and no night in summer; and this Thile is our Iceland.' All the great chiefs had at their little courts some man, often a relative of the chief, who was an authority on all the marriages and genealogies, knew the origins of the feuds,

the truces and the breakers of them, the love stories and the hairbreadth escapes, the ballads and the tales. During the winter nights such a man was in his glory, for it was then that he would bring out his harp and chant his lays, or mount the dais and recite his histories, receiving at the close a drink of mead and the proud thanks of his chief. Nor was it only the professional who could do this. At Yuletide, as we hear in the saga of Eric the Red, the whole household played at 'tables' and told stories. Many are the stories, in the sagas themselves, of men who knew the sagas. Thus, for example, in the Life of Harald Hardrada, we hear of a blind man named Stuf, a grandson of the renowned Gudrun, the heroine of *Laxdaela Saga*. Meeting by accident with Stuf, the king was struck with his ready wit and conversational quickness. 'The king talked much with Stuf; and when men would sleep, he bade him into the sleeping-room, to *skemta* to him.' *Skemta*, properly 'to shorten or abridge', was used by the Icelanders to denote the telling of tales, the chanting of ballads, or anything else that was good for making time pass quickly. 'And when the king was in bed, Stuf sang him a *flokk* or lay; and when he had finished the king asked for

another. And as the king was long awake, Stuf sang him thirty *flokks*. Dost thou know *drapas* also? said the king (a longer and more stately lay is a *drapa*). No fewer are my *drapas* than my *flokks*, said Stuf: whereupon the king told him he was a good *froediman*'—that is, a man learned in stories. When Harald fell at Stamford Bridge, Stuf made the funeral *drapa* in his honour.

Similarly, in the same saga, we are told of a young and clever Icelander, but poor and ragged, who came to King Harald and begged him for help.

'The king', says the story, 'asked him whether he knew any *froedi* or traditions: whereupon the Icelander answered that he knew certain sagas. Then said the king, I will take thee into my court, and thou shalt abide with me this winter and *skemta* as men ask thee. And so he did, and gained great friendship from the men, inso-much that they gave him clothes, and the king himself gave him good weapons. Thus the time ran on towards Yule: but as Yule drew near, the Icelander grew sad at heart. The king saw this, and asked what it was that made him sad. It is that I am born so, said he: I am of a change-ful mind, now cheerful now gloomy. Not so, said the king; and I will now guess what ails

thee. This is my guess, that all thy store of sagas is finished, for thou hast told to everyone that asked, whether by day or by night; and now thou thinkest it ill to be short of sagas at Yule-tide, nor does it please thee to tell a tale a second time. Thou hast guessed right, O king, said the Icelander; for I have but one saga left, and that is the tale of thy travels, which I dare not tell here in thy presence. Nay, said the king, that is the very saga which there is upon me the greatest longing to hear. Now shalt thou cease to tell tales till Yule, and on the first day of Yule-tide shalt thou begin thy saga, and tell of it some portion; and I will so fashion things that thy tale and Yule shall end together: nor will I let thee know, until the end, whether it please me well or ill. And so it came to pass; on the first day of Yule the Icelander began the tale, and had said but little when the king bade him cease; so there was much talk among the men about that tale. Some said it was great daring in an Icelander to tell it there, but others thought not so. The king took pains that it was well hearkened to, and, as he had said, he fashioned things so that the tale and Yule ended together. Then on Twelfth Night the king said, Hast thou no desire to hear how the tale has

pleased me? Very fearful am I about that, *herra* ("lord"), said he. Methinks it was very well told, said the king, nor did it depart at all from the truth: who taught thee? He answered, Every summer in Iceland I went to the Thing, and learned some part of the saga as Halldor, the son of Snorri, told it. No wonder, said Harald, that thou knowest well if Halldor taught thee: therefore shalt thou be welcome every time thou comest. So he stayed with the king that winter, and at spring the king gave him store of goods, and he was a thriving man thenceforward.'

Everywhere, in fact, we hear of men renowned for their skill in story-telling and for their accuracy in memory. 'Sir Ingimund the sailor-priest', the hero of Helen Barmby's fine ballad, was one of these famous tellers. Of Halldor Snorri's son we have just heard. Sturla Thord's son, the last and perhaps the greatest of Icelandic historians, himself tells us how he gained the favour of a hostile king by his gift of story-telling—indeed, the king told him 'he spoke better than the Pope'.<sup>1</sup> Nor were mortals the only beings that might be thus propitiated. A merchant was once telling his crew at sea the

<sup>1</sup> 'A jay can clepen Watte as wel as can the Pope' (Chaucer, *Prologue*, 643).

saga of King Vatnar, and called him a noble man. When he lay asleep by Vatnar's Howe, he dreamed that the king came to him, and said, 'Thou hast told my saga; I will give thee this reward therefor. When thou wakest, look in my howe and thou shalt find.' So when he awoke he looked and found there a great treasure.

Such then was the origin of the saga. It was at first literally what its name implies, a Saw or thing *said*. Not till the twelfth century at earliest were the tales written down; and even when they began to be actually written in the first instance, they still retained for many years the character stamped upon them by a long period of telling. Thus, for example, the *Hakonar Saga* of Sturla was written from the first. It was based upon information given by Hakon's son Magnus and by his 'wisest men': it is in fact a history in the proper sense of the word; but it is a history told in saga style. What that saga style is it will be the business of the following pages to explain and illustrate.

### SAGA CHARACTERISTICS

The first point, then, to be noticed in the saga proper is that it is history: it is *true*. No

mistake could be greater than to imagine that the saga is a conscious work of fiction, or that it is rightly judged by similar laws to those by which we judge a *Robinson Crusoe* or a *Gulliver's Travels*. There are, it must be confessed, spurious sagas—*skrok-sogur* is the Icelandic name for them—in which old motifs are exploited and the genuine saga more or less skilfully imitated. Thus, for example, *Finbow's Saga* is a deliberate fabrication; the incidents are stolen from true sagas and tacked on to a genuine hero to whom they do not belong; and at the end of *Laxdaela Saga* is a spurious chapter pretending to tell us more about the hero. *Viglund's Saga*, translated by Morris, is also a skrok-saga. The so-called 'Tale of Ale-cap', again, is almost certainly a somewhat clumsy adaptation from that admirable piece of comedy *Bandamanna Saga* (The Story of the Banded Men). There must also be spurious chapters in many of the genuine sagas: thus some of the adventures ascribed to Gretti in his story are as demonstrably false as others are probably true. But the existence of false sagas does not alter the character of the real ones. As hypocrisy is the homage paid by vice to virtue, so the spurious is a witness to the genuine. No false saga can be proved to have existed

before the thirteenth century, and few before the fourteenth. The heroic story proper, beginning about the middle of the eleventh century, and continuing till the time of Sturla in the thirteenth, was as near an approach to history as can ever be made in the absence of contemporary documents. Such touching up as the stories received was not deliberate, it was unconscious; often, it is true, with the unconsciousness of genius, which adorns whatever it touches, but always *aiming* at the truth. Scientific exactitude, of course, the stories do not possess; there is none of the careful balancing of evidence which we see in a Gardiner or a Ranke; but as literature they are none the worse for that.

Examples of the care with which the stories were handed down we have already seen. Hall-dor Snorri's son, for example, *teaches* his sagas deliberately and diligently to his pupil, and the first thought of King Harald is as to the *accuracy* of the story. Sturla, when preparing his *Hakonar Saga*, gets information from Hakon's son and from his 'wisest men'. From the very first there was a rigid determination that there should be no wilful perversion of the truth. When Gunnar Lambi's son, who had been present at the burning of Njal, told the tale 'unfairly, giving an un-

fair leaning in his story', Kari, the relative and avenger of Njal, unable to endure this perversion, rushed forward and slew Gunnar in the presence of Earl Sigurd himself. And, as Gunnar had lied about the story, no one took vengeance on Kari. 'Then Flosi', the leader of the burners, 'undertook to tell the story of the Burning, and he was fair to all; and therefore what he said was believed.' Even the tales of long-dead heroes, hoary with many ages, were not intentionally invented. Sigmund, Sigurd, Angantyr, these belonged to an immemorial past; but the poets and sagamen believed what they told of them.

Again, the saga as a rule belongs to the *anonymous* class of literature. This is no trifling or barren point. Much has been written on the total indifference to literary fame which is shown by so many writers of the Middle Ages: by the author of *Pearl*, for example, and by the author of the *Pistill of Susan*. The authors of *Njal's Saga*—one of the greatest books in the world—of *Laxdaela*, of *Eyrbyggja*, are all unknown: they were so utterly absorbed in the story they told as to forget to let us know the teller. But this anonymity had consequences which have a very important bearing on the saga as it has come down to us. Sagas were

nobody's property; they were a common land on which everyone might pasture his flocks; susceptible of interpolation, of alteration, of abridgment, just as it suited the successive reciters or copyists. We have, for example, two recensions of *Bandamanna Saga*; and it would take a bold man to say which is nearer the original. Of other sagas we have but one recension—but this is probably only because we have but one manuscript. In the case of longer sagas, such as *Njala*, it is quite impossible to decide what was the original story, or when certain additions were made, or to whom we owe its present marvellously consistent and literary form. That, when the first teller told the tale, it was less enthralling and less dramatic than now, is almost certain; but we shall never know who it was that saw the wonderful possibilities lurking in its crudity. On the other hand, some stories—and *Njala* itself is in certain aspects one of these—have seriously lost by addition. Legal Dryasdusts have loaded them with forensic subtleties and repetitions; flatterers of great chiefs have added irrelevant genealogies; reciters have often inserted large fragments of other sagas, often rather perhaps to show their strength of memory than because the additions

were to the point. In a word, the sagas are often not the works of single men, but of 'syndicates'. Just as, in the prevalent view, the *Iliad* began with a short poem on the wrath of Achilles, and gradually grew to its present shape and size under the hands of many reciters, so was it with the sagas. On the other hand, some of them never found a man of genius to weld them together. *Liosvetninga*, for instance, the Story of the Men of Lightwater, is a mere congeries of isolated stories: had the 'author' of *Njala* got hold of it, we should have had a consistent whole. *Laxdaela*, also, is not one saga, but at least two; and, while its main story is one of almost unequalled beauty, the work itself is spoilt by a number of irrelevant episodes.

There is every excuse for these interpolators. Where a family possessed but a single vellum, there was every temptation for a scribe to enter in that vellum everything that was likely to interest the family: and he entered it where he best could. Appendices, footnotes, excursuses, were then unknown; and it is difficult for us to-day, with all the stores of typographical wealth which we enjoy, to make due allowance for authors who did not possess such advantages. Were Gibbon printed with all the footnotes in

the text, we should read him with less pleasure: were all the genealogies of the Plantagenets or of the Stuarts thrust into the midst of Macaulay or Green, the narrative would hardly run smoothly. A true notion of the merits of the Icelandic writers can only be gained by printing them 'for modern readers', as Professor Moulton has printed the Bible. Were this done, they would take their places as what they are, unsurpassed monuments of prose craftsmanship. The family wished the records to be preserved *somewhere*; and the family scribe thrust them in where he could.<sup>1</sup> In some respects, therefore, the sagas are worse as written than they were as told; for what the teller could do by a mere reference or by a few words of aside, has now to be laboriously read. Nevertheless, we must be eternally grateful to those who did write them, and thus rescued so many stories of heroism and daring from the dungeon of oblivion.

When we say the stories are 'true', we must remember in what sense truth is predicated of them. They are the truth of a highly superstitious and imaginative age and nation. Daring and practical as the Icelanders were, they held

<sup>1</sup> Flatey-book, the property of a great family, includes an enormous number of distinct stories.

to the full all the beliefs common in a certain stage of society; and it is probable that the Irish strain in their blood had made them yet more fanciful than their Norse fathers had been. If the Venerable Bede, the most truthful of men, can give us, *on the evidence of eye-witnesses*, the most incredible stories about Aidan and Cuthbert, much more did the sagaman admit wonders into his tales. It was not his business to sift what he had heard: he knew no distinction between the natural and the preternatural, nor, if he had known the distinction, was it the part of a story-teller to insist on it. Hence the dreams, visions, forebodings, curses, with which the sagas are crowded. And it is precisely on the chances which a tale exhibited of utilising these motives to the full, that a good story-teller would instinctively seize, and which, more or less unconsciously, his genius would develop to the utmost. There would be, as we have shown above, nothing of deliberate falsification; no purposed distortion; but an emphasis here, a slight suppression there, would give that unity to the tale, provide that background, which would satisfy the struggling artistic sense of the teller. An example or two will make this plain. The tale of Njal is long, complicated, and difficult. As

first told, it was doubtless somewhat confused, and the epic unity was wanting. But it had in it the *possibility* of unity; and that unity lay in the character of Hallgerd, the lovely but rebellious woman who is the evil genius of the tale. And the first man who gave the due emphasis to this feature is the real maker of the saga as we have it. Recognising Hallgerd for what she was, he puts her in the very forefront of the story, so that none henceforth can mistake her significance. So it runs in the very first chapter:

‘It happened once that Hoskuld bade his friends to a feast, and his brother Hrut was there, sitting next him. Hoskuld had a daughter named Hallgerd, who was then playing on the floor with some other girls: fair of face and tall was she, and her hair was soft as silk; so long was it withal that it came down to her waist. “Come hither, daughter”, said Hoskuld. So she went up to him, and he took her chin between his fingers and kissed her; and then she went away. Then said Hoskuld to Hrut, “How thinkest thou of this maid? is she not fair?” But Hrut answered him not a word. Then said Hoskuld to him the second time, “Is she not fair?” Then said Hrut, “Fair indeed is she, and many shall rue her fairness: yet know I not whence thief’s

eyes have come into our family". Then was Hoskuld wroth, insomuch that for long the two brothers saw each other but little.'

In this manner, beyond the possibility of mistake, the key-note of the story is struck. We know quite well that the 'thief's eyes' will reappear; and amid all the ramifications of the tale the figure of Hallgerd is at the back of our minds. She grows up 'the fairest of women', and she marries Gunnar, the noblest of men; but her 'thief's eyes' bring him woe. And at last, when he is surrounded by his enemies, and the string of his mighty bow breaks, he says to Hallgerd, 'Give me two locks of thy hair, and twist them into a bowstring for me'.

'What hangs thereon?' said she.

'Even my life, no less', answered Gunnar; 'for they shall never attain near to me so long as I hold my bow.'

'Then', said she, 'I care naught whether thou holdest out a long while or a short, for I call to mind all thou hast done to me.'

'All men have some pride', said Gunnar, 'nor will I stoop to ask thee twice': and so it came about that his foes slew him.

Similarly, in the short saga of Gisli Sursson, the unity is given by the fate that hangs over

him from before his birth. An ancestor of Gisli of the same name borrowed a sword from a thrall named Koll in order to fight a 'holmgang' or duel. Before Koll will lend it, he exacts an oath from Gisli that he will return it, and Gisli swears to do so. But when it has brought him victory, he looks on the glorious blade, forged long since by the elves, and not to be dulled by spell or charm, and his heart fails him: for, surely, never was such a miracle as yonder brand. So, when Koll asks it back, he refuses it: whereupon the two smite at each other, and both are slain; but ere he dies Koll says, 'It had been better for thee that I had got back my sword—and yet is this but the beginning of the ill-luck that it shall bring thy kinsfolk'.

This also is told us in the very first chapter; and we are thus prepared for all the ill that is to follow. Gisli is the noblest of men, but the doom is upon him which he cannot avoid—a doom almost as terrible as that which hangs over Oedipus. He does what he can to shun the evil, but in vain. His wife, by a few innocent and thoughtless words, causes a feud to rise—Gisli blames her not, for 'that which is fated to come, must come'. Dream-women hover over him, deepening his melancholy forebodings, and at

last he falls. Men said there had never been a greater champion or a nobler hero, 'but he was not a lucky man'.

The first and main motive, indeed, which all good sagas exhibit and endeavour to develop, ✓ is that of this overmastering fate; illustrations of which could be multiplied to almost any extent. It has often, for example, been noticed how vastly superior is the Northern form of the *Nibelungenlied* to the High German. The secret lies in many points, but chiefly in this, that the Northern form alone has unified the story by deriving it from the curse laid on Andvari's hoard. Andvari, the pike-dwarf, lived under a waterfall and guarded his treasure. Now it chanced that Loki killed Otter, the son of Hreidmar, and Hreidmar laid on him this were-gild, that he should cover the skin of the otter with gold. So Loki went to the sea-goddess Ran, and borrowed her net; with this he went to Andvari's Force and caught the pike: and Andvari gave him gold. But there was still left one hair uncovered; so Loki took yet from Andvari the magic ring, which had in it the power of multiplying gold. Whereupon Andvari fled into a stone, and said that that treasure should be the bane of all that held it. And so it

came to pass; for Fafnir slew his father Hreidmar to get the hoard, and Sigurd slew Fafnir, and himself perished at the hands of Hogni and Guttorm.

Very similar is the story of the sword Tyrfin<sup>1</sup>—from which doubtless Gisli's sword Graysteel borrowed some of its magic properties. A certain king called Svafلامي rode a-hunting, and was left alone of his men; then saw he a great stone toward the sunset and two dwarfs thereby. The king 'consecrated' the stone without with his enchanted dagger, and so made the dwarfs captive. 'What are ye called?' said he. 'Dvalinn is one, and Dulinn the other', said they, and withal they offered ransom. Then said the king, 'For ransom shall ye make me a sword, the best ye know how to make; the hilt shall be of gold, and it shall bite iron as cloth, nor shall rust abide thereon; and victory shall follow that sword in all battles and holmgangs'. And to this they agreed. And on the set day, the king rode thither again, and the dwarfs gave him the sword. But Dvalinn stood at the entrance of the stone and said, 'Thy sword shall be the bane of him who draws it, and with it shall three nothing's<sup>2</sup> deeds be done; and thy bane also shall it be'. Then the king was wroth, and hewed at

<sup>1</sup> *Hervarar Saga*.

<sup>2</sup> Dastard's.

the dwarfs with the sword; but they leapt into the stone, and the doors closed behind them. And he called the sword Tyrfing, and bare it thenceforth in all battles and 'holmgangs'<sup>1</sup>; and ever had the victory. But the rest of the saga tells how it was his 'bane', and the bane of them that slew him; and how the three 'nithing's deeds' were done. This saga, by the way, was the first ever turned into English: a large part of it is to be found in the *Thesaurus* of Dr. George Hickes (1705), the famous Nonjuring Bishop of Thetford.

It is needless, surely, to add that this sense of fate lends a wonderful pathos to many of the sagas. There is, as we shall see later on, in these stories a certain reticence as to the feelings of the actors; and this reticence at first sight might seem to border on indifference or even on callousness. Partially, of course, this is to be explained by the fact that, as we have said, the teller of a tale can convey, by tone or gesture, conditions which it would require many pages of writing to express fully. Partly, also, our Northern ancestors, like their descendants, fought shy of allowing emotion to appear. But the fact that the lives dealt with by the sagaman

<sup>1</sup> Duels: usually fought on *holms* or small islands.

were lived against a vast background of inexorable fate is in itself a source of deep feeling.<sup>1</sup> The story-teller is 'majestic in his sadness at the *certain* doom of human kind'; for the doom is written, and the gods know it; and we, the hearers, watch the puny actors struggling in a net from which there is no escape. So persistent is this sense of fate that it is, as it were, taken for granted; it is never emphasised, and only remarked on by accident. Yet it is felt everywhere, and, like the music of the spheres, contributes its harmony to the scheme of things. A man, we are told, avoids almost inevitable death—because he is not yet 'fey'. 'It was not fated', says the sagaman again and again, 'that so-and-so should get his death of that blow.' On the other hand, no precautions would avail to save a 'fey' man. Gisli warned Vesteinn again and again; but he rushed on his doom, and Gisli saw it was not to be helped: 'weird' or fate would have it so. In the saga of Hord the whole story depends upon a curse, uttered by Hord's mother in a moment of impatience, whose working is long delayed, but is none the less inevitable and certain. Kjartan is offered help that would have

<sup>1</sup> Compare the pathos lent to the story in the *Iliad* by Achilles' knowledge of his approaching death.

effectually warded off any attack: he refuses the aid, and marches on to the doom that had been foreseen for him years before. Over every saga is written the word *kismet*: as our own Old English poem of *The Wanderer* says, 'Weird is full stubborn'.

The sagas have been accused of sameness, and monotony of plot. Those who bring this charge are not usually those best acquainted with the whole range of the literature. There is plenty of variety if we will but look for it: *Bandamanna Saga*, for example, is not extraordinarily similar to the tale of *Howard the Halt*; and neither is very like the story of Kormak. Yet it must be confessed that a large number of the tales are based on the theme of a blood-feud. This is due to the age in which they rose, an age in which vendetta had not yet given way to law. Nevertheless, even in these very vendetta-sagas the monotony must not be exaggerated. In some of them, such as *Njala* and *Eyrbyggja*, one main interest of the story lies in the struggle between the rising principle of legalism and the ancient principle of blood-revenge: we watch, with an interest which the author surely shared, the slow triumph of arbitration as against the sword, and the gradual recognition of the superiority of

brains to muscle. Njal's whole life is given to the endeavour to substitute peaceful methods of settling quarrels for bloody ones, and he dies at last, the victim of a feud which he had done his best to suppress, because he would live no longer to carry the feud on. Snorri the crafty, again, has very few bloody quarrels; such as he has he usually settles without the sword, and many he checks by the simple method of bringing public opinion to bear against the aggressors. Nor has the sagaman himself, as a rule, a sympathy with bloodshed as such. He can describe a fight, when it comes, with all the zest of Homer, but he generally lets us see that his feelings are with the punishment of the wrongdoer. No character in all the sagas is drawn with more sympathy than Gunnar of Lithend, one of the two heroes of *Njala*; but in Gunnar strength and skill are the least of his admirable qualities. There is in him an amazing forbearance and gentleness which set him, in many ways, far above Odysseus or Achilles: we see in him a chivalry of which Homer had scarcely a conception. 'I would like to know', says he, when he has been tried and provoked almost beyond endurance, 'whether I am really less brave than other men because I am slower to slay than they are.'

It has often been noticed, and usually with some severity of censure, that in the sagas it is the women who kindle the fires of hatred, and blow up the embers when they begin to flag. Thus, in *Laxdaela Saga*, after the death of Kjar-tan, his father Olaf settles the feud without shedding a drop of blood. As soon as Olaf is dead, however, his wife Thorgerd stirs up her sons to a deed of vengeance which sets the whole tide of slaughter and counter-slaughter flowing once more. Similarly, at a later stage, it is Gudrun who stirs up *her* sons to avenge their father. In *Njala* two husbands, by a long-continued series of full atonements, only just succeed in undoing the mischief caused by the revengefulness of their wives.

All this is true; and yet there is a brighter side to it. Such an influence, evil as it is, ascribed to women, would have been out of the question in an age in which women were not duly respected: in such an age, for example, as that of classical Athens, on the one hand, in which women were not regarded at all; or as that of the Troubadours, on the other, in which they were in theory worshipped and in practice despised. The epoch of the sagas is the truly heroic age—that in which a Helen can be safe

and honoured in Troy, or an Ethelflaed in England. And such an age must have the defects of its qualities; the same *Beowulf* which pictures the stately grace of a Wealtheow describes also the cruelty of a Thrytho:

Thrytho the great Queen,  
Did many a deed of dastardly crime;  
Was none that dared look on her with eyes,  
Of peers or paladins, but her lord only;  
If so a man ventured, swift was the death,  
First the hand-grip, and then the sword:  
Surely unfitting for woman is this,  
High-born though she be, to shorten men's life.  
Woman is weaver of lasting peace;  
Not her it becomes to sharpen the feud.

Next to the vendetta as a saga-motive—indeed, often inextricably interwoven with it—is the theme of love. This is the theme that has attracted to the saga the attention of modern poets. It was not, surely, the blood-feuds that impelled Morris to the writing of the *Lovers of Gudrun*, but, as the very title of his poem shows, the more lasting and changeless human element in the story of the Laxdale men. Vendettas have disappeared from the Northern world; men no longer slaughter one another in family quarrels; but love lasts, and beauty in woman is ever born afresh, and perversity and pride will

not fail mankind yet awhile. Gudrun was not the first, nor will she be the last, who, in her own immortal words, 'has treated worst him whom she loved the most'. In Kormak's story we have love linked with fate: Kormak is bound to love while he cannot attain. In Gunnlaug's tale we have the old old motive—the course of true love never did run smooth. In *Njala* we have the theme, indistinguishable from love, that of hate. Hallgerd is doomed to be the bane of those that love her: Gunnar, like Solomon in the tresses of the Shulamite, is tangled in her hair, and perishes. But in *Njala* also we have a motive not too common in early romances—the love of the wife for the husband, outlasting years of wedlock, and triumphing over death:

'Flosi said, "I will offer thee, Njal, leave to go out, for it is unworthy that thou shouldst burn within". Njal replied, "I will not go out, for I am old and unable to avenge my sons; and I will not live in shame". Then spake Flosi to Bergthor, Njal's wife, "Come thou out, housewife, for it is not my will at any cost to burn thee". But Bergthor answered, "Not so, for I was given to Njal young, and I have vowed him this, that we should never be sundered in our deaths". So they two went back into the

house together; and Njal said, "We will go to our bed, and lay us down; for long have I wished to rest". Then they signed themselves with the cross, and gave their souls into the hand of God; nor did men hear them say a word more.'

This is a scene not unworthy to be compared with the scene between Hector and Andromache—perhaps the noblest passage in the *Iliad*. But in the sagas there are scores only just inferior: the scene between Bolli and Gudrun after the death of Kjartan, the scene between Gisli and his wife Aud shortly before his last fight, the last parting of Signy and Sigmund in *Volsunga Saga*, and many others.

Travel, again, is a motive rarely absent from an Icelandic saga. At the age of about eighteen every young hero feels the lust for going abroad come upon him—a lust, as in Gunnlaug's case, not to be quenched by paternal admonitions. Kjartan, his father Olaf, Gunnlaug and Raven, Thorkell the husband of Gudrun, Gretti—all of them make the 'grand tour' to the courts of kings and jarls; all of them seek adventures like knights of the Round Table, and find them in plenty. Hence, though there is but little description of natural scenery in the sagas, there is a

full supply of travellers' tales. Of these unquestionably the most enthralling is that found in the saga of Eric the Red—the tale of the discovery of America, where our ancestors did not stay long enough to deprive Columbus, five hundred years later, of the glory of a pioneer. Other tales are less veracious than this; for the sagamen, like other people, could believe much more easily in wonders told of distant lands than in those told of their own.

Certain other motives, recurring more or less frequently, may be briefly dismissed. A not uncommon theme is that of the exposure of a girl child on the hills—a theme which all but ceases when Christianity appears in the island. An example occurs in the tale of Gunnlaug. A quarrel, and a subsequent reconciliation, between a father and his son, is found now and then. Many episodes deal with the *purchase* of a bride by the parents of a young man; the bargaining gives just that kind of simple intrigue in which the saga-tellers delight. But perhaps most noteworthy is the very common incident of an Icelander on his tour who obtains the favour of a king or other great man. Either by 'drapas' composed in the king's honour, or by some more substantial service, the young hero

rises high at the court. Later he is seized with home-sickness; but it is always with some difficulty that he wins the king's consent to his departure. Such young heroes, among many others, are Kjartan and Gunnlaug.

As for dreams and forebodings, they are everywhere in the sagas; and none but the inexperienced would on that account impugn the sagamen's general credibility. Even to-day he would be a bold man who would deny offhand the prophetic character of *all* dreams and visions; and in the eleventh century a saga *without* such phenomena would either be a miracle or a mass of falsehoods. Examples are so numerous as to be embarrassing. The dreams in *Gunnlaug's Saga* are well known; a glance at *Njala* in Dasent's translation will yield many more. Take, for instance, chapter cxxvi., which tells of the portents at Bergthor's Knoll just before the Burning.

'Njal said, "Wondrously now it seems to me. Methinks I see all round the room, and it seems as though the gable wall were thrown down, but the whole board and the meat in it is one gore of blood." All men thought this strange but Skarphedinn; he bade men not be downcast.' Again, 'A man named Hildiglum looked into

the west *airt*, and thought he saw thereabouts a ring of fiery hue, and within the ring a man on a grey horse. He passed quickly by him, and rode hard. He was as black as pitch, and sang a song with a mighty voice: then he hurled the firebrand before him, and such a blaze of fire leapt up to meet it that he (Hildiglum) could not see the fells for the blaze. It seemed as though that man rode east among the flames and vanished there. . . . And that was the "Wolf's Ride", which comes ever before great tidings.'

But the classical dreams of the whole range of the sagas are those of Gudrun in *Laxdaela*, which foretell her marriages and her destiny. They are, of course, told by Morris; but they may perhaps bear to be reproduced in prose.

'Guest, the son of Oddleif, was a foresighted man, and many resorted to him for counsel. Now it came to pass that Guest rode from Sowerby and reached the spring of Saelingsdale: and Gudrun came to the spring and gave him greeting. Guest received the greeting well, and they began to talk together. So Gudrun said, "I have dreamed four dreams that do fret my mind much, nor hath any man interpreted them, and that though I ask not that the interpretation be good". Then said Guest, "Tell me

thy dreams; it may be that I can say somewhat concerning them". So Gudrun said, "Methought I stood by a certain brook, and I had a crooked coif on my head, which I liked not; and I tore the coif from my head and cast it into the water". And Gudrun spake again, "This is the beginning of my second dream, that I seemed to be standing by a certain water; and I had a silver ring on my hand, which fitted me well, and seemed to me a very great treasure. But when I least thought it, the ring slipped off my hand, and into the water, and I saw it not since. And grievous scathe indeed methought that loss." Then said Guest, "No less a dream is this than the former". And Gudrun spake again, "This is the third dream, that I had a gold ring on my hand, and methought my loss in the former ring was now made up: but then I fell, and the gold ring struck on a certain stone, and broke into two parts, and the two parts dripped blood: and what I seemed to feel after was more like grief than sorrow for some loss". Then said Guest, "The dreams, methinks, grow not less as thou tellest them". Lastly said Gudrun, "This was my fourth dream, that I had a helm on my head, made of gold, and set with gems; and what I liked

least about it was that it was too heavy, so that I bore my head on one side; yet blamed I not the helm therefor. And lo, the helm fell off my head into Hvammfirth; and I awoke." Whereupon Guest told her that the sameness of these dreams meant that they all foreboded the same thing, namely, marriage: "And my mind foresees that thou shalt have four husbands, all of whom thou shalt lose". "It is a fearful thing", said Gudrun, "if all this thou sayest is to come to pass." And so Gudrun went home, and Guest rode on his way.'

Among minor motives ghosts are not likely to be absent: and the Icelandic ghost-tale is indeed impressive—the more so as the teller makes no attempt to conceal his belief in it. But the ghost must not be conceived as a *spiritual* being. He is terribly substantial, and palpable alike to feeling as to sight. As a rule, he is an 'after-ganger'—that is, he is the walking corpse of a person recently dead, a corpse of which some demon has taken possession. In this condition he is of superhuman strength, and owns, besides, certain powers like those of sorcerers or enchanters. Daring indeed is the man who encounters such a being; for even if the ganger be apparently slain, he will yet resume his uncanny

life unless he be burnt to ashes and the ashes scattered far and wide. A useful preliminary is to cut off his head and lay it beside his thigh; for this gives at least an interval of repose. The most famous of all Icelandic ghosts of this kind is Glam, whose story is told in *Gretti's Saga*; he is perhaps even more famous under the name of Grendel, whom Beowulf slew. But almost equally instructive, and perhaps even more curious, is the story of Thorgunn, which is told with all the air of truth in *Eyrbyggja Saga*—one of the best and most authentic of all the Northern histories. I shall have to abridge it.

In the summer of A.D. 1000 there came to Iceland a certain ship, with a Hebridean woman on board named Thorgunn. It was noised abroad that Thorgunn had great treasures of woman's attire, the like of which no one had ever seen in Iceland. And when Thurid, the Lady of Frodey, heard thereof she rowed to the ship, and saw Thorgunn and her treasures; but for no money would Thorgunn sell them. Wherefore Thurid bade her to her home at Frodey, and she came willingly. She was of the Sudreys<sup>1</sup> (Hebrides): tall and large of frame, with black eyebrows and dark brown hair. Her linen and

<sup>1</sup> Hence the Bishop of *Sodor* and *Man*.

her tapestry and curtains were indeed wonderful, and she spent all her days working at the loom. Now one day there was a great portent, for it rained blood, and Thorgunn's clothes were stained therewith, nor could they be cleansed; and she took to her bed, saying the portent boded ill to the house. And soon she saw that she was dying; wherefore she sent for Thorodd, the Lord of Frodey, and bade him burn her bed with its curtains and linen and tapestry: 'For I foresee', said she, 'that they will bring ill-luck to them that own them'. Soon afterwards she died, and Thorodd prepared to burn those things even as she had said; but his wife Thurid would not have it so; for it seemed hard to her to destroy such treasures: moreover, she thought that Thorgunn had given her commands out of envy, lest other women should enjoy those things. And so Thorodd yielded to his wife, and spared those tapestries and hangings. And Thorgunn's body was carried to Skalholt and buried there.

But no sooner had the funeral-party come back from Skalholt than strange doings began at Frodey. A light entered the hall, which men knew to be more than mortal, and it travelled round the hall withershins (that is, against the

sun): and Thorir Woodleg, the steward, said that sight boded death, but whose death he knew not. Not long thereafter the shepherd died, and men saw his corpse walking. Then Thorir Woodleg met that corpse without the house, and the corpse seized him and hurled him to the ground with such force that he died soon after of his wounds; and thenceforward men saw two walking corpses instead of one. Nor did things stop here, for one man died after another, until six more had died; and just before Yule Thorodd himself perished at sea. At Yuletide Thurid held the funeral-wake; and lo! all the dead men came into the hall, speaking to no one—Thorodd and his men dripping with water, and Thorir and those others covered with earth-mould. And this sight was seen every night all through Yule.

At last Kjartan, Thorodd's son, knowing not how to check these horrors, went to his uncle Snorri, the priest, who was reckoned the wisest of all men in Iceland that had not the second-sight. Snorri lived at Holy-Fell, and it happened that just when Kjartan came to Holy-Fell there was a priest there who had come from Gizur the White; for Gizur had just given up heathendom and become a Christian, and

wished others to do the same. So Snorri said to Kjartan, 'This shalt thou do: take this priest with thee, and go back to Frodey. When thou arrivest there, burn all the things that belonged to Thorgunn—her bed, and her linen, and her tapestry, and her hangings—and then let the priest sprinkle holy water all over the house and shrive them that dwell therein. And then shalt thou hold a court at thy door, and summon all the spectres thereto, and try them for the ills they have done. And that thou mayst have no need to summon thine own father, I will send my son Thord Kausi and six men with him.' And so Kjartan did: he went back home, and when he came there he found Thurid his mother lying ill, wherefore he knew there was small time to lose. So he took all the things of Thorgunn, and burnt them with fire. And then he held a court at the door; and summoned Thorir first thereto. And the sentence was that he should leave the house forthwith; whereupon Thorir rose, and said, 'I sat while it was lawful to sit', and went halting forth. And next the shepherd was banished; and last Thord Kausi summoned Thorodd, who said, 'Inasmuch as there is now no peace for us here, we make our flitting one by one'. After which the priest

sprinkled the walls with holy water, and sang mass, and shrived those that dwelt there. And Thurid mended soon; and the ghosts haunted Frodey no more.

Everywhere, in fact, such stories are met with—not always, of course, as elaborate as the one we have just quoted. In *Laxdaela*, for example, there is a narrative of the drowning of a certain sorcerer named Hallbjorn Whetstone-eye (Slikisteinsauga). After his drowning his body is washed ashore, and he begins to 'walk' and cause great trouble in the neighbourhood. Not far off, however, dwelt Thorkell of Thickshaw, a man of great strength and courage. One evening a cow was missing at Thickshaw, and Thorkell and a house-carle went to look for it. It was after sunset, and the moon was shining. Thorkell and the carle chose different paths; and when he was alone he saw what he took to be a cow; but when he got nearer he perceived that it was Hallbjorn. A mighty struggle ensued, and when Thorkell was just getting the better, Hallbjorn sank into the earth out of his sight. After that Thorkell went home, and there the carle met him to tell him he had found the cow. Thenceforward no harm happened from Hallbjorn.

Those who wish for further examples need only glance through Morris's translation of *Gretti's Saga*, where they will find such tales to their heart's desire. In later days they often take a different form: Thorgisl, for example, is represented as wrestling with Thor, who has just been deposed from a god to a demon; and in the tale of Thidrandi the *Disir* who slay the boy are trembling on the verge between goddess-hood and trollship. The first step taken by Christianity was not to destroy the old gods but to transform them into devils.

Men and women with more or less of supernatural powers are of course equally easy to meet with. In a Greenland story we hear of Thorgunn's son by a man named Leif: men bethought them of the hauntings of Frodey, and said that the boy was 'not quite like other boys'. One of the commonest gifts was that of creating a kind of 'glamour' by which people could be deceived. Of a certain man called Thorbjorn Stigand we are told in *Hen-Thorir's Saga*, in a curious phrase, that 'he was not always there where he was seen'; and later in the tale we find that Thorbjorn has the power of vanishing as he pleases. In *Vatzdaela Saga* there is a story of a witch named Ljot, who repeatedly saves herself

and her son Hrolleif from arrest and death by casting such spells upon the searchers that they cannot see what is before their very eyes. On one occasion the pursuer sees nothing but a great bundle of clothes and a piece of red cloth sticking out of it, and not till afterwards does he guess that that must have been Hrolleif and the clothes he wore at a sacrifice. Finally Hrolleif is caught by a man who understands the ways of witches, and sings the appropriate charms. But even so, says Ljot, 'I should have turned the land upside down, and ye would have gone mad and run about with the wild beasts, if only ye had not happened to see me before I saw you'. 'True', said Thorstein, 'but chance was on the side of right.' We are reminded of the famous passage in Virgil's *Ninth Eclogue*, in which 'the voice fled from Moeris, for the wolves saw Moeris before he saw them'.

Of witches, indeed, and their charms it would be endless to speak. The central incident in that fine saga, the *Story of the Men of the Faroes*, is concerned with a woman, half goddess, half witch, named Thorgerd Holgabrud, whom the famous Earl Hakon worshipped. A young man, Sigmund Brestison, had attached himself to the earl, and was now going out to the Faroes on

a dangerous quest. 'Thou art not', says Hakon, 'the kind of man I should wish to go out and never return.' 'For that', said Sigmund, 'I trust in mine own right hand.' 'Much is that', said the earl, 'yet is it not enough: I know a witch-wife, whose name is Thorgerd, who hath such power that she can make thee safe against all evils; her let us visit.' So they went to Thorgerd's house: it was splendid exceedingly, and adorned with gold and silver on the gables and pinnacles; there were many windows in that house, and all of them were glass. Very splendid, too, was the attire of the witch-woman. Then Sigmund saw a strange thing; the earl, who never bent to any man, flung himself on the ground before Thorgerd, and lay thus a long while. Then he arose, and said, 'She will not give way yet; gold and silver we must heap upon her chair'. So they piled up money; and then Sigmund saw how the earl drew near Thorgerd, and tried to take away a ring from her finger, but she would not have it so; then the earl threw himself down on the ground, and prayed again, even weeping; then stood he up a second time, and now he drew the ring off easily. 'Take that ring', said Hakon to Sigmund, 'and as thou lovest me part not with it.' 'Never till my dying

day', said Sigmund; and with that they separated, the earl to his court and Sigmund to his ships. The rest of the tale tells how Sigmund lost his ring and perished.

One might also mention Thorhild, who prophesied to Gudmund the Powerful. Thorhild was 'forn i lund', old-fashioned in her ways, and a great friend of Gudmund. To her he took his way. 'Great desire have I to learn whether there shall be vengeance for my slaying of Thor-kell Hake.' 'Come thou to me later, and seek me alone.' So the days passed, and one morning Gudmund went alone to her, and found her dressed as a man, helm on head and axe in hand; and she waded out into the sea, and smote the waves; but Gudmund saw no change therein. 'No vengeance shall come to *thee*; thou mayest sit at home in thy splendour.' Then said Gudmund, 'Yet would I learn whether the vengeance will touch my sons'. "'Tis much thou askest', said she, for she was risking her soul; but she waded again into the sea, and smote the waves with the axe; and now there was a great crash, and all the sea ran blood. Then said she, 'That deem I, Gudmund, that it will steer very close to one son of thine; but no further will I labour for thee, for at no little cost have I done

this:<sup>1</sup> and neither threat nor blithe word will avail to move me'. Gudmund said, 'Nor will I lay more burden on thee'; and after that he fared home, and sat there in his splendour. But shortly thereafter a man named Thorhall dreamed a dream, which boded ill to Gudmund; and he rode to Gudmund's stead and told him thereof. And that same night Gudmund died. But the vengeance came to his son even as Thorhild had foretold. And Thorbjorg the 'Little Sibyl', to whom Gudrid sang the warlock-songs, and who thus was able to prophesy—is not her story told in the story of Eric the Red?

Of 'skin-changers' and 'hard' men also the sagas have much to tell. Certain persons, whether of their own accord or by some malicious enchantment, were often changed into animals—a strange superstition which lingered even in England till a generation or two ago. In the very Faroe saga from which we have just quoted, Sigmund, when a boy, kills a bear so savage that even his foster-father Thorkell would not face him, thinking him no bear but a demon. Readers of the *Volsunga Saga* will

<sup>1</sup> Like Sister Helen in Rossetti's ballad, she is risking her soul.

remember how Sigmund (the father of Sigurd) and his son Sinfjotli were changed into wolves; nor is it likely that to the early hearers of that story this episode seemed the most improbable. The poem of William of Palerne, which was translated from the French into English about the time of Chaucer, is entirely taken up with a 'werwolf' legend; and there is no reason to think that it was not accepted as fact. Perhaps the most familiar story of this kind in Icelandic literature is that told by Ari in the *Landnáma Bók*:

'Dufthak took Dufthak's Holt, and was a great skin-changer (*ham-rammr*), as was also Storolf of Hwale. These twain had a great feud about pasturage; and it was so that one evening a certain second-sighted man (*ófreskr mathr*—a man whom no glamour could deceive) saw a great bear come out of Hwale and a bull out of Dufthak's Holt, and they met on Storolf's Field, and fought furiously; but the bear had the better. Next morning it was seen that a ravine had been made where they fought, as though an earthquake had torn the earth asunder. Both Storolf and Dufthak were sore wounded, and lay in bed a long time.'

It will be noticed that this skin-changing

took place at night: as in the beliefs of all nations, the powers of evil are much more active after sunset than in the day. An ancestor of Egill the poet actually bore the name of Evening-Wolf, and was believed regularly to change himself into a wolf at dusk. The 'trolls', the river-spirits, the nixies, all exert their influence mainly at night.

Among the 'hard men'—those whom no sword would bite—the Berserks take a foremost place. Many pages have been written on these men, and scholars have exhausted themselves, to little purpose, in endeavouring to find out how much truth lies behind the fantastic legends that have come down to us about them. At Hafrsfirth, as we have seen, Harald Fairhair planted a band of these heroes in the very thick of the fight. Prodigies of valour were performed on both sides; the slaughter was terrific, and yet, if we are to believe the tales, not a single one of the Berserks received a scratch. Whether the name be derived from bear-sark, as though these men had changed themselves into bears, or from bare-sark, as though they fought in their shirts, such stories are equally wonderful. The Berserks were not always on the side of law and order; indeed, when they wandered

about from hamlet to hamlet, exacting toll from lonely housewives, they became like the Free Companions of later ages, nothing but public pests. Thus in *Gretti's Saga* we hear of a Berserk named Snaekoll, who came to the house of a bonder named Einar, and demanded Einar's daughter to wife and with her a dowry of five-score bags of silver. Unfortunately for him, Gretti happened to be staying with Einar. 'Let us see how thou appearest when thy fit is on thee', said Gretti. Thereupon Snaekoll belled like a bull, rolled his eyes, foamed at the mouth, and tore at his shield with his teeth. Meanwhile, Gretti, approaching nearer, suddenly spurned at the shield with his foot, and drove it upward so mightily that it broke Snaekoll's jaw; then rushing in he thrust the monster from his horse and slew him with his own sword. From this deed Gretti gained great glory, and men gave him great thanks.

In *Kristni Saga*, the story of the conversion of Iceland, we learn that the missionary Thangbrand encountered a Norwegian Berserk, who challenged him to the holmgang or duel. 'Thangbrand consented thereto. Then said the Berserk, Little wish wilt thou have to fight with me when thou seest my feats. I walk barefoot

over burning iron, and I let myself fall naked on to the edge of my sword, and neither harms me. God will see to that, said Thangbrand. So when they came to the holm, he consecrated the fire, and made the sign of the cross over the sword. And when the Berserk walked the iron, he burnt his feet, and when he fell upon his sword, he got his bane therefrom.' The historian adds, 'Many good men rejoiced at this, even though they were heathen'.

Nor were Berserks the only enemies met with by Thangbrand. His enemies hired a certain wizard named Galdra-Hedin (Enchantment-Hedin) to try his powers against the new religion. 'And that very day, as they were riding out of Kirkby from the house of Surt Asbjorn's son—whose ancestors had been Christian for a long while back—then the horse of Thangbrand suddenly fell down into the earth, and Thangbrand himself only just escaped by leaping off his back; but he stood on the edge safe.'

In *Gretti's Saga* we are told that his enemies went to a witch to have spells woven against him. The witch found a log of driftwood, planed it down, and cut 'runes' on the smooth part—that is, she cut an incantation, written in the old Northern characters called 'runes' or

mysteries. This done, she lanced her arm, and smeared the runes with her blood; after that she wrought further spells, dancing and leaping round the log; and finally she rolled the log back into the sea, and the tide carried it to Drangey, the island in which Gretti was. Gretti found it, and started to cut it with his axe for firewood; but the axe slipped and cut into his leg below the knee. Of that wound came Gretti's bane: 'For', said he, 'fate is approaching, and it cannot be avoided. Well I know that this blow came from that witch.'

A little later, as Gretti lay dying, his brother Illugi saw him plucking at the wool of the sheepskins on which he lay; and Illugi knew that to be an omen of death; for men were then skilled in seeing signs and auguries.

Everything in fact was an omen. Just as, on the last day of Tiberius Gracchus's life, men took it as an evil augury that he struck his foot against a stone and drew blood, so in old Iceland every little incident had its meaning. In *Vapnfirthinga Saga*, a man named Bjarni goes to the house of his enemy Geitir with murderous intent; but he will not kill him until some word is said which may convey the required boding. The word, when it comes, is of the simplest, but

it is sufficient. His friend Kolfinn 'began to speak in an evil hour, and said, looking up at the sky, Changeful is the weather; methought it was somewhat icy and cold, but now I deem it likely that it will thaw. Bjarni answered, Then rarely will it not thaw, if it thaws now. Then he stood up and said, My foot is "dumb". Lie thou then in peace, said Geitir; and at that word Bjarni hewed him his death-blow.' Doubtless he took the words as an omen that after the murder he might sleep calmly and free from fear; but it was not so.

When, in *Njala*, Gunnar of Lithend was banished from Iceland, he set out with his brother Kolskegg to leave home. 'They rode along Markfleet, and just then Gunnar's horse tripped and threw him off. He turned with his face toward the Lithe, and the homestead at Lithend, and he said, Fair is the Lithe, so fair that it has never seemed to me so fair; the corn-fields are white to harvest, and the home-mead is mown; and now I will ride back home, and not fare abroad at all.' And so he does, and from that comes his death.

An *ófreskr*, or second-sighted man, could often see sights which, though invisible or unintelligible to ordinary men, to *him* foretold

much. Thus, in *Njala*, Thord Freedmanson thought he saw a goat lying in a hollow, and it was all one gore of blood. Njal said to him that neither goat nor blood was there. 'What is it then?' said Thord. 'Thou must be fey', answered Njal, 'for that must have been thy *fylgja* or fetch, and now it behoves thee to look to thy life.' 'Little boots it to take heed', said Thord, 'if death is doomed; for no man can scape his fate.' So, in the tale of Thidrandi, Thorhall tells Hall that the murderesses of Thidrandi were the *fylgjur* or fetches of his family. The *fylgja* might take any shape: those of men might be wolves, bears, or bulls; those of women, swans. When the enemies of Gunnar were plotting his death, Njal saw their *fylgjur* as flitting things darting to and fro before his eyes; and scarcely had he told his vision when a man came in and said that he had seen twenty-four men lurking round who meant evil to Gunnar. In *Bandamanna Saga* we hear how Hermund, passing by Valfell, heard as it were a bowstring clang in the hill, and suddenly felt himself wounded under the arm. He looked and saw 'two hundred in the gully': these were doubtless the *fylgjur* of his foes. In a few days he died. Readers of our old English history will remember the very similar story of

the death of King Sweyn, which was attributed by the Christian feeling of the time to a lance-thrust from St. Edmund.

Such then being the material on which the sagaman worked, a few words only are necessary to describe the manner in which he dealt with it; indeed, inadequate as all translation is, the reading of a few specimens in English versions will give a better idea of the general character of a saga than many pages of description. It may, however, be desirable to give the reader a few preliminary hints as to what he is not to expect, as well as what he may reasonably look for. Afterwards he may well be left to do his own criticism.

In the first place, the telling is of the directest and simplest kind possible. Not even in *Robinson Crusoe* has the author his eye more constantly fixed upon his narrative than here. He does not allow himself to be fretted by obstinate questionings of invisible things. Here we find no analysis of motives or of character—scarcely indeed a moral judgment of any kind. We are indeed occasionally told that so-and-so was respected by his neighbours, or that somebody else was gloomy and morose. The most tremendous actions are narrated as if they were ordinary. Thus in *Hen-*

*Thorir's Saga*—‘Blundketill’s enemies woke him when his house was ablaze. He asked who they were that kindled such a fire. Thorir told him their names. Blundketill asked if any terms of peace might be made; but Thorir said there was no choice but to burn: and they departed not till every man’s child was burnt to death.’ In the beginning of the same saga we have two or three lines on the ancestry of the great chief Odd of Tongue, and to this account the brief sentence is added, ‘He was not called a man of fair dealing’. Later in the saga we are given two or three examples of much more than unfair dealing on the part of Odd; but there is not a word of comment. Similarly, throughout the whole of *Laxdaela Saga* not one word is said by the author to reveal the consuming pride and jealousy of Gudrun—a pride and jealousy like that of Lucifer himself, which are indeed the very mainspring of the tragedy. A few sayings of Gudrun herself, dropped as it were by accident, alone reveal the terrible passions raging beneath the calm surface of the saga. Occasionally a man’s character is summed up in a short and significant epitaph: ‘The slaying of Arnkell was bruited wide abroad, and men deemed it great scathe’.

The dialogue is almost always short, sharp,

and remarkably pithy. As few words are wasted as in any composition under the sun. Thus, for instance, when the noble bonder Blundketill has been summoned by Thorvald, we are simply told that Thorvald used those words which he deemed most violent. 'Then Blundketill went home, and there he met the East man Orn. Art thou wounded, said Orn, that thou art as red as blood? He answered, Not wounded am I, but things are not better than if I were: such words have been used to me as never before.' Here, as usual, we are left to guess things from their consequences. The dialogue is full of proverbs. 'A bairn grows, but breeches grow not.' 'Bare is the back save a brother be behind.' 'The look lies not, if a woman loves a man.' 'Every man must fare when he is fey.' 'Long do men live who are slain with words.' 'Better is a good foster-child than an ill son.' 'But a little while is hand fain of blow.'

Allied to this reticence is a noteworthy love of what the grammarians call 'litotes'—that is, the figure of speech by which much less is said than is meant. To the Icelander 'not often' means 'never', 'not many' means 'few' or even 'none'. 'One blow was more than enough for Koll' means that Koll was killed outright. 'If

thou speakest thus again, something may hap that thou dost not altogether like' is a prelude to a deed of blood from which a whole saga of vendettas springs. 'I have not noticed that where thou art friendships grow' is a polite observation to one of the most desperate mischief-makers in the whole history of Iceland.

When the hero is a poet, his words often take a verse form—a form exceedingly difficult, for the later Icelandic poetry is nothing but a series of conundrums, in which 'kennings' or periphrases are used for the most common things. Poetry itself is in this language 'the boat of Odin'; a king is 'the despiser of the flame of the street of the hawk'—the street of the hawk being the hand, the flame of the hand being gold or rings, and the despiser of gold being he who distributes rewards to his followers. A sword is the gnat of the bone; and so on. It is in the poetry that we find most interpolation; for there can be no question that the earlier poetry was simpler, and the later more complicated and elaborate.

This form of art has its own dangers. As we have seen and shall see, there is often a lack of unity in the tales. The original teller, reciting to hearers to whom every adventure in their own

family was interesting, was not always careful to conform his tales to rules that apply to written compositions. He was sure of his audience so long as he stuck to the clan, and the clan is the real principle of unity in these narratives. Thus, for example, *Laxdaela Saga* is the story of many people, and has in it many disconnected episodes; but to the descendants of the heroes every point was full of fascination, nor would they rest till the last fragment had been told. In *Njala* the genius of the author—or of one of the authors—has contrived to create an extraordinary oneness out of a most confusing multiplicity; and in some of the smaller tales, like *Gisli*, *Hen-Thorir*, *Bandamanna*, there is a perfection of unifying art worthy of Ben Jonson or Fielding. The monotony in subject, of which we have spoken above, leads to no monotony in the way of telling. The scenes of battle are usually well balanced against those of law; and the battle-scenes themselves, in the better sagas, are less wearisome than some of those in the *Iliad*. The mere nearness of the sea provides a certain variety; for every Icelandic hero is an amphibious being. When surrounded by foes on land, he often takes to the water, and the sagaman, who knows the sea, never fails to arouse

our interest in the escape of the swimmer and the disappointment of his pursuers.

Thus the saga is, as it has so often been called, a kind of prose epic; and it presents many curious parallels to the manner of an epic poem. No part of the *Iliad*, for example, is more deservedly famous than the passage in which Helen is presented to us on the walls of Troy, pointing out the Achaean heroes to old Priam. A very similar passage is that in *Laxdaela Saga* in which Helgi's shepherd describes to him the men he has seen, and Helgi guesses from the description who they are. 'There sat a man in a stained saddle, in a blue cloak; great of size, and valiant to look upon; bald in front and tooth-bare.' 'That', says Helgi, 'must be Thorgils Holluson.' The youth goes similarly through the whole list, and Helgi tells him in every case who the man described is.

Equally epical are the catch-phrases, the balancings, the repetitions. As in Homer the messenger tells his message in precisely the same words as those in which he received it, so it is in the sagas, and doubtless for the same reasons. A work composed without the help of writing requires and uses these aids to the memory. Of such repetitions of phrase the account of

the great lawsuit in *Njala* provides a good example.

Again, the saga is like the old epic precisely in its total carelessness of what used to be regarded as 'epic dignity'. Homer, says Matthew Arnold, is 'uniformly noble'. He may be so, but he is by no means uniformly sublime. He can compare Ajax to an ass thwacked by his master, or Menelaus to a courageous fly; he can describe a primitive laundress at work, or even a Polyphemus barbarously devouring his loathsome food. He is, in fact, thoroughly homely when homeliness comes his way. Precisely similar is the sagaman. To him 'the word is cousin to the deed', and he has no foolish shrinking from the plain: Gudmund falling into a kettle of boiling milk, Earl Gizur hiding in the whey-tub, the cutting up of a whale, the drying of sea-drenched clothes—all these he describes when they come his way with perfect simplicity, just as he describes his battles and great heroisms with perfect simplicity when *they* come his way. He is a man, and nothing human is alien to him.

But if the saga is thus an epic, it yet offers many of the features of a tragedy. Not even the *Oedipus* succeeds better than *Njala* or *Hrafn-*

*kell's Saga* in 'purging the mind of pity and terror' by means of pity and terror themselves. But the comparison which will rise oftenest to the English reader's mind will be that with the free romantic tragedy of Elizabeth's times—a form of literature born in a Viking age not dissimilar to that which produced the sagas. A Drake, a Hawkins, and a Raleigh, in their Tiberius-like mixture of good and evil, in their portentous virtues and portentous crimes, in their cruelty and their poetry, are very like a Kjartan or an Egill; and the literature to which their exploits gave birth is like the literature that clusters round the Vikings. One point of similarity will at once occur to all. The sagaman, like the Elizabethans, knows well how the effect of tragedy is heightened by allaying the gloom with an infusion of comedy or even of farce. For his object, like Shakspeare's, is to hold the mirror up to Nature. But, like Shakspeare, he gives us Nature touched with Art; he never forgets that his mission is to please. Above all, like the old tragedians, he is careful not to fret us above bearing: he dismisses us, at the end, in 'calm of mind, all passion spent'; for after the heaving storm of quarrel and revenge his story ends in peace, even though it be the peace of death.

# I

## THE STORY OF ROLF KRAKI

THERE was a king in Denmark who was called Rolf Kraki: he was the noblest of the kings of old, alike in valour and in mildness, and also in lowliness of mind. And of this lowliness this story is a sign, which is oftentimes told. There was a boy named Vogg, small and poor: he came to King Rolf's court. At that time the king was young and slight of body. Vogg came in and looked up at him. 'Why lookest thou so at me?' said the king. 'I had heard', said Vogg, 'that King Rolf of Leidra was the greatest man in all the Northern lands: and now, there sits in the high-seat a Kraki or little thin pole, and men call *that* their king, though round him are twelve Berserks, all mightier than he, and Bodvar Bjarki mightier by far.' The king, no whit offended, took the lad's words kindly, and said, 'Now thou hast lengthened my name, and henceforth I shall be known as Rolf Kraki. But

'tis the custom at a naming-feast to give gifts: take then this ring'; and he took his ring from his hand and gave it to Vogg. Then Vogg said, 'This oath I take, that whosoever killeth thee, of him will I be the bane'. All men laughed at the boy's boast; but the king said, 'A little toy makes Vogg glad'.

Now, after a long while, King Rolf set forth with his warriors to Upsala where King Adils ruled; and on his way thither he came to the house of a peasant who called himself Rany: he wore a large hat that shaded his face, yet could men see that he was one-eyed. He spake with wisdom, and so that men could not but hearken; and he told Rolf that he had too many men in his host; better were it that some were sent back. And so weighty was his speech that Rolf agreed, and kept but his nobles with him. Then the old man beckoned with his right hand, and the Valkyries, the Maidens that choose the slain, came at his bidding: they were Rist the storm, and Mist the cloud, and Goll the speaker, and Gondul the she-wolf, and Skogul the carrier, and Hilda the warrior-maiden—whom the old man called each by her name, bidding them give victory to Rolf. And so it was; for in the battle that came, the Valkyries gave victory to Rolf

and defeat to Adils. And so they came back to Rany. And Rany showed Rolf a shield and a sword and a byrnie or shirt of mail, saying, 'Take these; for the time will come when thou shalt need them all'.

But Rolf, whose eyes were blinded that he knew not who it was that spake, answered, 'Ill becomes it a king that he take such gifts from a peasant's hands'.

Then Rany was wroth, and his face darkened, and he said, 'Go hence, ye sons of Jotuns: some norn hath clouded your eyes from seeing; lo, she hath cast the thread of your fate northwards'. So saying, he vanished from their sight. Then said Bjarki, 'Methinks that peasant was more than he seemed'.

'Ay', said Rolf, whose sight was cleansed; 'it was Odin's self, one-eyed, blue-caped, and mighty.' But they saw him no more for a season.

Now it came to pass in later years that Skuld, Rolf's sister, an evil witch, conceived a hatred of the king, and by her enchantments stirred up a like hatred in her husband, Hjorvard: and the twain plotted to kill Rolf. Wherefore they came to Rolf's court, and were welcomed royally; but they told him not that they had hidden their men round about the town. And

when Rolf's men slept, the traitors stole in, and slew men now here, now there. But forthwith Bjarki awaked, and cried out to the men to wake also. And then came a Valkyrie, and held up her left arm, bent at the elbow, saying, 'Look through the hollow of my arm, and the mist will leave thy eyes, and thou shalt see'. And Bjarki looked, and lo! he saw Odin among the traitors; and he cried in anger, 'Would I could throttle him as one throttles a rat!' And at last he saw Rolf fall, and said, 'Ay, the noble-minded one hath stooped to the hair of Earth' (the grass). And again he cried, 'I see in the air the Valkyries, beckoning me to Valhalla'. And with that the greatest of Rolf's warriors fell also.

Then it seemed that all were slain: but Hjorvard said, 'Is there none of all Rolf's heroes left? Were there one, I would reward him.' Then there rose up from the place of slaughter a man covered with blood, but with the ring on his arm that Rolf had given him. All men knew him, that he was Vogg. And Vogg said to Hjorvard, 'My lord is dead: gladly would I serve thee, had I but a sword; for mine own is broken in the fight'. Then Hjorvard held out to him his own sword. 'Nay', said Vogg, 'King Rolf ever gave the sword by the point to the man he delighted

to honour.' And the king therefore took the sword by the point, and gave the hilt to Vogg, who straightway thrust him through, saying, 'Go thou to the realm of Hel, where thou shalt walk in valleys of misery'. Forthwith the men of King Hjorvard cut him to pieces with their swords; but he said, 'Now is my vow fulfilled, and I have avenged my lord'.

All this was told in a lay called the 'Waking-Song of Bjarki'. Hundreds of years later, on the night before the last battle which Olaf the Holy ever fought, the good king asked for a song, and his skald, Thormod, sang him this song of Bjarki and Rolf. The king said it was a good song to bid men quit themselves bravely; and next day he went into the battle, and, fighting valiantly, perished like King Rolf.

(*Hrolfs Saga Kraka.*)

The reader will think of the passage in Virgil (*Aeneid* ii. 604), borrowed from Homer, in which Venus removes the mist from the eyes of Aeneas. 'Lo, I will snatch from thee the cloud that darkens thy human vision. She spake, and dread faces loom before me, and the mighty Powers, gods that love not Troy.'

## II

### THE STORY OF KORMAK

IN the days when Athelstan the Mighty ruled over England; when witches still had power and elves still danced their rings; when 'stitch' was still caused by goddesses that shot invisible arrows into a man's side; when 'wise women' could foresee the future, or make a man invulnerable, or change themselves into animals—in those days a certain man, named Ogmund, set sail from Norway to go to Iceland. He carried with him the twin pillars of his high-seat, images of Thor and Odin, for these had within them his luck. And when he drew near to Iceland he cast these same pillars overboard. And they came ashore in Mid-firth, where dwelt a chief named Skeggi. Skeggi welcomed Ogmund, and gave him a plot of ground whereon to establish himself and build a house. Now it was the belief then that if in measuring for a house a man found the meteyard too short, then would the

fortune of the house be shortened also; and three times did Ogmund measure, but three times did the meteyard fall short. Wherefore men deemed the luck of that house would be scant; yet Ogmund builded there.

Ogmund took to wife a woman named Dalla, who bore him two sons: the elder was called Thorgils, and he was quiet, gentle, and slow to move. The younger was called Kormak; he was gloomy, passionate, and hasty of temper, black-haired, tall, and strong; a good 'skald' or poet, and his verses were easily remembered. When these two had just reached early manhood, Ogmund their father died, and Thorgils took the household in hand. Men reckoned him a good bonder. As for Kormak, he stayed at the house a while, but did little therein.

Not far from thence, at a place called Tongue, lived a chief named Thorkell: he had a son also named Thorkell, whom they called Toothgnasher: proud men were both father and son. A daughter had Thorkell, whose name was Steingerd: bright-eyed was she, beautiful-haired, and the fairest of maidens. She was away from home, at a house called The Peaks, near to the farm of Thorgils and Kormak. Now one day it happened that Kormak and Tosti, a friend of

his, had gone some distance from their home after their sheep; and they stayed the night at The Peaks, for they were weary. Large was the hall, and fires were lit for the guests. Now Steingerd and her maid were eager to see what guests had come that night; so they came and peeped over the door of the hall; and as they did so, Kormak spied her feet below the door. Whereupon he whispered a *visa* to Tosti:

‘Lo the feet of the maiden  
Below the door;  
With love hath she struck me  
To my heart’s core:  
Ill-luck will she bring me,  
Sadly I fear;  
That maiden brings danger  
Whene’er she draws near.’

Now Steingerd saw that she had been seen; so she ran along the passage, until she came into the hall at the far end, behind the high-seat. Here she deemed she would be hidden by the carved pillars, and she stood and gazed at the young man. But of a sudden the fire flamed up, and its light flashed upon her bright eyes, so that Kormak saw her once again:

‘Lo, those are the maiden’s bright bright eyes!  
Methinks they will harm me in wondrous wise.’

So spake he to Tosti; but meanwhile, Steingerd and her attendant were speaking of him; and Steingerd, as the manner of women is, took pleasure in making light of him, that she might hear her handmaid praise him.

In the morning Kormak saw her as she was combing her hair; and the handmaid said to him, 'What wouldst thou give for a wife with such hair and such eyes as Steingerd's?' And he answered, in yet another *visa*:

'I price one of her eyes at three hundred in silver,  
And the head she is combing at five hundred.'

Then said the handmaid, 'Pity is it that she thinks not the same of thee'; but she knew well what were Steingerd's true thoughts of him.

'As for the whole of her', said Kormak, 'I would value it against Iceland, and Denmark, and England, though I might rule over all three.' Then came Tosti, and asked him to go out after the sheep; but what were sheep to Kormak then? Better loved he to stay in the house, and to play chess and tables with Steingerd, than to look after cattle on the hills. Late was it ere he could bring himself to go home. And when he reached home, he told his mother of his love, and said to her, 'Mother, make me

fine clothes, that I may find more favour in Steingerd's sight'.

'Alas!' said Dalla, 'well I perceive the evil that is coming on our house. Hast thou thought how this will seem in the eyes of Thorkell her father, and of his son?'

Now Thorkell was proud and haughty, and when men told him that Kormak loved Steingerd he was aflame with wrath. 'Who is this Kormak?' said he; 'is he much better than a thrall of Midfirth-Skeggi?' Now there was a man named Narfi, a low man and an insolent, whom Thorkell kept in his house; and he heard these words of the father. Wherefore, one day, when Kormak was at the house—for Steingerd had now come to Tongue—he seized some sausages that were on the fire, and thrust them in Kormak's face. 'How likest thou these kettle-snakes?' said he in a kind of doggerel rhyme. Kormak, not wishing then to quarrel, for Steingerd was by, said he liked them well; but at even, when he was about to go home, he saw Narfi and remembered these insolent words. So he stayed him, and bade him take back what he had said. 'Not so', said Narfi; 'if thou like not the fare, thou needest not come to the dinner.' And at that Kormak struck at him with his axe,

but Narfi fled from him, and so escaped for a season.

Now there was a witch-wife named Thorveig; she dwelt at Stanstead in Midfirth. She had two sons, Odd and Gudmund, violent men both. To them spake Thorkell, and promised Odd many gifts if he and Gudmund would lie in wait for Kormak. So they watched for their chance. And one day, when they were in the great hall and Steingerd was on the dais, they saw Kormak coming towards the door. So these two brethren rose up to slay him as he entered the door. And Odd seized a sword that was there, and Gudmund a scythe. But Kormak chanced to see them, wherefore he thrust his shield into the room before him, and bent the scythe and brake the sword. Then Thorkell came out and said that Kormak was ever a brawler, and a madman in his words; then sent he Steingerd out of the hall, and said that Kormak should never see her more. At that Kormak spoke a verse—

Let my foes, these brethren, whet their swords,  
Yet shall they not slay me;  
Let them set on me in the open field,  
It will be as though two ewes attacked a wolf.

Now, later, Kormak found that Steingerd

was in a certain house; so he went thereto, and when he found it locked he broke it open and talked with her. But she said, 'Little care hast thou of thy life, for the sons of Thorveig are seeking after thee'. 'Little indeed care I', said Kormak, and abode there all that day. And as he departed, he saw three men waiting for him in a dale; these were Odd, Gudmund, and Narfi, whom Thorkell had sent to watch for him and slay him. So he spake another verse:

Three men lie in wait for me;  
They strive to keep my maiden from me:  
But the more they seek to hinder us,  
The more we love each other.

And at that moment the three sprang out on him. The two brethren fought bravely, but Narfi hung behind, for he was fearful and a coward. Now Kormak fought like a lion, and the two brethren could not slay him; wherefore the fight was long, and Thorkell deemed it were best to go to help the brethren. But when he donned his armour Steingerd clung to him so that he could not go. The end was that Kormak slew Odd, and wounded Gudmund so that he died soon thereafter.

Then went Kormak to Thorveig. 'Thou canst not abide longer in these parts', said he;

'thou must flit thee abroad at such a time, nor will I pay thee any were-gild for either of thy sons.' Thorveig answered, 'It is likely enough that I must yield to thee and go hence; and as to the were-gild thou hast the power to deny it; yet shall I pay thee thy due reward—never shalt thou desire to have her save when thou canst not get her'. 'Do thy worst, thou evil woman', said Kormak. A little later he told these words of Thorveig's to Steingerd, and she was sad about them, for she feared the power of the witch. Kormak replied,

All the rivers shall run backward,  
Ere I leave thee, lady mine!

'Boast not thereof', said she; 'many a little thing may bring thy boasts to naught.' 'Fear not', answered he; 'dost thou choose me for thy husband?' 'Surely', replied she. 'Then urge thy father to let me wed thee.' After that, Kormak gave Thorkell great gifts for Steingerd's sake, and many men of mark took up the cause and pleaded for Kormak with Thorkell. And the end of it was that Thorkell gave way, and consented to give his daughter to Kormak. But so soon as this was done, the mind of Kormak began to change, for Thorveig had wrought mighty

spells. When Thorkell began to speak about the dowry, Kormak thought himself not fairly dealt with therein, and quarrels began; insomuch that when all things were arranged for the bridal, Kormak came not to it: and all men thought that a deadly shame done to Steingerd, and her father, and his whole house.

There was a man named Bersi, who lived at Sowerby not far from Tongue. Many a duel had he fought, and therefore was he known as Holmgang Bersi, or Bersi the Duellist. To him came Thorveig when she was driven from Midfirth; and Bersi received her well, and gave her a portion of land west of Midfirth. Now Thorkell, after the shame put upon him by Kormak, remembered Bersi, and deemed he would be a great help if it came to an open quarrel with Kormak. So Narfi was sent to Bersi, and was told to offer him Steingerd to wife. Narfi went, and Bersi greeted him well. 'Men say, Bersi', said he, 'that Steingerd and thou would make a good match. Nor is there need to think of Kormak, for he has shown he thinks no more of the maiden.' The end was, that Bersi was betrothed to Steingerd, but Steingerd's own heart was not in the matter: and she sent Narfi to tell

Kormak thereof. Little pleased was Narfi with his errand; for well knew he how hasty was Kormak with his blows; so he rode with a shield in front of him, and stared all round like a frightened hare. Now when he came to Kormak's home, he found him building a turf-wall, and beating it with a mallet. 'What tidings, Narfi, that thou comest thus to me?' 'Slight tidings: we had many guests last night.' 'Who were your guests?' 'Holmgang-Bersi, and seventeen others, for he had come to his bridal.' 'Who was the bride?' 'Steingerd, Thorkell's daughter', said Narfi. 'Ever dost thou bring ill news', said Kormak; and he rushed upon Narfi and smote him with the mallet so that he fell from his horse stunned. 'Ill done was that', said Kormak's brother Thorgils. 'Not so', replied Kormak; 'tis but that a churl hath got his deserts.' Soon Narfi came to himself, and told them all about the wedding. 'Did Steingerd know of it beforehand?' 'Not until the very evening they came thither', said he. 'But thou wilt find it a lighter thing, Kormak, to ill-use me than to fight with Bersi.'

Now when Kormak knew that Steingerd was wedded to another, all his love for her came back as it were a flood. Straightway he took his

horse and weapons, and started to rush after Bersi. 'Whither wilt thou?' said Thorgils. 'After him who hath stolen her whom I love', said he. 'Vain is thy errand', said Thorgils; 'long since will Bersi have reached his home: yet will I go with thee.' 'For no man will I tarry', said Kormak; and forth he rode, so that ere he had gone far he foundered his horse. And Thorgils with seventeen men found him near Thorveig's home.

Now Bersi had come to Thorveig but a little while before, and she lent him a boat to cross the firth. 'But ere we part', said she, 'I would give thee a little gift—'tis this shield; methinks thou canst not be wounded if thou carriest it. Small is this gift in return for the home thou hast given me.' Bersi thanked her, and so they parted. And Thorveig, by second-sight, knew of the coming of Kormak and Thorgils; wherefore she sent men to bore holes in all the other boats. Straightway came Kormak and the rest, and asked Thorveig for a boat. 'Not for nothing will I do thee that service', said she: 'here is a boat which I will lend thee for half a mark.' Thorgils said two ounces would be more than enough. 'Waste not time', said Kormak; he leapt into the boat and Thorgils after him. But scarcely had they gone far, when it filled beneath them,

and hard work had they to come back to land. 'Thou deservest punishment rather than pay, thou evil woman', said Kormak. 'A little jest was it of mine', said Thorveig; and with that Thorgils paid her the money. Meanwhile Bersi had got safely home.

Now after this naught would content Kormak but that he should send a challenge to Bersi, though Bersi offered him his sister Helga to wife. 'That is well offered', said Thorgils; 'for Helga is deemed a good match.' 'Not so', said Kormak; 'what are all the women in the world to Steingerd?' wherefore the challenge was sent.

Now when Dalla, Kormak's mother, heard thereof, she was displeased with him. 'Thou hast done foolishly', said she; 'for Helga is a good match, and Bersi hath not his equal as a fighter in all Iceland. Moreover, he hath a sword called Whiting which naught can resist, and a healing-stone which will cure all his wounds; and by these hath he come through a score of fights; and yet more hath he Thorveig's spells to aid him: what hast thou against all these?' 'My good axe', said Kormak.

'Little boots that', said Dalla. 'Go hence to Midfirth-Skeggi, and borrow his great sword Skofnung: that alone can break the spells.' Now

Skofnung was indeed a mighty brand, and a wise man holding the same could fail not of victory. For there was tied to it a small wallet, which must not be touched: the sun must never shine on the hilt; and it must never be worn save when the owner was making ready for battle. If drawn in haste it would shriek; but if drawn with heed it would do strange things; a snake would creep out from under the hilt, and then, if the blade were duly slanted, it would creep back again in sign of good luck.

Therefore, when Kormak went to Skeggi and begged for his sword, Skeggi would not give it. 'Slow is the mind of the sword', said he, 'and thou art hasty. Little good wilt thou do it, and little will it do thee.' But Dalla went to Skeggi and asked for it. 'I will lend it', said he, 'if he will do all I tell him; otherwise it will go hard with him'; and he told Kormak all the needs of the sword. Kormak took it, and straightway forgot all that Skeggi had told him. In his house he dragged the sword from its sheath, and it came out shrieking; and so hastily did he draw it that he tore off the wallet therefrom. 'Alas', said Dalla, 'all is over with thee. I should have known how it would be, hasty-tempered as thou art!'

Nevertheless, Kormak carried Skofnung with him to the holm. So swiftly went he, that he kept not the sun from the hilt: Skofnung shrieked as he was drawn, and when the snake crawled from under the guard, Kormak slanted not the blade. Wherefore the luck of Skofnung fled from him.

In those days it was the custom at the holmgang that each man should smite thrice at the other's shield, one first and then the other; and if no blood was shed, then should they fight without shields. Now Bersi had brought three shields, and the third was that which Thorveig had enchanted: yet, had Skofnung been duly dealt with, little would have booted her enchantments. So they smote in turn, and each shield was split in turn, till it fell to Kormak to strike at the magic shield. And so it was that when he smote, Skofnung was broken, fire flew from the shield, and the point of the blade was driven back on to Kormak's hand, so that blood fell on the rug whereon they fought. Then men went between them, and said that Kormak was conquered. Little liked he his fate; but he had to pay the ransom, and to tell Skeggi how he had fared with the sword. Skeggi said that it had happened as was to be expected from such a

man as Kormak. Long was it ere the wound was healed, and longer ere Kormak had peace of mind, for he loved Steingerd, and could not bear that another should have her. As for Skofnung, the more men strove to grind it to a point the worse it was.

Long stayed Kormak at home, eating his heart with care and grief. Then it came to pass that Bersi had yet another holmgang; and in this he was grievously maimed: therefore Steingerd, scorning to be the wife of a maimed man, and also loving Kormak, put him away and went home to her father's house. 'Now', thought she, 'Kormak will surely wed me.' But Thorveig's spell was still mighty; and as before he loved her not.

Now Steingerd was given in marriage once again, this time to a certain man named Tintein, who dwelt in the north of Iceland. And no sooner did Kormak hear thereof, than his love welled up once more. 'I cannot bear', he said to Steingerd in one of his verses, 'that thou shouldst be wedded to a tin-man; never shall I smile now thy father has given thee to such a nothing.' Steingerd said, 'Thou wouldst not have me when thou mightest; little good is it to wail

now thou canst not'. And she told Tintein of Kormak's words. Thereupon, Tintein spake to his brother Thorvard. And Thorvard watched, and saw that Kormak oft tried to get speech with Steingerd. Wherefore Thorvard summoned Kormak to the holmgang. All men knew that Kormak was the better sword-player; therefore went Thorvard to a wise woman named Thordis, who, though she was friendly to Kormak, yet prepared Thorvard for the battle by many spells. Not long thereafter, Kormak came to Thordis, and begged her to prepare him likewise. 'Alas!' said the wise woman, 'thou hast come too late: I knew not that I was preparing an enemy of thine: yet, for the friendship that is between us, I will undo the spells I have laid upon him. But I fear thy hastiness; take heed therefore to speak no word except I speak to thee, whatever thou seest me do.' Now to undo the spell she had to slay three geese on the holm or place of battle. And three nights she went with Kormak to slay a goose there, but such was his hastiness that each night he spake to her: so that at last she said to him, 'Vain is it to try to help thee, so hasty as thou art: hadst thou but obeyed me, I had given thee victory to-morrow, and also had broken the

spells of Thorveig, so that thou shouldst have married Steingerd and loved her till thy death-day; but now it cannot be'. Angry indeed was Kormak, but it availed him naught to rave. Wherefore the battle came on, and Kormak did not lose in it, yet did he not win Steingerd.

Now Steingerd and Tintein set out for Norway, and it happened that Kormak and Thor-gils his brother set sail about the same time. And on the voyage Tintein's ship was attacked by Vikings, but Kormak was near and saved it, not for love of Tintein, but for love of Steingerd. And so they went together to the court of King Harald of Norway; and here Kormak saw Tintein often in the company of Steingerd, and liked it ill. One day it came to pass that he saw them on their ship together in the harbour; wherefore he was suddenly angry and seized the tiller of his own boat and hurled it at Tintein so that he fell stunned. Many such quarrels had they; and at last Tintein and Steingerd left Norway for Denmark.

Now one day, when Kormak was cruising in his ship, he saw another ship coming towards him, and when it drew near he saw that the captain thereof was Tintein. But Tintein said no words of wrath to him, but asked his help; 'for',

said he, 'certain Vikings attacked us and carried off Steingerd, and I would have thy aid in taking her back'. 'Assuredly will I help thee', said Kormak; 'where lie those pirates?' 'Not far hence', said Tintein. So Kormak sailed with Tintein, and, as luck would, he came up with the pirates in a certain harbour, when most of the men were ashore. He rushed on board, and slew the first man he saw—and that was Thorstein, the man who had carried off Steingerd: and the rest of the crew either were slain or swam ashore. Thus Steingerd was taken back again; and Tintein said to Kormak, 'She is thine by law of conquest—take her and go in peace'. But scarce had Tintein said these words, when Kormak felt in himself that he could never wed her. So they parted, and never saw one another again.

Little more need one tell of Kormak. With Thorgils sailed he about the British Isles; and men say they founded Scarborough, and called it after Thorgils' other name Scard; but the end was that in Scotland he fell in combat with a giant or *blot-risi*. So died Kormak Ogmundson, whose fate it was never to wed the woman he loved, nor to love her except when she was wedded to another.

And as for Thorveig, so men say, she died in the manner following. As Kormak was sailing to Norway, a walrus rose out of the sea, and made as though it would rush at the ship of Kormak. But Kormak smote it with a long pike; hard and true smote he it, so that it straightway sank, and never rose again. But as she sank, men say they saw her eyes, and they were the eyes of Thorveig the witch: for she had made herself a walrus to slay Kormak, and had been slain herself. Howsoever this be, at that very hour Thorveig fell sick in her house in Iceland, and died in her bed.

*(Kormak's Saga.)*

Mr. Maurice Hewlett has based a novel on this saga.

### III

## THE TALE OF GEIRMUND HELL-SKIN

GEIRMUND and Hamund were the twin sons of King Hjor. And this is the story that tells why the twain were both called Hell-skin. At the time when King Hjor had to go to a kings' moot, his queen was 'not well', and while the king was out of the land she bore two sons; and they were fine children, but that was the greatest mark upon them, that never had men seen darker skins than were on those children. The queen set little store by them, and deemed their colour of ill omen. Now there was a thrall named Lodhott, who was set in charge of other thralls. He was married, and his wife bore a son at the very time that the queen bore the twins: and this boy was so exceeding fair, whom the thrall's wife had borne, that the queen deemed her own sons but ill-favoured, to compare with him. Wherefore she devised to make

an exchange with the handmaid; and though the handmaid deemed even as the queen that her own son was the fairer, yet dared she not deny to make the bargain. So the queen took the thrall's son, and spread it abroad that he was her own, and called his name Leif, while the handmaid took the twins and brought them up in thrall fashion, till they were three winters old; but Leif had the honour of a prince. Yet the twins showed tokens of their true birth.

Now it came to pass that Bragi the skald came to King Hjor, and abode with him some time. And when the king one day went a-hunting, there were but few left in the palace. Bragi was in the window-seat, with a reed in his hand; and the queen was lying in an alcove, so hidden that none could see her. Leif sat in the high-seat, and played with a gold ring. And the twins, thinking the hall empty save of Leif, and seeing him thus playing, drew near; and Geirmund said to his brother, 'How were it if we took the ring from Leif, and played therewith ourselves awhile?' 'Ready am I', said Hamund. So they ran up and took it from Leif; whereupon he wept bitterly. Then they said, 'A strange thing surely, that a king's son should

weep to lose a gold ring!' and, pulling him from the high-seat, they mocked at him.

Now all this Bragi saw: wherefore he rose and went to the queen, and, touching her with the reed, spake a verse:

'Twain are in hall, both know I well,  
Hamund and Geirmund, Hjor's sons are they:  
And Leif the third, Lodhott's child:  
Thou didst not bear him: few viler could be!'

Thereupon the queen arose, and went forth with the boys, and took back her own, restoring Leif to his mother: for she deemed—as was indeed true—that they had in them the high spirit that it was likely, from their birth, that they would have. And at eventide, when the king returned and sat in his high-seat, then went the queen to the king, taking the two lads with her, and told him all she had done, and of the exchange with the handmaid, bidding him deal as he deemed fit. Then the king, looking at the boys, said, 'Of a truth I perceive that these boys are of my race; yet never have I seen such dark-skinned boys as they are'. Therefore were they thenceforward both surnamed Hell-skin. And as soon as they were full grown they went out of the land a-harrying, and gained both wealth and glory, steering with skill

a great ship a long while: insomuch that it is said in some sagas, and specially in the saga of Rolf the Black, that those brothers were held the greatest Vikings among sea-kings of that time.

(*Sturlunga Saga*, i. 1, 2.)

Twin-stories are common in all languages. With this may be compared that of Romulus and Remus. Twins were suspected of coming from double parentage, human and divine, and were often cast out of the house as ill-omened. See Rendel Harris's *Dioscuri*.

## IV

### THE SAGA OF HORD

THIS is the story of one whose luck was evil from his youth, and who came to an ill end through a curse laid unthinkingly upon him by his own mother when he was a child. For in those days men had to take heed to their words: inasmuch as, if they spake unadvisedly with their lips, the Weird Sisters listened, and would assuredly suffer not the words to fall to the ground.

There was a man named Grimkell in the south-west of Iceland, silent and dour, but just and honourable; never failing in doing sacrifice to the gods. He sought in marriage Signy, the daughter of Valbrand, a widow, wealthy, whom men deemed a great match. But Valbrand thought Grimkell no unequal husband for her, and hesitated not to consent; though Torfi his son, thinking the twain unlikely to agree, set his face against the thing, and said ill-luck would

arise therefrom. Yet was the bargain hanselled and carried through.

Valbrand, being old, went not according to custom to the bridegroom's house, but sent a friend of his, whose name was Kol, instead. With Kol went Grim, the son of Signy by her former marriage, and thirty men besides. Evil were the omens on that journey: a horse was lost in a snowdrift, and Grim wished even then to turn back, but Kol made him go on. Grimkell gave them a great feast, wondering much, howsoever, that neither Valbrand nor Torfi had come with the bride.

Signy was proud and fond of show: Grimkell, as was said, was silent and loved not company and merry-making. Soon therefore the pair began to disagree, and might have quarrelled, but that Grim, loving them both, oftentimes played the peacemaker. He was gentle and honest; but ere long he wedded and left the stead. His wife was Gudrid, the daughter of Hogni, a man of wealth. Grimkell stocked his farm right royally, so that Grim speedily became rich. He and Gudrid had a son whom they called Geir.

Now Signy had a dream. She saw a great tree growing, with such mighty branches that it overspread the house; but it bore no blossoms.

This dream she liked ill, wherefore she told it to her foster-mother Thordis, a woman skilled in omens; but Thordis liked it no better. 'This is the meaning', said she. 'Thou wilt bear a son, strong and fair, but there will be no love lost between him and his kin.' Soon thereafter did Signy bear a son, whom she called Hord: fair and strong; but there was this marvel about him, that he walked not till he was three winters old; and men deemed this unlucky. Now one day when Grimkell was sacrificing in the temple, Signy sat on a stool, with a necklace across her knees that was an heirloom and a great treasure. The child, seeing the glitter of the necklace, rose to his feet—having never walked before—and came to his mother, snatched at the necklace, and broke it, so that the pieces fell on the floor. Signy, in hasty anger, cried out, 'See this child! Unlucky are his first steps, his next will be worse, and worst of all his last!' Grimkell, hearing the words, and knowing that the Weird Sisters must have marked them, spake no word, but took up the child and carried him to Grim and Gudrid. 'Rear him for me', said he, 'for his mother draweth ill-luck on him.' They took him and brought him up with Geir; but Signy, angered with herself and with

Grimkell, thenceforward saw less of her husband than ever. Shortly afterwards a maid-child called Thorbjorg was born to her at Torfi's house, and she died in giving her birth. Torfi liked not the child that had caused this ill, and bade that she should be thrown into the river. But the man, instead of so doing, carried her to Grim and Gudrid, who took her also, and brought her up with Geir and Hord.

Now Grimkell, hearing this, was wroth with Torfi, and would fain have slain him; but Grim and the lawman, Thorkell the Moon, a just man, won him over to take as atonement six hundred ounces of silver. When Torfi came to pay it, Grimkell said, 'I ask it not for myself: pay it, and the interest thereon, to Hord when he reacheth man's estate'. Torfi answered, 'I will pay it if Hord is a better man than his father!' 'Be it so', replied Grimkell; 'little good in any wise will it do him, seeing whence it comes. But boys take after their mother's brothers: wherefore I deem that Hord will turn out worse than I.' At this there arose a great shout, and things came nigh to bloodshed; and though the two men fought not at that time, little love was between them thenceforward. Thus early was Hord the cause of quarrel among his kin.

At twelve years Hord was a match for most boys of sixteen; and at fifteen he was a head taller than the most part of full-grown men; and he had further this gift, that no glamour could make him see things save as they truly were. He had the keenest eyesight of all men, and in all sports was the greatest champion. Geir also, though less than he, was tall and strong; and the two were ever together, and had but one mind between them.

Now it chanced that a ship came from Norway, the owner whereof was a man called Brynjolf. At the 'Thing' Brynjolf met Grimkell, and said, 'Gladly would I see thy son Hord, of whom I have heard much praise'. And just then Hord and Geir passed by: so Grimkell called Hord, and made him known to Brynjolf, who, looking on him, saw that fame had not erred in praising him; and he said, 'If thou desirest to go out with me to Norway, I will be thy partner and give thee a half-share in all our gains'. 'That is a strange word', said Hord, 'to one thou hast never seen before: yet will I go with thee if but I can gather enough goods to trade with.' Geir, too, was eager to go; and he urged Hord to take a man with them called Helgi Sigmundson, Hord liked this not, for, seeing things as

they were, he perceived in Helgi a hasty temper that would bring ill-luck: yet did he yield to Geir. Grimkell gave them a large sum of money, and store of merchandise wherewith to trade: and so they set sail, and arrived at Bergen with a fair wind.

This was when Harald Grayfell was king in Norway, and about the time when Edgar the Peaceable reigned in England. Harald received Hord well, gave him leave to trade, and made him his man. Soon it was seen how noble Hord was: he did great things in war, and gained wealth and high renown. For one thing he did he won especial fame. There was a howe on a hill, wherein was buried an ancient Viking. Men said he had a great sword in his hand and a precious ring on his finger: yet none dared to enter the howe to get these treasures. Hord, hearing thereof, entered the howe, fought with the Viking, and, overcoming him, took sword and ring. Of which deed the fame spread far and wide, insomuch that the Jarl of Gautland gave him his daughter Helga to wife: and, though Helga was the paragon of women, it was said that such a man as Hord was no ill match for her.

Meanwhile in Iceland his sister Thorbjorg

had grown up and had wedded a man called Eindrídi. Soon after this marriage Grimkell died, and, what was great scathe, Grim and Gudríd died also. Eindrídi and Illugi, who had married Grimkell's eldest daughter, saw to the sharing of the lands and goods. Soon afterwards, Hord, being then thirty years old, returned with Helga his wife, Helgi Sigmundson, and a train of followers. Little ill-luck had been his thus far; but the Weird Sisters had not forgotten. He met Eindrídi and Illugi, and fairly they dealt with him. Eindrídi would take no more than Thorbjorg's share; and Illugi entertained him so royally throughout the winter that Hord said he was happy in having found such a brother-in-law. But next he bethought him of the money due to him, by the award of the lawman, Thorkell Moon, from Torfi. So he went to Torfi and asked for it. Torfi replied, 'I mind me of my words to thy father, that I would pay thee only if thou wert a better man than he. No proof do I see that thou hast yet excelled thy father.' Hord answered, 'I boast not myself so highly, but the money is mine and I will have it'. So saying, he rode thence and told Illugi of Torfi's unfair dealings. Straightway the twain gathered a band of men, and rode to Broadbowstead,

where Torfi dwelt; and Torfi, seeing the host, came forth and said, 'Now see I plainly thou art thy father's son: what I said was but to prove thee. Take thy money, lands, and all; and I give thee to boot sixty head of sheep as seal to the friendship that ought to be between men so near of kin.' Hord took the gift, but, seeing Torfi as he was, loved him but little more for his yielding and his words.

Now among Torfi's men was a yeoman named Aud, whose horses strayed often into Hord's lands, doing great damage. Wherefore one day Hord said to Helgi Sigmundson, 'Go forth and drive away these horses'. Helgi went forth, and found Sigurd, Aud's son, driving the horses home. 'Wherefore art thou so slack in tending thy beasts?' said he. 'Thou and thy father are the pests of the land.' Upon which, Sigurd answering no less fiercely, a quarrel arose, and the end was that Helgi slew Sigurd. Soon thereafter came Hord, and saw what had befallen. 'A knave art thou', he said to Helgi, 'to slay a harmless lad: it were but just if I slew thee in thy turn; yet will I spare thy life. But my mind bodes me that this is the beginning of ill-luck to thee, and that upon me also it will drag the evil that hath been foredoomed.' So

saying, he went not forthwith to tell Aud, but, casting a cloak over the boy, departed homeward.

A little later he went to Aud, and said, 'Sore grief is thy son's death to me, and much against my will it came to pass. Self-doom I give thee: name thy own price for the were-gild; none shall say that I have dealt unfairly with thee.' 'It is too late', said Aud. 'I have been to Torfi, who hath taken up my case, and hath promised to pursue it to the utmost.' Whereat Hord, feeling a sudden rush of wrath, which men deemed to have come from the Weird Sisters, drew his sword and cried, 'This for calling in Torfi against me!' and slew Aud. Nor did he cease therewith, but set fire to his stead and burned it to the ground. And when this was done, the fury ran out of him.

And Torfi, hearing of this, summoned Hord to answer for it at the Althing or Moot of all Iceland. Hord said he would scorn himself to answer Torfi, who had ever been his enemy; but he sent Helgi to Eindridi, asking *him* to take up the case at the Althing. Eindridi replied that he had at that time a case at a smaller Thing, having promised to help Illugi therein; 'But', said he, 'if Hord will come to my stead he shall

not lack for aid from me'. Helgi returned to Hord, and, saying naught of this last offer, told him that Eindridi refused to help him. Thus it was that, when the case came on at the Althing, there was none to speak on Hord's behalf, and he and Helgi were alike outlawed.

When Hord heard the news, he mocked thereat, saying, 'Torfi hath had me outlawed; but what care I?' and, destroying all such property as he could not carry with him, he went over to Geir's house at a place called The Flats. There, having left little spoil for Torfi to take, he fortified The Flats, and lived thenceforward as a freebooter, Geir willingly joining with him. And finding the cattle too few to feed so great a company, Geir and Helgi went forth to a farmstead called Waterhorn, slew the herdsman, and drove off the cattle. Hord liked this ill. 'Ye may rob openly', said he, 'but stealing of this kind must cease.' Yet could he not hinder his men from doing much that he liked as little as this.

The news of this deed at Waterhorn spread far and wide, and made a big stir. But more news soon came. There was a man named Kolgrim, living no great way off; and he asked the Flat-men to play games on the ice at Yuletide. At these games the Flat-men ever got the worse,

but could see no reason therefor, till they thought that Kolgrim had laid an evil charm on their shoes, which were made of ox-hide from stolen cattle. When they told Hord of this, he said, 'Little good are we if we cannot avenge ourselves'; and came himself to the games, and fought so furiously that six of his enemies lay dead on the ice. As for a seventh, whose name was Onund, he was sore wounded, but dragged himself thence: yet, as he came near his house, he said, 'I must sit down and bind my shoe', and sitting down he died straightway. That place was ever after known as Onund's Knoll.

Such things made men resolve to make an end of The Flats and of the outlaws dwelling there, whose numbers increased continually as other outlaws joined them. At the summer Thing men met and planned to destroy them; and Hord, hearing thereof, and knowing that, however long he held out, famine would conquer in the end, bade the men remove to a holm or island in the firth by Dinner Ness. This isle runs sheer down into the sea, and few men were needed to defend it against thousands. Two hundred went with Hord, taking boats from the boat-sheds of any men that lived near by. There they built a great hall on the very

edge of the cliff, and cut underground passages, so that if need were they could escape thereby. They had but one lack—there was no sure supply of water: therefore they built a great tank, and sent men from time to time in a seal-boat to the river mouth to bring fresh water from thence, which they emptied into the tank. And they made laws. All men were to obey first Hord and next Geir. If any were sick, and recovered not within three days, they threw him over the cliff. All men had to swear an oath to keep these laws, and to be faithful unto death. Of these the chief were Thord Kott, Thorgeir Girdlebeard—of him none spake a good word—and Helgi Sigmundson, who was scarce better than Thorgeir. In that fortress were Helga, Hord's wife, who was no whit in endurance behind any of the men, and her two sons Grimkell and Bjorn.

Three years was Hord in that holm, and daily were there battles, and robberies, and evil deeds, in which Thorgeir was the worst: nor could Hord restrain his men from such, though he knew they brought ill-fame upon him. Sometimes the men of Geir's Holm—for so that isle was called—had the better in fight, and sometimes the worse; but all men feared them and

desired their destruction. Of these three years the saga tells many things, which here we pass over and come to the end.

None hated the holm-men more than Ref, the godi or priest, a chief and a great fighter. Ref had a brother called Kjartan, strong of his hands likewise, but not held to be a truth-teller, evil-minded and not greatly beloved. Their mother was a very old woman named Thorbjorg Katla, a witch whose spells were mighty. Katla boasted that by her spells and glamours she was safe from the holm-men, howsoever they might strive to harm her. This boast came to the ears of Geir, and he was minded to put it to the proof; wherefore he set out with Thord Kott and eleven others to the house of Katla. Drawing near thereto, he left two men to guard the boat, and set Thord on a rock to keep watch, while with the others he came toward the house. But Katla, knowing by her arts that a boat had set forth, straightway came to her door and raised such a mist and glamour that no man could see his fellow. Then, sending a messenger to Ref, she waited; and Ref came in haste with fifteen men. They found Thord on the rock, and forthwith slew him, and then turned to the shore where Geir was. Suddenly

the mist lifted, and the bands saw each other, whereon began a fierce fight. All Geir's men were slain, and three of Ref's: as for Geir, he was sore wounded, and had a hard task to reach the holm, where Helga, who knew leechcraft, tended his wounds.

A little later, Hord, deeming that Eindridi had been faithless to him—for he trusted the tale of Helgi—sent men to set fire to Eindridi's house. Small success had the men: yet the chiefs, feeling that an end of these dangers must be made, held a moot to plan the taking of the holm; and one said this and another said that. And as they were thus talking, a woman rode into the moot—even Thorbjorg, the wife of Eindridi and Hord's sister. 'Hearken', said she; 'I know your devisings. As to what may hap to the rest, I care not; but whosoever slays Hord, let him know that I will be his bane!' At this a dead silence fell on the crowd; but at length they said, 'Even so an end must be made of the holm-men, or the land will perish'. And Ref said, 'Force against the holm is vain; fraud must be tried. Let therefore a man go thither, and take the oath as one of them; and when he hath gained their trust let him say that if they scatter and go back to their homes their lives will be

spared.' Torfi deemed this advice good: 'But first', said he, 'let us move to the Ness, out of hearing of any of Hord's men'. Next day they dined at the Ness, wherefore it is called Dinner Ness unto this day. And then they looked round for a man to go. 'Whoso goes', said Torfi, 'shall gain great honour. Moreover, I deem that by now the holm-men, by their evil deeds, have lost their luck, and will not see things as they are.' Then said Kjartan, 'I have my own score to settle with the holm-men, and will go. But if Hord be taken, ye shall give me that treasure of his, the ring of gold which he took from the cairn.' 'So shall it be', said Torfi.

Now there was a man named Thorstein, who had sworn never to harm the holm-men. His boat Kjartan took, and went over therein. The men welcomed him, for Weird had cast a glamour on their minds, and any tale would they believe. Hord alone, who ever saw things as they were, was not deceived. 'But see', said Geir, 'he has come over in Thorstein's boat, and Thorstein has promised never to betray us.' 'Thy eyes are blinded', said Hord; 'an ill man is Kjartan for a friendly errand.' 'I will take thy oath if thou willest', said Kjartan. 'Thy oath is as thy mere word, worthless', said Hord. None the less the

men, who were fey and weary of their narrow life, disobeyed Hord, and would go: nay, he was gladdest who got to the boat first. Kjartan took them round a point that hid them from the view of the holm-men, and here were they all slain. Then Kjartan came back; and now Geir was eager to go, for he too was fey and beglamoured. 'Thou art bewitched', said Hord: 'seest thou not that Kjartan hath returned alone? Had he been true he had brought witnesses of his truth.' But the doom was on Geir, and he went, and many with him. As they came round the point, Geir saw the throng of bonders. 'Ill-luck follows ill-rede', cried he. 'Ever hath Hord seen farther than I', and straightway sprang into the water. But a man named Orm, a friend of Eindridi, who was the best of javelin-throwers, saw him, and forthwith hurled a javelin, which struck Geir and slew him. Men said that was the best throw that had ever been heard of. All the other men were then slain.

Much was Kjartan praised for his craft; and Torfi said, 'Few can be left: wilt thou try yet again?' He answered, 'I will put the knob on the stick', and set forth for the last time.

Now there remained on the holm but Hord, Helga, their two sons, Helgi Sigmundson, and

a few more. And Helga saw the death of Geir from the cliff, and bade Hord look. He looked, and saw naught. 'Never ere this hast thou failed to see things as they are', said Helga; 'I fear doom is on thee.' Then came Kjartan, and Hord said, 'Wherefore came Geir not back with thee?' 'He waiteth to take the peace along with thee', said Kjartan. 'Looks lie if thou speak true', said Hord. 'Then thou art afraid to come', said Kjartan. 'Naught fear I', replied Hord; 'nor wilt thou doubt that ere the day is over.' Then he said to Helga, 'Come thou also'. 'Nay', said she; 'I perceive that thou art fey; and 'tis said that there is no help for a doomed man.' So saying, she wept sore.

Hord stepped into the boat, and said no word till they reached the shore; and there he saw the body of Geir with the javelin right through it, floating on the waters. 'Not long', cried he to Kjartan, 'shalt thou rejoice in thy treachery', and with the old Viking's sword clove him to the waist. But just then the boat ran ashore, and straightway the men seized him, and Eindridi bound him fast, and Helgi with him. 'Fast dost thou bind me', said Hord. 'So did ye hold *me* fast when ye strove to burn me in my house', said Eindridi. 'Will no one slay

him for me?' But all remembered the words of Thorbjorg, and stood still.

Suddenly Hord broke loose, snatched the axe from Eindridi's hand, and rushed through the midst of his foes. Ref pursued him, being on horseback, but he too remembered Thorbjorg, and dared not smite him. And then had Hord escaped his enemies, but the 'war-fetter', that fear which the gods send on the bravest, of a sudden descended on him, and held him fast, so that the men overtook him again, and dragged him back. 'Not ye could hold me', said he; 'but 'tis some evil power that hath come upon me.' With that he leapt forward, and saying that none else should have the glory, slew Helgi with one blow of his sword. And just then came up Thorstein. He, knowing naught of Thorbjorg's words, gave Hord his death-blow.

So died Hord. Men praised him for his courage, and said his ill-deeds were less his own than those of others. 'But there was a doom on him', said they, 'and he was not a lucky man. What is fated none can shun.'

To Thorstein, Torfi would fain have given the great sword; but when Thorstein heard of Thorbjorg's threatening, he would have chosen not to have earned the reward. The chiefs then

planned to go over to the holm for Helga and her sons, meaning to slay the boys; but that night they stayed still, and next day it was too late. For Helga was a paragon among women. She took her younger child Bjorn on her back, and swam with him that night to the mainland. Then, leaving Bjorn, she swam back and carried Grimkell over in like manner. The night they spent in a clift of the rock, which was afterwards called Helga's Clift. Then all three went to Eindridi's house, and called Thorbjorg out. When Thorbjorg came forth, she spake no word, so deeply moved was she. But she put the three in an outhouse, and waited for Eindridi.

When Eindridi returned, she bade him tell her the whole story of Hord's death, and he told her. Then she said, 'Thy wife will I not be, unless thou slay Thorstein'. Little did he like the work, but, forasmuch as he loved her, he did so, and then came back to tell her. 'Fulfilled is my vow', said she, 'that I would be the bane of Hord's slayer; yet remains there another thing.' 'Speak thy mind', said he. 'Even now never will I be thy wife save thou promise to shelter Helga and her two sons, if so be they come to us for help.' 'An easy promise is that', said he, 'for assuredly they are dead. Strictly did we search

the holm, and found them not: wherefore it is our belief that they threw themselves into the sea and perished therein.' Then went Thorbjorg to the outhouse and brought in Helga and the lads. 'Too crafty hast thou been with me', said Eindridi; 'yet will I keep my word to thee.' And so did he, receiving them into his house, and bringing the children up as his own.

Hord was thirty-nine years old when he died. For thirty-six of these he was in honour and good fame, and for three an outlaw. But men deem that few have surpassed him, first because of his wisdom in counsel and skill in fight; secondly because of the noble woman who was his wife; and lastly because of the vengeance that was taken for him after his death.

And here endeth *Holmverja Saga*, or the Story of the Holm-men.

## V

### THE TALE OF GRETTI AND GLAM

[See page 46]

So Gretti rode to Thorhall's stead, and the bonder greeted him well. He asked whither he wished to fare, and Gretti said he willed to abide there overnight, if so it seemed good to the bonder. Thorhall said he would be glad enough therefor: 'But few think it profitable to guest here for long; thou wilt have heard tell what is here to face, nor would I desire that thou shouldst come by any danger through me; and though thou thyself shouldst come off unscathed, yet know I that thou shalt lose thy horse, for none that come here can keep unharmed their goods'. Gretti said there was supply of horses whatever happed to this one. Thorhall rejoiced greatly that Gretti would be there, and welcomed him with both hands. Gretti's horse was tied fast in the stall, and then

went they to sleep; and the night passed in such wise that Glam sought not the house. Then said Thorhall, 'Well hath been thy coming to me, for every night hath Glam been wont to ride the house and break the panels, whereof thou canst see the marks'. Gretti said, 'Two ways may that be taken: either he will not rest for long, or the ridings may cease for more than one night; I will abide here yet another night, and see how it fares'. Afterwards they went to see the horse, and behold, no harm was done to it; and the bonder deemed this even as the rest, such was the luck of Gretti. So Gretti abode another night, and the fiend sought not the house that night either, which seemed to the bonder a sign of hope; but when they went to see the horse, the stall was broken up, and the horse dragged out of door, and every bone in him broken in sunder. This did Thorhall tell to Gretti, and bade him take heed to himself, 'for certain is thy death if thou abide Glam'. But Gretti said, 'It is little indeed to do for my horse, if I abide the fiend'. The bonder said, 'Ay, but small good wilt thou do, for he is not of human shape: yet do I own that every hour seems good to me when thou art here'. So the day goes on; and when men should go to sleep, Gretti said he

would not go out of his clothes, and lay down in front of the bonder's locked chamber. He had a rug over him, and twisted one fold under his feet, and another under his head, and looked out through the neck-hole. In front of the bench on which he lay was the house-pillar, strong and firm, and Gretti set his feet against that pillar. The door was all broken, but in its place was set a hurdle, which men had hastily fashioned for that end; and the cross-wainscot was broken also. All the beds were taken away, and very inhospitable seemed that hall. A light burned therein through the night.

And when a third of the night had almost passed, Gretti heard without a great noise; then was there a sound overhead, and the roof was ridden, and that so violently that every beam cracked. This went on long; and then the steps came down off the roof and came to the door; and as the hurdle was fastened over it, Gretti saw that the fiend put in his head, and it seemed terribly big and wondrously harsh of feature. Glam came in slowly, and stretched himself up when he had entered the door; he loomed up toward the roof, and laid his arms on the cross-beam, and so glared through the hall. Gretti lay still, and stirred no whit. Then

saw Glam that a strange heap was lying on the bench, and he came towards it and seized it; but Gretti set his feet against the pillar and yielded not. So Glam tugged thereat even harder, and yet could he not drag the rug away. Then tugged he a third time; and this time he pulled Gretti from the bench; nay, the rug came in sunder between them. Glam stared at the rent, and wondered much who could be so hard tugging against him; and at that Gretti leapt in under his arms, and grasped him round the waist, and hoped that Glam would give way and fall; but the demon pressed on Gretti's wrist so hard that he was bowed down by the force thereof. And Gretti stayed himself at all the seats, and set his feet against all he could, to hold himself back, and the pillars of the hall started from their sockets, and all that was in their way was broken. Glam strove to drag him from the hall, and Gretti strove to stay within; for hard as it was to hold up within the house, well knew he that it would be harder without; but Glam increased his might, and notwithstanding all Gretti's strength did Glam drag him out of the hall and into the porch; and there he drew him even towards the door. And at the door Gretti suddenly thrust hard against Glam, so that he,

not expecting it, fell backwards, and Gretti fell face downwards upon him. There was a moon that night, and at whiles it shone forth, and at whiles it was covered by the clouds; and when Gretti saw Glam's face his strength left him, so that he could not draw his sword, but lay between this world and the next. And then did Glam show forth his accursed might, more than other aftergangers, in that he spake thus: 'Great daring hast thou shown, Gretti, that thou hast faced me; yet deem it not strange that thou shalt gain little luck thereby. For thou hast yet achieved but half thy full strength, yet shalt thou never be stronger than now; and henceforth all thy luck shall turn to evil: thou shalt be an out-cast and a wanderer, and whenever thou art alone thou shalt see these glaring eyes of mine till loneliness shall be a horror to thee; and this same horror shall drag thee to thy doom.'

And when the demon had thus spoken, the weakness ran off Gretti that had been upon him; then drew he his knife, and hewed the head from Glam and laid it by his thigh. Then came out Thorhall, who had clothed himself while Glam was speaking; but he had dared not to draw nigh till Glam was dead. He thanked Gretti, and praised him much, that he had

vanquished this unclean spirit. Then burned they Glam to cold ashes, and after that they bare the ashes away in a srip and buried them where neither men nor cattle were wont to tread.

Thorhall sent messages to the nearest hamlet, telling what had been done; and that was the saying of all men, that never had there been in the land such a man for strength and daring as Gretti, Asmund's son.

But thenceforward Gretti was never as he had been before; and this was the difference, that whereas of old he feared nothing, now he had become afraid of the dark, so that he never dared to fare alone after night had set in, for he seemed then to see phantoms of every kind.

*(Gretti's Saga.)*

## VI

### THE TALE OF THIDRANDI

Now toward the end of the time when Iceland was yet heathen there came rumours of a greater god than Odin or Thor from over the sea; and some men wondered whether, if that god came, they would worship him or cleave to the old gods. For there were strange whispers that this 'White Christ' was a god that would reward the men who served him. Of such men was Hall of the Side, a just man and a true; and it was deemed that Thorhall of Horgsland, a friend of Hall's, knew more of the coming change than he would say, for he was a great spa-man, and foresighted. Hall and Thorhall loved each other much; and when Hall went to the Thing he would guest at Horgsland, and Thorhall would often stay long whiles at the house of Hall.

The eldest son of Hall of the Side was called Thidrandi: he was the best-loved youth in all Iceland, handsome and kind-hearted, and good

to the poor, and blithe with every bairn he met, so that men's hearts went out to him. Now one summer, when Thidrandi was eighteen years old, it chanced that Thorhall was staying with Hall; and men began, as they oftentimes did, to speak well of Thidrandi and to praise his ways. But Thorhall held his peace, saying neither good nor bad. At last Hall said to him, 'Why art thou so silent about my son Thidrandi, seeing that to me thy words are of more account than all other men's?' Thorhall answered, 'It is not that I mislike aught about him, or that I am slower than other men to see that he is the best of youths: rather is it that I know he will always have many to praise him, but I forebode he may not be long with us, and then, the more men have praised him the sadder wilt thou be'.

And as the Yule-feast drew near, Thorhall waxed more and more sad. 'Wherefore art thou sad?' said Hall. 'I like not this coming feast', said he; 'for I forebode that a spa-man will be slain there.' 'That need not grieve thee', answered Hall. 'I have an ox called Spa-man: him will I slaughter at the feast, and no harm shall befall thee, though thy boding be fulfilled.' 'Not for myself was my fear', said the prophet, 'but for great tidings and strange, which I

foresee, but which I will not tell forth as now.' 'Then shall we put off the feast?' 'Not so; for what must be shall be, let men do as they will.'

And when Yule came there were few men at the feast, for the weather was cold and very wild. And as men sat at the board at even, Thorhall said, 'This is my boding, that it were better for no man to go out this night, whatever happenings he hear outside: let him pay no heed, whoever knocks or cries'. Hall said to his men, 'Hearken to Thorhall, for great things hang upon his words: what he forbids let no man do'. Now Thidrandi was waiting on the guests: he was, as ever, courteous and well-beloved of all. And when night fell, Thidrandi put guests in his own locked bed, and slept outside in the hall. And when men slept, there came a knocking at the door; and all men made as if they heard it not, for the warning of Thorhall was strong upon them. But at the third knock Thidrandi said, 'Great shame it is to us to make as if we slept, and men without on such a night as it is: these are guests my father bade to the feast, who have been lost, and are but just arrived hither'. So he took his sword in his hand, and went out; but he saw no man. So he went a little farther, and heard a sound of riding from the north:

that was a company of nine women, all with drawn swords, and dressed in black garments. Then he heard a sound of riding from the south: that was a company of nine women, all in white garments, and riding on white horses. Then he would have turned back and told his vision; but lo! the black-stoled women came between him and the door, and made at him with their swords; nor was he slack to defend himself.

Now, a long while after, Thorhall awoke, and called Thidrandi; but there was no answer. 'Slow is he to answer', said he: whereupon men rose, and went out. The moon was now bright, and the frost clear, and they found Thidrandi lying sore wounded. So they carried him in; and when they had speech with him, he told them all even as it had happened. At daybreak he died, and they laid him in a howe after the old heathen fashion. And they made inquisition to find who had slain him; but no man knew of any enemy of Thidrandi's; as indeed all men loved him. Then Hall spoke to Thorhall, 'What deemest thou of this strange deed?' said he. 'I know not', answered he; 'but this is my guess thereat: those women will be none other than the fetches of your friends, and the goddesses ye worship. Not long hence will be a change of

faith in this land, and better gods will come to drive out the old; and thou, Hall, shalt take to these new gods: wherefore these have come to take toll of thee beforehand, in revenge for what thou shalt do to them. And those in white were the better ones, that strove to help Thidrandi; but so it was not to be.'

Hall liked so ill the death of his son that he bore not to stay at his old home, and moved thence to the place that was afterwards called Baptism River. And there also Thorhall visited him; and one morning, as he looked out of the window, Hall saw him smile. 'Why smilest thou?' said Hall. 'Therefore I smile', said he, 'because I saw every howe and cairn opened, and all the ghosts, and Dises, and fetches, both small and great, passing away, and making Flitting-day.' And soon after came great tidings, as we shall now tell.

For even then King Olaf of Norway was sending out Thangbrand to teach the new faith in Iceland. And Thangbrand came to Side on Michael's Day, and did the service for St. Michael. 'For whom doest thou these strange things?' said Hall. 'For Michael the Archangel', said Thangbrand. 'And what is his power?' asked Hall. 'It is to meet the souls of the dead,

and take them to their appointed place.' 'If *his* power be so great', said Hall, 'then great indeed must be the might of him who gave him the power', said Hall. 'God hath put that thought in thy mind', said Thangbrand; and he went on and told the story of the White Christ, and of his birth and death and rising again. And Hall and all his house believed the story, and were baptized by Thangbrand in Baptism River, which keeps that name unto this day. And so the boding of Thorhall was fulfilled; for a better race of gods had come to Iceland.

(*Thidranda Tháttr*—a short story inserted, perhaps from the lost *Hall's Saga*, in *Olaf's Saga Tryggvasonar*.)

## VII

### THE TALE OF HALLBJORN HALI

THERE was, in Iceland, a skald or poet called Thorleif, skilled in all drapas and visas, and knowing all kennings and metres: he was renowned far and wide in that country. When he died, men laid him in a howe. And not far from that howe dwelt a bonder named Thorkell, gentle of disposition, and wealthy, but not of great rank or honour. His shepherd was a lad called Hallbjorn, whose eke-name was Hali. And Hali had keen desire to make a praise-song on the poet of the howe, and oftentimes, when by the howe, tried to make that song. But forasmuch as he was no skald, and knew not the devices and ornaments of song, he got not the poem made; and could attain no further than these words, 'Here lies the man'.

Now it was that one night he was lying, as often, by the howe, and striving zealously to achieve that lay of praise to the howe-dweller,

but as ever he succeeded not. Then at last he fell asleep; and in his sleep he seemed to see that the howe opened and a man came forth, great and tall, and well set up. He came up the hill to Hallbjorn, and said to him, 'Here liest thou, Hallbjorn Hali, and eager art thou to do that which thou art not by fate gifted to do, namely, to make a song of praise to me. And the choice lieth thus: either thou wilt attain the gift, and that in higher measure than most other men—and this is the more likely chance—or else thou shalt fail, and then needest thou no more strive to attain the gift. I will speak in thy ears a visa; and, if so be thou rememberest that visa and hast it in mind when thou wakest, then wilt thou be a skald, widely renowned throughout the land, and sing the praises of many chiefs; and great shall be thy gain therefrom.' Therewith he came yet nearer, and drew out the lad's tongue, and spake this visa:

'Here lies the man; since time began the best of poets he:  
Whene'er he sang the rafters rang with merriment and  
glee.'

'Now', said he, 'must thou learn the art of poetry, to make a due praise-song on me when thou wakest, and it must be well wrought, with

the right words and metre, and specially with kennings.' Then he turned toward the howe, and entered therein, and closed it behind him; but Hallbjorn woke, and seemed to see his shoulders as he vanished.

But he remembered the visa; and after a while went home with his sheep, and told men what had happened to him. And afterwards he made the praise-song on the howe-dweller, and went far and wide through the land, singing songs about many chiefs, and gaining great glory and good gifts from the chiefs for his songs, so that he became a man of wealth. And of him many things are told, both in Iceland and abroad, though they be not here written.

*(Flatey-Book.)*

Compare Bede's story of Caedmon. An Icelandic court-poem is a series of periphrases, called 'kennings': *e.g.* 'bone-gnat' for sword; 'hair of earth' for grass; 'ring-giver' for king, etc. The best parallels for the English reader may be found in the last chapter of Ecclesiastes.

## VIII

### THE TALE OF BJARNI

IN the days when Ethelred the Redeless was king in England, a certain Icelander, named Eric the Red, was living in Greenland; and his men used to sail from thence hither and thither over the seas. And at one time there came home his son, a captain, named Leif, whom men called 'the Happy', and Leif said he had sighted a fair land to the west; which, indeed, was no other than the land men now call New England.

When Eric heard this, he sent out a man called Thorfinn Karlsefni to spy out more news concerning that country. And Karlsefni went forth, and found the land good; and his men lived there three years. With Karlsefni there was a man called Bjarni, Grimolf's son, brave and noble.

Now after the three years, Karlsefni and his men set sail again for Greenland; and it was so that the ship of Bjarni, going too far east, was

sundered from the others, and fell into that sea which men call the 'Maggot Sea'; for there swarms that maggot or teredo which bores through the planks of ships. And Bjarni found that his ship was bored through by this pest; nor was there chance of keeping her afloat. But they had a boat which was smeared with seal-tar, which same seal-tar men say the maggot will not touch. So they launched that boat; but she would hold only half the ship's men. Then said Bjarni, 'As this is a thing of life and death, it shall not be settled by rank or nobleness. We will draw lots to see whom the gods will to die and whom to live.' And as it chanced, the lot fell on Bjarni himself to leave the ship: whereon he entered the boat with all the others to whom the same lot had chanced.

Now on the ship was a young man who was Bjarni's companion. Their fathers had sworn that they should never part, whatever betide, and the young men had never been parted till now. But now the lot willed that this young man should stay in the ship and perish, while Bjarni should go in the boat and live. And so, as the boat was about to draw aside, he leant over the ship's side and said:

'Bjarni, wilt thou leave me?'

‘So it is fated’, said Bjarni; ‘it is not by my will.’

‘Then what becomes of our oaths and of our friendship? Is there no other way?’

‘No other way, since the gods will have it so.’

Then the young man wept, for he feared death; and he said, ‘Yea, there is another way: let us change places, and come thou into the ship while I come into the boat’.

‘Is it so’, said Bjarni, ‘that so great a dread of death is on thee? If it be so, and thou hast such desire to live, let us even change places as thou wilt.’

And with that he climbed up into the ship, and the young man down into the boat. And this is the story that men tell, that Bjarni went down there in the Maggot Sea and all the men who were with him. But the boat, and those that were therein, went on their way till they made land, and there they told this tale, which shall not be forgotten while the world lasts.

(From *Eirik's Saga Rauda*.)

## IX

### THE TALE OF LODIN

TOSTI, the brother of Harold Godwin's son, was of an evil heart, and tyrannous; and, being Earl of Northumberland, did sorely oppress the people. And when he added to his oppressions this also, that he slew Orm Gamal's son, the same who built that church at Kirkby which standeth till this day, the men of Northumberland appealed unto Harold. And Harold, being a just man, finding the charges true, spared him not for that he was his brother, but bade him depart out of the realm. And Tosti, being angry, went first to Earl Baldwin of Flanders, and asked him for help against Harold, which Baldwin denied him. Then went he to King Harald Sigurd's son of Norway, whom men called Hardrada or the Stubborn-counselled. And King Harald, not for love of Tosti, but for desire of war and glory, granted to go with him and strive to win back his earldom for him.

And he gathered three hundred ships for that war; but the wind was contrary, and sorely did Harald chafe thereat.

Now as he lay in Solund, there sailed into the bay from the North Sea a Greenland ship; and the captain of that ship was a man called Lodin, whose eke-name was Corpse: for he had brought from Greenland the corpse of Finn Fain, the nephew of King Olaf the Holy, King Olaf so bidding him. That ship was all seared and charred, and men wondered at the sight. Then the crew put off from her in a boat, and came to King Harald's ship; and Lodin saluted the king. Then said the king, 'Have ye any tidings to tell of your voyage?' 'Naught new, O king', said Lodin; whereupon his men rowed the boat away. Then said the king, 'Thy men deem not that thou tellest true: say thy tale now they are gone. How long were ye on the voyage?' 'Seven nights', said Lodin. 'Tell thy hap', said the king. Then said Lodin, 'We sailed two nights away from the land; then saw we a fire burning, stretching so far north and south that no end on either side could we see: it was as blue as flame, and though we had the fairest wind, yet could we in nowise sail by it: wherefore at last it was my counsel to sail straight for

that place where the fire blazed least. Sorely did we feel the heat, and the spars and sheets, as thou seest, were scorched thereby. And this seemeth to me a great sign, O king.'

'Speak further', said Harald.

'We went three half-days, and a rack of clouds came upon our ship, causing a darkness so thick that we could not see our hands before our eyes. And then there came a mighty crash, and the cloud was rent a-twain, and straightway there fell upon our ship a rain of blood, as a waterfall, so huge was it; and I made my men set buckets thereunder, but not so but the decks were all spattered therewith; and that blood can still be seen on the deck, but cold and clotted, whereas when it fell it was warm. And that too, O king, seemeth to me to bode great things.'

'Speak further', said King Harald.

'We sailed yet other three half-days, and we heard a roaring in the air; and looking upward we saw many birds flying, small and great, their names I knew in Norway. With high glee did they give forth their voice. Three hours they took in passing, none coming back, so that we saw not the sky because of them. Then we sailed two days more, and made land yester-even. And lo, we saw the same birds, yet not the same, for

there were none great among them, but the small only, and those small were as it were sorrowful, and flew by in silence. And when they reached the shore, they scattered, each one to its place. And that seemeth to me a great sign: nor have I more to tell thee.'

Then said the king, 'So it was this thou didst desire to keep secret from me when thou saidst thou hadst seen nothing?'

'Ay, my lord, for meseems these things are no wonder when thou art going on this expedition from this land.'

'Wherefore?' said Harald.

'Because', answered Lodin, 'assuredly thou wilt not return; and, ere such mighty men fall, 'tis to be expected that great tokens will be seen; and such tokens have I seen.'

'Wilt thou go with me?' said the king.

'If so thou willest; but in anywise I will seek the bodies of those that die.'

'More need have I of men while I live than after death', said the king: 'yet would I rather have thee with me, insomuch as thou sayest thou knowest all our farings.' Then said he to Tosti, 'What thinkest thou of these tokens?' Tosti answered, 'It were indeed a token had it happened to a truthful man'.

Lodin replied, 'It were worth much, Tosti, if thou shouldst lie no more between land and land than I'. And the king gave Lodin leave to go.

And, paying no heed to all these wonders, the king, and Tosti, and all his host sailed for England, and landed at Scarborough. And, first meeting with Edwin and Morcar, they gained the day; but then came Harold of England, and fought them at Stamford Bridge. There was King Harald Sigurd's son slain, and Tosti, and Eystein Orri, and all other of the great chiefs; and but few of the lesser men made their way back to Norway, silent and sorrowing. They came in three hundred ships, and returned in twenty-four. And thus were fulfilled the omens that Lodin had beheld; for it is vain to speak words of warning in the ears of a fey man.

*(Heming's Tháttr or Short Story.)*

[Of Heming it is said, that having contests with King Harald, he won all; wherefore the king bade him shoot a nut off the head of his brother Bjorn. And Heming cleft the nut without harming his brother; but he went and joined himself to Harold of England. And in the battle of Stamford Bridge it was his arrow that smote King Harald.]

## X

### BRAND THE GENEROUS

ONE summer there came out from Iceland to Norway a man named Brand, the son of Wer-mund. He was always called Brand the Open-handed, and well he deserved the name, for he was always giving. Now, at the time he came to Norway, King Harald Hardrada was in Dron-theim, and staying with the king was a man named Thjodolf, a friend of Brand's; and Thjodolf spoke many things of the open-handedness of Brand, so much so that the king smiled and scarce believed the half of what he said.

At last the king said, 'Well, Brand is now in Norway: we will test whether he is as generous as thou sayest. Go to him, and bid him give me the cloak he is wearing.'

Thjodolf went straightway, and found Brand in a little house, measuring linen. He was in a scarlet kirtle, and over the kirtle was a scarlet cloak, which he had thrown loose over his

shoulder while he measured the linen; and hanging to his wrist was a gold-handled axe.

‘The king wishes to have thy scarlet cloak’, said Thjodolf.

Brand answered him not a word, but let the cloak slip from his shoulders and went on with his work. Thjodolf took it up and went back to the king.

‘How did it fare with thee?’ said Harald.

‘Brand spake no word’, answered Thjodolf. Moreover, he told all about Brand’s behaviour and about the axe with the gold handle.

Harald answered, ‘Truly is he an open-handed man; yet meseems he has no small pride about him, forasmuch as he spake no word. Go back to him, and tell him I would have his axe with the gold handle.’

‘I like not to go on such an errand. It may be he will deem I am jesting with him, to ask his weapon.’

‘Nevertheless’, said Harald, ‘thou shalt go, or else what must I deem of all thy boasting of his open-handedness? I shall hold him no generous man if he withholds the axe.’

So Thjodolf went and asked for the axe.

Again Brand spake no word, but in silence gave him what he asked.

Thjodolf departed, and told the king even as it had fared with him.

The king answered: 'Now begin I indeed to fancy he is more generous than other men; yet will we test him yet again. Go and ask him for his scarlet kirtle.'

'I like not to go on such an errand; he will surely, this time, take me for an ill-timed jester.'

'Nevertheless thou shalt go', said Harald.

So Thjodolf went the third time.

'The king wishes yet another gift, thy scarlet kirtle', said he.

Again Brand spake no word; but he stepped out of the kirtle, cut one sleeve from it, and kept the same: the rest he gave to Thjodolf, who fared therewith to the king.

'Now', said Harald, when he saw the gift, 'now see I indeed that Brand is not only generous but high-minded also. Well do I see his riddle; he meaneth that I am a man with but one hand, even the hand that takes ever and not the hand that gives. Go now yet again to him, and bid him follow thee to me.'

And so was done. Brand followed Thjodolf to the king, who smiled at him and said, 'Thou

shalt see that I have the other hand also; I will give thee precious gifts and great honour'.

And Brand abode in the king's court, and well did men see that the king held him in high esteem.

(From *Harald's Saga Hardrada.*)

## XI

### THE BURNING AT FLUGUMYRI

EARL GIZUR had made many enemies, and they had sworn his death. On October 22, 1253, he was holding the marriage-feast for the marriage between his son Hall and Ingibjorg, the daughter of Sturla the historian, who himself tells the tale. Sturla had ridden away but twenty-four hours previously. The narrative is thus practically that of an eye-witness, for Sturla heard it all from Gizur himself. The tragedy is one of the most awful in the whole tragic history of Iceland. It was shortly afterwards terribly avenged.

[There being two Gizurs mentioned, I have called the hero of the story the Earl, though he did not become actually an earl till some years later].

And when they came to Seljungsstead, Eyjolf said to his whole company that it was his intent to go to Flugumyri with all his force, and to seek Gizur with sword or with fire, if he could not

find him otherwise. Many were the men there to whom either course seemed ill, to go on or to turn back; yet none turned back of all that had come thus far. Now took they to hard riding, for the country is there easy to ride upon. Men have spoken afterwards, telling how swiftly they rode. They came out about Deepdale River, and rode then the higher way of the fell above Byggghol; and at last they came over the fell, and drew up in the garth at Flugumyri. There they leapt off their horses' backs, and tied them up, and went very silently up to the house. There were two men in the 'town', Markus and Beini. Markus ran straightway out of the place, when he spied there were enemies about, and stayed not till he came to the church at Cross-water; there he told men what was a-doing. Beini ran with all his might into the hall, and bade men wake, 'for foes were come'. At that there was a great hurrying to and fro; and those men that tried to get out at doors were hewn down.

Now Gizur and Groa his wife lay in the room near the quarters of the women, and Hall his son and Hall's bride, Ingibjorg, lay in the room next theirs. Then when the alarm came, Gizur ran into Hall's room and bade them rise: then he put on his helm and his byrnie, and Groa

brought him his sword 'Byrnie-biter'. Hall also took his weapons, and bade men quit themselves well. And so they did; nay, even John the priest, though unarmed, fought bravely, and urged on other men to do gallant deeds; and little advance did the foe make, either upon Hall's men at one door or upon Gizur's at another. It was a hard battle and a stern one: men fought most part of the night, and it was easy to see how the fire flashed from the weapons when they met; and Thorstein Gudmundson said afterwards, that surely never was there such defence as there: for they thrust with swords, and smote with axes, and broke the points off hooks in the women's chamber, and fought therewith. Eyjolf's men taunted Gizur with every kind of insult, that they might know where he was; but he never answered a word; but once he came very near to killing Eyjolf.

And at last, when Eyjolf saw that he and his men prevailed not, and feared that the men of the places around would come to help Gizur, then he bade his men set fire to the house. John of Bank, one of his followers, had store of tar with him: they took sheepskins off the frames whereon they were stretched to dry, and carried lighted tar in them; some men took hay and laid

it at the doors and set fire to it. Straightway was there a great and choking smoke in the house. Gizur and Groa laid themselves down with their faces close to the floor to breathe, and a man, named Thorbjorn Nef, lay likewise facing him. Then Gizur began to pray, and Thorbjorn thought he had never heard such words nor so earnest a prayer, though he could scarce part his lips for the smoke and reek. And after that Gizur stood up, Groa supporting him, and went to the southern door; and then was he sore put to it for the smoke and heat, and he deemed it better to look out than to be stifled in the house. Now his namesake, Gizur the Glad, was standing just outside the door, and talking with Kolbein Beard, the greatest champion in Eyjolf's company. Kolbein offered Gizur the Glad peace; for they had before this agreed that each should yield the other peace if need were and power was. Earl Gizur stood just behind his namesake while they talked; and cooled himself a little. And Gizur the Glad said, 'I choose me a man to have peace along with me'. 'Any thou wilt', said Kolbein, 'save Earl Gizur and his sons.' At that moment there came to Groa Ingibjorg the little bride, Sturla's daughter: she was barefooted and in her night-dress. She was but thir-

teen years old, but tall for her years and fair to look upon. She had round her her silver belt, and a pouch hanging to it, with much money in it. Groa was very glad to see her, and said, 'One fate shall overtake us both'. And when Gizur had cooled himself a little, he did not feel so ready to rush out; but he expected death for himself and life for Groa; therefore he gave to her two gold rings from his pouch—one his uncle, Bishop Magnus, had owned, and the other his father, Thorvald. 'Take these', said he, 'for it is my will, if thou livest, that my friends should have them.' He looked in his wife's face, and saw therein that the parting was very grievous to her. And after that he went back into the house, and with him Gudmund the Haughty, who would never leave him. They came first to a small postern door, and listened; but they heard the talk of men and their curses without, so they turned back.

Now to tell of Groa and Ingibjorg: Groa bade Ingibjorg go out; and Kolbein Beard heard the words, and told her to come out to him. 'Not unless I can choose a man to go with me', said she. 'That cannot be', said Kolbein. 'Go out', said Groa. 'But I must look for little Thorlak', said she (Thorlak was her sister's son,

aged ten years; now he had run out already, and was at the church). But Kolbein rushed into the fire and seized Ingibjorg, and carried her also to the church. As for Groa, it is said that Thorstein the Noisy thrust her into the fire. Gizur's son Hall, and Arni the Bitter, his attendant, came a little later to the southern door, but they were both nigh overcome by the flames, for the fire had now become very fierce. Hall ran out first, and a man named Einar hewed at him as he came, and gave him a mortal wound. When Einar and his men had left him, a certain monk spread a sheepskin under Hall, and drew him to the church; but the cold came into his wounds. Arni leapt out next, and fell as he came out. 'Who are you', said they, 'that comest so furiously?' 'I am Arni the Bitter', said he; 'nor do I ask peace; for I see that Hall is lying in front of me, and I wish no other fate than his.' Now Arni, some years before, had been the death of Snorri Sturluson: wherefore Kolbein said now, 'Is there no one who remembers Snorri?' Whereupon many men smote at him, and so he got his death. And by now the whole house was in flames, save the kitchen and the dairy.

Now to tell of Earl Gizur: he came to the

dairy, and with him his kinsman Gudmund. 'Leave me now', said Gizur, 'there may be some way of escape for one, if it be so fated, but scarce for two.' At this came up John the priest, and bade them both come with him; so Gudmund went with him out of the south door, and men gave them both peace. As for Gizur, he took off his byrnie and his helmet, but he kept his sword in his hand; and then he went into the byre, and saw there a tub of sour milk standing, and he tried it with his sword, and the whey came right up to the hilt. The tub was sunk in the ground, and the whey nearly covered it. But there was room enough left, so that Gizur got into the tub, and sat down in it as he was, in his linen clothes, and the whey came up to his breast. It was deadly cold in the tub, but he stayed there. He had not been there long, when he heard men's voices, and they were saying how they would deal with him if they caught him: there would be no hurry as to killing him, but three men would each give him blows, and see how he bore it. A moment later, they came into the byre with a light, and looked around. They came to the vat in which he was, and three or four times did they thrust into it with their spears. Some said there was something

there, and some said not. Gizur kept off the spears from him with his hands, but gently, so that they should notice as little as possible. He was scratched on his hands and all down his body to the knees; those wounds were not great, but they were many. He said afterwards, that when he first came into the byre he shuddered with cold, but when the men came in he did not shudder at all. They came in twice, and twice they looked about, but found him not: then they went out and departed for their homes.

*(Sturlunga Saga.)*

## XII

### THE STORY OF VIGLUND

IN the days of Harald Fairhair there was a great chief in Norway named Thorir: he was married to a noble woman, and had a daughter named Olof. Olof, even when very young, was a paragon among maidens, and skilled in all womanly arts; wherefore her name was lengthened, and she was called Olof the Star. Thorir loved her much, and would suffer no man to talk with her; and he built her a beautiful bower, roofed with lead and girded around with railings of iron. And when she grew in years, many men, rich and great, sought her hand; but Thorir would give her to none of them, nor did she desire to look on them. So went the days by.

Now the story takes in other names. There was a man named Ketill, who ruled in Raumarik; a great man, wise, and with many friends: his wife Ingibjorg was of high descent, and their two sons, Gunnlaug and Sigurd, were

nobly taught in all that should become men: they rode out often to shoot deer or birds, and excelled in all sports. Ketill was a great holmgang-man: he had been in twentyduels, and had had the victory in all; moreover, he was so persuasive of tongue that, when men heard him speak, they ever deemed that things were as he said. King Harald loved Ketill much.

Now it so happened that Harald made ready his ships to sail south, and took with him Ketill's sons; but Ketill himself abode at home, for he was now somewhat stricken in years. So the king sailed, and came to Rogaland, where was a jarl that ruled in the land, Eric by name, a mighty chief, and well-dealing with his friends. When Eric saw the king, he gave him good welcome, and brought him to his house with songs and much joy. And the king was pleased thereat, for the jarl spared naught to make him blithe: good drink was brought forth, and the men were soon drunken. And after fair harping, the jarl took the king to show him all his estate. In an orchard was there a grove, where sat three boys playing at tables; all three were handsome, but one passed the others. And afterwards they took to wrestling, and that one was a match for the other two. So the king asked

their names, and Eric said, 'Sigmund and Helgi, and Thorgrim is the third; he is not of the same mother as they'. Then the king, seeing how strong and handsome Thorgrim was, took him to himself, and made him his henchman. And as time went by, the king laid great honour on Thorgrim, so much so that his name was lengthened, and he was called Thorgrim the Proud. And as the days went by, Jarl Thorir came to the king's court, and with him Olof Star; and Thorgrim cast eyes on her and loved her, nor did Olof disdain his love. But, even at that time died Ingibjorg, the wife of Ketill; and Ketill asked of Thorir his daughter Olof to wife. Now, as Ketill was a great chief, and King Harald urged the suit, Thorir agreed thereto; but men say that Olof would have chosen rather to take Thorgrim; but it was not so to be. So the bride-feast was fixed for the next Yule, at the house of Jarl Thorir.

Now Thorgrim was out harrying that summer; and when he returned, he heard that Olof was betrothed to Ketill; whereat enraged he went to King Harald, and asked that he would help him against Ketill. 'Not so', said the king, 'for Ketill is my friend.' 'But Olof and I have plighted troth; nor will I break my word with

her; and if thou, O king, wilt not help me, then will I no longer be thy henchman.' 'Do as thou wilt', said the king; 'but I deem thou wilt nowhere find greater honour than with me.' So Thorgrim took leave of the king, and went alone till he came to the house of Jarl Thorir. And when he came there, he found the house all made ready for the marriage-feast: bright lights in the hall, and the finest entertainment, and Ketill the bridegroom there also. Thorgrim came forward, and said, 'Hast thou, Ketill, chosen to wed Olof?' Ketill said that it was even so. 'And did she give thee her consent?' said Thorgrim. 'I deemed', said Ketill, 'that Jarl Thorir could dispose of his own daughter, and that a bargain would hold that was made with him.' 'This say I', replied Thorgrim, 'that Olof and I have plighted troth, and she hath promised to have no man but me; or is that so, Olof?' And Olof said it was even so. 'Then must I have her', said Thorgrim. 'Her shalt thou never have', cried Ketill; 'and I have had dealings with greater men than thou art, and come not off worse than they.' At that suddenly all the lights went out, and there was great confusion in the hall; and when the lights were brought in, then was Olof vanished, and Thorgrim like-

wise. Then men seemed to know that he had done this, and so it was, for he had bidden his men put out the lights, and he had carried Olof to his ship. Men thought that Ketill had taken great shame from this, and the king made Thorgrim an outlaw for what he had done.

Now that was the 'landnam-tide' in Iceland, when men were taking land there, and Thorgrim came to Iceland, to Snowfellsness. There dwelt a man named Holmkell, a kindly man, whose wife was Thorbjorg, a harsh woman. Their sons were Jokull and Einar. Now Thorgrim bought land close by Holmkell's stead, and great friendship grew up between them two. In Iceland Thorgrim made the wedding-feast for Olof; and there, a year later, was born their first-born son, whom they called Trausti. A year later was born their second, Viglund; and it happened that in the same year was born a maid-child to Holmkell and Thorbjorg, whom they named Ketilrid: and it was said there was no fairer pair in all these parts than Viglund and Ketilrid. Now Thorgrim spared no trouble to teach his sons manly deeds; but Thorbjorg loved not her daughter Ketilrid, and would teach her none of the arts of ladies. Wherefore it came about that Holmkell gave Ketilrid to Thorgrim to foster;

and so she and Viglund grew up together. Olof had a third child, a daughter Helga; and so it was, that in all games they played, Viglund and Ketilrid were on one side, and Trausti and Helga on the other. And some men say that Viglund bound himself by oath to Ketilrid; but others say that she would none of that for fear of her mother, yet told him that she would choose him rather than any man.

Now is it to be told that Jokull and Einar took after their mother, and behaved themselves unwisely in that country: Holmkell liked their ways ill, but they heeded not his advice, and rather did worse the more he warned them. They had a fighting-horse, brown of colour, very wild and fierce, whose teeth were sharp and terrible, like the teeth of no other horse. Viglund had also a horse, tawny in colour, the best and fairest in that neighbourhood; and of these horses there will be a story later.

Now one day Einar came to his mother, and said, 'Ill seems it to me that Thorgrim the Proud has such renown in these parts: methinks if I might deal an insult to Olof Star, that might minish his pride much; or, if he sought vengeance therefor, it is not certain that he would come out higher than I'. She said that that was

well said, and was even as she would have desired. So one day, when Thorgrim was not at home, Einar and his brother Jokull rode to Thorgrim's stead. But Olof's handmaid spied them coming, and deemed from their looks that they were after no good; so she told Olof. And Olof said, 'Take my mantle, and wrap thyself therein, and sit at the high-seat, so that they may think that thou art I; and I will see that no harm befalls thee'. So the handmaid did; and when the young men came to the door, another servant told them that Olof was at the high-seat. So they went thither, and thought it was really Olof, and talked with her. Suddenly in rushed a man with a drawn sword: he was not tall, but very furious. 'Hence', said he, 'and greet Thorgrim the Proud; for he is riding into the garth!' They sprang up and looked, and beheld Thorgrim with a throng of men: whereupon they leapt on horseback and rode for their lives. But soon it was spread abroad that the man with the sword was Olof herself: wherefore the young men got nothing but shame and laughter from that journey. Thorgrim said to Olof, 'Forasmuch as they did not get their end, and for the love I bear to their father Holmkell, I will seek no vengeance as at this time'.

Now another day also Jokull and Einar rode to Thorgrim's stead; and Jokull asked Viglund whether he would give him the tawny horse. 'Not so', said Viglund. 'Then will you match him against my brown?' said Jokull. 'That may be', said Viglund. 'I deem the horse then better than given', said Jokull. 'Things do not always go as one deems', answered Viglund; and then they appointed a time for the horse-fight. When the time came, the brown horse was brought out, and it took both brothers to hold him, so terribly did he behave. Next came out Viglund's horse; and scarce had he seen the brown when he rushed at him, and smote him so hard with his forefeet that he dashed out all his dreadful fighting-teeth; nor was it long before he dealt so rudely with him that the brown fell down dead. At this Jokull and Einar were so angry that they took their weapons and attacked Viglund; nor did they cease till Thorgrim and Holmkell came up and parted them; but even so one man had fallen of Viglund's company and two of Jokull's. Holmkell and Thorgrim still kept their friendship; and when Holmkell heard of the love between Viglund and Ketilrid he rejoiced thereat, but to his wife Thorbjorg and her sons it was a bitterness. Soon was it said

abroad that no pair were the equals of Viglund and Ketilrid in all that might become man and maid.

It is told that one night Jokull and Einar stole out to Thorgrim's stead, and came to the pasture where was the tawny horse, and tried to drive him and the other horses home. But that could not be, for he resisted bravely; and at last they grew so angry that they sought at him with their weapons and tried to kill him. Even so it was long ere they attained their end, for he fought long with hoofs and teeth; yet at last they brought it to this, that they slew him with spear-thrusts. And then they feared to drive the other horses home, for they saw that men would know they had slain him; therefore they dragged him over a cliff, trusting that it would be thought he had fallen over and so killed himself. Then they went home. Their mother knew all they had done, and in truth urged them on to it.

Now when Viglund and Trausti came to the stables, they missed their horse, and found him under the cliff; but such were his wounds, they saw he had been slain, and they seemed to know who had done it. But when they told Thorgrim, he said, 'Keep yet the peace; if it so goes as I

expect, they will do some other thing that will entangle them'. And so it was: for not long after, the oxen of Thorgrim were lost, and men said that Holmkell's sons had done that also. And when Holmkell heard that said, and further found out that it was even so, he took his horse and rode to Thorgrim's house, and told him that he deemed his sons had done Thorgrim that scathe. 'Wherefore', said he, 'I leave thee to put thy loss at what sum thou wilt, and I will pay it.' So Thorgrim put it at the sum he thought just and fair; and he and Holmkell parted with great friendship.

There was a woman named Kjolvor, who dwelt at Hraunskarth: she was a great witch, in every way ill-thought of and unholy in her dealings, a great friend of Thorbjorg. Now Thorbjorg and her sons offered her a hundred in silver to do some harm to Viglund and Trausti as she saw best chance so to do; for they had great envy of those brothers, and, moreover, they had heard of the love between Viglund and Ketilrid. And indeed Viglund and Ketilrid loved each other dearly; for it is the nature of love to burn more brightly the more men try to check it or wish it harm; and so they continued loving till death. Now Kjolvor knew that one day Viglund and

Trausti were out fishing with a man named Bjorn: whereupon she went into her house and, by her enchantments, made bad weather come up over the sea. When Viglund saw it coming, he said, 'That seems best to me, that we fare home'. But Bjorn was so great a seaman that he deemed no weather too bad to sail in; so he said, 'We will not fare home till we have loaded the ship with fish'. And Viglund said he should be the master. Then came the bad weather—wind, frost, storm, and hail; and Bjorn said, 'Now will we turn home'. 'It had been better earlier', said Viglund, 'yet will we say naught of that.' Trausti and Bjorn rowed, but made no way, and the ship began to fill under them. Then Viglund took the oars and bade Bjorn bale and Trausti steer; and so mightily did he row that they made land at Dinner Ness. Next day they fared home, and Ketilrid rejoiced much to see them, for she had thought them dead.

Now the story returns to Ketill in Norway: he took ill the loss of Olof Star, and wished for vengeance; but he grew old and could not take it himself. His sons Sigurd and Gunnlaug grew into mighty men, and his daughter Ingibjorg was the fairest of women. Now a certain man of the Vik sought Ingibjorg to wife: his name was

Hakon; he was rich in money and strong of his hands. Ketill said to him, 'I give thee my daughter on this condition, that thou go first to Iceland and kill Thorgrim'. So Hakon set sail; and when he reached Iceland, Jokull and Einar met him, and Hakon told them his errand. At that they rejoiced greatly, and promised him, if he killed Thorgrim, that he should have Ketilrid to wife. Then they took him to their home, where Thorbjorg gave him good welcome, but Holmkell liked things little.

Now after a time Hakon asked these brothers where the fair woman was that they had promised to give him to wife, 'For I would fain see her'. They said she was out fostering with Olof the Star. Then Hakon asked that she might be fetched home: 'And with your help I doubt not then that she will take me to husband'. A little later Thorbjorg said to Holmkell, 'That will I, that Ketilrid should come home to us'. 'It seems to me', said he, 'that she is better where she is.' 'Not so', said Thorbjorg; 'I would rather seek her myself than that she should wed Viglund; it is my wish that she marry Hakon.' Now Holmkell thought it better to seek her himself than that Thorbjorg should go: wherefore he set out. And when Viglund saw him coming,

he said to Ketilrid, 'Here is thy father; methinks I know that he desires to flit thee home; but I bid thee remember all our speech together, and what we have plighted'. Ketilrid answered, and wept much: 'Long have I thought that we should not be able to be together: almost I think it better we had said naught to each other; and it is not clear that thou lovest me more than I thee, though I say less thereof than thou. Now I see that all this is my mother's doing; I have had little love from her this long time, and likely it is that our days of joy are over if she has her way. Now either shall we see each other no more, or my father's wish will prevail; and that is not likely, for it is hard for him to strive against my mother and my brothers, and they are all set against my will.' Then Viglund kissed Ketilrid, and it was easy to see that parting was a grief to them both.

Now when Holmkell came, Ketilrid told him that he should rule in this matter; and together they rode home; but all in Thorgrim's house were sad to lose her, for she was gracious to every man. And at home, despite her mother, she would have none of Hakon; and her father Holmkell aided her therein; and so many days passed in which she said no word to Hakon.

Now about this time there were games at a place called Esjutarn; and Holmkell's sons came to the sport with Ketilrid; Thorgrim's sons also came. Ketilrid rejoiced to see them, and talked long with Viglund. Then she said, 'I will lengthen thy name, and call thee Viglund the Fair; and I give thee this ring as a christening-gift'. And Viglund gave her a ring in return. Now this came to the ears of Jokull and Einar, and they liked it ill: so Thorbjorg saw to it that she went not out alone again.

In those games Viglund and Jokull came against each other in the ball-game, and Viglund threw the ball further than Jokull. At this Jokull was wroth, and hurled the ball in Viglund's face, so that the skin of his forehead was all torn. Trausti bound it up with a piece of his dress; and when that was done, Jokull and Einar had gone off home. So Trausti and Viglund went to their house, and when Thorgrim saw them, he said, 'Welcome, son and daughter!' 'I am no daughter', said Viglund, 'though this bandage makes me look like one.' And they told Thorgrim what had passed. 'And didst thou not avenge thyself on Jokull?' said Thorgrim. 'He was gone before I had finished bandaging the wound', said Trausti. But the two brothers

waited not long for vengeance; for ere the games were over, Viglund met Jokull and smote him with the ball in the forehead, even as Jokull had smitten him before. Jokull tried to strike Viglund in return, but Viglund rushed in under his arms, and threw him mightily to earth, so that he lay stunned, and had to be carried home by four men holding a sheet at the corners, and it was some time ere he was whole.

And Viglund visited Ketilrid at her father's house, and talked with her, and played tables. Her brothers were then not at home, but when they heard of his doings they lay in wait with ten men to kill him and Trausti. Ketilrid saw their ambush, and bade Trausti and Viglund to go home some other way; but they answered, 'We will alter our purposes for no man'. So they came to a certain stackyard, and there Jokull and his men burst out upon them. And Jokull said, "'Tis well we have met; now will I take vengeance for the fall thou gavest me and for the blow'. 'Be it so', said Viglund; and fought so well and bravely that he was the bane of two men, while Trausti slew another. Then the other nine drew off, and went back home, and told Holmkell that Viglund and Trausti had without cause slain three of his men. At this, for the

first time, Holmkell was wroth; and, when Hakon again asked for Ketilrid's hand, he refused no longer. Hakon gave up all thought of returning to Norway or of marrying Ingibjorg; and he deemed also that he would never attain to killing Thorgrim. But Ketilrid liked the marriage ill, and when Viglund heard the news he was sore pained at heart. And again he came to her house, and she told him that it was against her will that it had happened. 'And now we must part; but go not home the way thou camest, for Hakon and my brothers, and men beside, are waiting to kill thee.' 'Not so', said Viglund, 'for it comes into my mind that now Hakon and I must settle things between us for ever.' So he and Trausti went out, and he came to the stack-house as before. There were twelve men awaiting them, but the two brothers fought hard and well, until at last there were left but Jokull, Einar, and Hakon on the one side, and the two sons of Thorgrim on the other. Then said Jokull, 'Let Einar fight Trausti, and Hakon Viglund; and I will sit by'. So Trausti fought Einar, until both fell. Then Viglund fought Hakon; this battle lasted long, for Viglund was exceeding weary, and Hakon strong and courageous; yet it ended so that Hakon fell dead,

and Viglund was sore wounded. Then sprang up Jokull: he was fresh and without wound, and long did he fight with Viglund. Now Viglund felt himself growing weak with loss of blood, and thought he might fail to finish with Jokull for his weakness; therefore he suddenly changed his shield to his right arm and his sword to his left, for he could use either hand equally, and smote Jokull's arm off at the elbow. At that Jokull went backwards, nor could Viglund follow him for weakness; but he seized a spear lying close by, and hurled it at Jokull; and it came between his shoulders and out at the breast: then Jokull fell down dead. As for Viglund, he fainted from the blood-rush, and lay there as it were a corpse.

Then men rode to Holmkell's house and told him the news that both his sons were killed, and Hakon, and Thorgrim's sons also. And when Ketilrid heard it she fell down in a swoon. When she came to herself, her mother said, 'Now is revealed all thy love for Viglund, for thou didst faint when thou heardest he was dead; well is it that ye are now parted for ever'. Holmkell said she had paled as much for her brothers as for Viglund. 'Be that so or not', said Thorbjorg, 'now seems it to me that we should

gather men and kill Thorgrim the Proud.' 'Not so', said Holmkell: 'little is Thorgrim's blame for the death of our sons; and as for Viglund and Trausti, what more could they lose than their lives, which are lost already?'

Now Viglund and Trausti lay some while on the field; but at last Viglund came to himself and staggered to his brother, and saw that there was still life in him. As he was wondering what to do, for he was too weak to carry another, he heard a slight moving over the ground, and he looked and saw his father Thorgrim therein. Thorgrim took them with him to a certain underground dwelling, where their mother Olof was: she bound their wounds and tended them long in secret, until, after many months, their hurts were healed. Nearly all men fancied they were dead. Holmkell buried his sons in a howe called Kumli's Howe: he and Thorgrim divided not their friendship, but were agreed to bring the matter neither to law nor to private doom. And so things were for a time.

Now the story shifts again to Norway. Men came to Ketill and told him all that had happened: how that Hakon was dead and Thorgrim yet unpunished. And forasmuch as Ketill deemed it a shame to him that vengeance came

slowly, he bade his two sons, Sigurd and Gunnlaug, take up the case and go to Iceland to kill Thorgrim. Now both of them had taken vows: Gunnlaug that he would refuse no man help if it were a case of life and death, and Sigurd to return no man evil for good. Little did they like their errand, yet for their father's sake they set sail. Now off the coast of Iceland there came a great storm, and their ship was broken near to Thorgrim's stead. Thorgrim heard of this, and took them into his house, and gave them all they needed. There Sigurd saw Helga, Thorgrim's daughter; and some men said that love passed between them, but that came not into wide knowledge. Viglund and Trausti still lay hidden, nor did Ketill's sons hear aught of them. One day Gunnlaug said to Sigurd, 'Shall we not take vengeance on Thorgrim? Methinks it were now easy to do.' 'Speak never again thereof', said Sigurd. 'That were to repay ill for good; for he hath taken us in after our shipwreck, and helped us in every way.' And Gunnlaug never spoke thereof again.

Now when it had come about that Thorgrim's sons were healed of their wounds, they asked their father what it was best in his mind that they should do. He answered, 'That seems

to me good, that ye should embark on ship-board with the brothers Sigurd and Gunnlaug, and say, as is even true, that it is a matter of life and death, and ask them for a faring from Iceland: and, methinks, they will grant you this request, for they are good men both'. And so it was done. Men say that Ketilrid was sore grieved that winter: she slept little and wearied much. But that same night, when Ketill's sons were due to set sail, went Viglund to her, and Trausti also: great was her joy to see them. 'I deem myself free of all ill', said she, 'now that ye are healed of your wounds.' Then Viglund told her of his purpose abroad; and she was glad thereat. 'I rejoice that ye are safe', said she, 'howsoever it goes with me.' 'Wed no other man', said Viglund, 'while I am hence.' 'That will my father decide', said she. 'I will never go against his will; yet it may well be that I shall find pleasure with no one as with thee.' Then Viglund bade her trim his hair; and she did so: whereupon he said, 'No other shall trim my hair than thou while thou art in life'. Then they kissed and parted; and easy was it to see that it grieved them sore to sunder; yet so it had to be.

A little later Holmkell found his daughter greeting much. He asked why it was so sad to

her. 'Dost thou wish me to avenge thy brothers?' said he. 'Know of a truth that 'tis for thy sake I have spared these other brethren; but if it be thy will, I can easily have them slain.' 'So far is my thought from that', quoth she, 'that I would neither have had them outlawed nor have chosen to send them penniless out of the country; nor would I, were it in my choice, take any other than Viglund to be my husband.' When Holmkell heard that, he took his horse and rode after the brethren. When Trausti saw him, he said, 'Here rides Holmkell all alone; it were an easy way, and not a noble way, to get Ketilrid, if thou wert to slay Holmkell'. Viglund said, 'If so were that I should never see Ketilrid again, yet would I never harm Holmkell: small gratitude were such a deed for all the good that he hath done me; and Ketilrid hath grief enough, though her father be not slain—he who hath willed her naught but happiness'. 'Thou hast spoken well', said Trausti. Now Holmkell rode past them and then turned back; and when they came to where he turned, they saw there money and a gold ring and a rune-stick carved, whereon were cut all the sayings of Ketilrid and Holmkell, and this besides, that she gave that money to Viglund for his journey.

Afterwards they went to the ship, and there were Sigurd and Gunnlaug ready to sail, and a land-breeze blowing. Viglund called to the ship, and asked if Gunnlaug were on board, and whether he would give him passage to Norway. 'Who are ye?' said Gunnlaug. 'We are Vandred and Torred', said they. 'What urges you to sail abroad?' said he. 'Our life lies on it', answered they. 'Come into the ship', said he; and so did they.

Now when they were some way out into the sea, Gunnlaug asked the strong man why he called himself Vandred. 'I called myself so', said he, 'because great dread is round about me; but my real name is Viglund and my brother's is Trausti: we are the sons of Thorgrim the Proud.' At that Gunnlaug was silent a space, and then said, 'What is now to do, Sigurd? for well I know that Ketill our father will have them slain so soon as they come to Norway'. 'Surely', said Sigurd, 'we must do to them even as their father Thorgrim did to us—namely, that he saved our lives.' 'That is nobly spoken', said Gunnlaug, 'and so let us do.'

They had fair weather, and came easily to Norway; and when they came to Raumsdale Ketill was not at home. When he returned he

sat in his high-seat with his men around him; then he greeted his sons. 'But who are these unknown men?' Sigurd said, 'They are Viglund and Trausti, the two sons of Thorgrim the Proud'. 'Up, men!' cried Ketill, 'and seize them: I would Thorgrim were with them, that I could deal so with him!' But Sigurd said, 'Not so did Thorgrim deal with us, for he took us in after shipwreck, and did to us even better than the day before; and now wilt thou slay his sons, though guiltless? Nay, for we will be their comrades, and one fate shall happen to the four of us!' Then said Ketill, 'I cannot fight with my own sons'; and the wrath ran from him. Then said Gunnlaug, 'This is my advice, that Thorgrim keep his wife Olof, and that she have her inheritance from her father Thorir; that Trausti marry our sister Ingibjorg, and that Sigurd marry Helga, Thorgrim's daughter'. To all did that advice seem good; and according to that advice was it done. They stayed there that winter in great friendship; Trausti wedded Ingibjorg, and in the summer they all went a-harrying: all were men of renown, but Viglund gained more renown than any; yet had he little delight, for never was Ketilrid out of his thoughts. So went three years by.

Meanwhile strange things had happened in Iceland. A man named Thord came to Holmkell's stead, and asked the hand of Ketilrid; and because of the urgings of Thorbjorg, and also because Viglund delayed, at last Holmkell gave her to Thord; but she liked it ill. And that same summer came Viglund home from his harrying; and all the other men had their hair trimmed: but he said, 'No other will I have to trim me, save Ketilrid; so did I promise her when we parted'. Then next summer they all came out to Iceland, and told Thorgrim of the peace made with Ketill, whereat Thorgrim rejoiced greatly; but sad was Viglund when he heard that Ketilrid had been betrothed to another man. Still were his thoughts on her, so that when he made lays on her, her name came both at the beginning and at the end of his verses.

Now Viglund and Trausti set out to find the dwelling of Thord. So they called themselves by other names: Viglund called himself Orn, and Trausti was Hrafn; and set sail. Long were they on the voyage, for the wind was contrary. And when they came thither, Thord received them kindly, and bade Ketilrid do well by them. Now Ketilrid knew Viglund, but Viglund did not know that she knew him. Thord was stricken in

years, and, as old men will, he slept in the afternoon: and Viglund came in with drawn sword, and said to himself, 'How easily could I slay him!' But Trausti had followed him, and said, 'Do not so ill as to kill a sleeping man, and him old; bear thy fate manfully'. So Viglund put up his sword; and all that winter, though he saw Ketilrid many a time and oft, he said no word of love to her.

Now, as summer came on, old Thord set out from home, and came back with many men—Thorgrim the Proud, and Olof his wife, and Helga, and Holmkell, and others. Then Viglund and Trausti received them in Thord's house. And Thord stood up and spoke, 'Well know I who ye are, Orn and Hrafn; ye are the sons of Thorgrim; and I know well what was between thee, Viglund, and Ketilrid. Now will I tell thee who I am: I am Helgi, thy father's brother, and I have taken Ketilrid only that she might be given to no other: I have kept her here with me, but married her not. Now, therefore, take her at my hand: right sure I am that Holmkell will refuse her not. For it is my advice that ye and Holmkell be reconciled, and that ye live in peace hereafter.'

And so it was: Viglund went up to Holmkell,

and a peace was made between them; and he and Ketilrid were wedded with great splendour. And here ceases this saga. To us who have copied it, there seems much pleasure therein.

(*Viglundar Saga.*)

A skrok-saga, *i.e.* spurious: a specimen of the false tales that arose when the genuine kind was dying out. Other specimens are *Finbow's Saga* and *Frithjof's Saga*, adapted by Tegnér.

## XIII

### MASTER PIERS

THERE was a certain sea-captain once upon a time who was known for his bravery and kind heart: he used to put down and kill all the pirates he met and let all good men go free. So he was very well liked, and all the kings around gave him what he wanted. One day he was in his ship by the coast, and his cook had just begun to boil a fowl for him. At this moment a certain magician named Master Piers came on and said to him, 'I have heard such good tales of thee that I would fain do thee a good turn: wouldst thou like to be king over some country?'

The captain answered, 'I have never let my thoughts run so high'.

'Wouldst thou', says Piers, 'become a king if thou hadst the choice?'

'Of course', said he.

'Wouldst thou reward him well through whom it came to thee?'

'Of a surety', said the captain.

Piers said, 'Wouldst thou give him ten marks a year?'

'Ten, or two hundred, if he liked.'

'I ask no more than ten', said Piers.

'That I promise willingly', said the captain; and therewith they parted.

Piers went on until he came to a certain city where the king had died, leaving behind him his queen and his three-year-old son. The people were just then choosing a king, and it seemed good to all that the son should follow his father. Hereupon Piers stood up and began to speak.

'True it is', said he, 'that the son should succeed the father; but now the son is too young either to rule us or to defend us, more especially if the pirates attack us. Have ye not heard tidings thereof?' They answered 'No'.

He said, 'I have heard that a great host is come to the land, and ye yourselves can see that the bays are full of ships. Therefore it is fitting that you take a brave captain to rule over you; for the pirates will not spare to take your queen and your goods.'

The men saw that he said true, for the bays were floating with ships, and fear filled their

hearts: so they asked Piers what chief he had in his mind to rule them. Piers told them how that there was no other so fitting as the aforesaid sea-captain for bravery and wisdom, and how far he passed other men. It came to this, that the men chose him to be king, and to this the queen agreed. Then went Piers back to the captain, and told him that he now had the choice of becoming king if he would give him the ten marks every year. The captain consented, and straightway gave him the money.

The sea-captain went to the city, where he was chosen king, and took the queen to wife. So mighty was his name that the pirates who had come to the land fled at once, nor did any man know what had become of them. Thus passed the first year.

At the end of the year, to a day, came Piers to the palace and saluted the king, who received him kindly.

Piers said, 'I am come to receive my money of thee'.

'Right', said the king; 'here it is, ready', and weighed out to him ten marks of gold; but to the courtiers that seemed strange.

So passed a second year.

A second time, on the same day of the year,

came Piers, and asked for his money; but now there is great murmuring among the courtiers that this stranger should be asking tribute of the king; they say also that some ill secret must lie behind it. When the king heard that, he told Piers to come no more for his money; yet he gives him, for this time, his ten marks. Piers answered that he would come whatsoever the king said, took his money, and fared thence.

So passed the third year.

The third time, on the same day of the year, came Piers to the king and asked for his ten marks. But the courtiers murmured exceedingly that their king should be such a slave to this man.

When the king heard that, he said to Piers, with anger, 'Thou art a rogue and a rascal to dare to ask money of me, and to repay so ill the kindness I have shown thee. Cease thy villainy, or somewhat will happen to thee that thou likest not.'

Piers answered, 'Think not that thy threatenings will make me cease to claim my own goods'.

The king said, 'Then it is not unlikely that I have thee seized, and, perhaps, it may be that thou be slain'.

‘Rememberest thou’, said Piers, ‘where we met the first time?’

‘I remember it well’, said the king.

‘*Then*’, said Piers, ‘thou wast but a sea-captain, and men said that thou wast a just man and not very avaricious; but *now*, when thou art a king and mayest do as thou wilt, thou art unjust and a miser; and, forasmuch as I have proved thee what thou art, *I tell thee that the fowl is boiled.*’

Instantly the king looked round, and, behold! he was again in his ship, and all his adventures—his kingship of three years, his marriage with the queen, and all else—were nothing but an illusion that Master Piers had raised; nor had it lasted longer than the time it took for the fowl to boil, for Piers had meant to prove him and see what sort of man he would be when he could do according to his will.

Another time there was a rich chief whose name was Prince, great in wealth and fond of arraying himself in fine apparel; his horses also were better than other men’s. It chanced that one day he rode from his house with twelve attendants through a wood, himself and all the twelve being very gaily apparelled. And as they rode through the wood they saw a man riding

towards them who seemed to them tall and strong. His horse was so fine that they thought they had never seen its like either in size or in beauty; and the man's dress, also, was far above what they had ever beheld. And as they were coming towards each other, small wonder it is that they speedily met.

Straightway spake Prince to this man. 'It seems to me, friend', said he, 'that thy apparel, and horse, and weapons befit not a low-born man: I will therefore give thee my own apparel and weapons, and gold beside, if thou wilt give me thine in return.'

The stranger said, 'I care not to have thy horse or raiment rather than mine own; let each keep what was his before'.

Prince replied, 'Whether thou give it or sell it, needs must that it be mine'.

He answered, 'Though thou take all I have, yet will not thy greed be diminished; neither will I give unless I be compelled—which, indeed, may easily be, for I am one and ye thirteen'.

So they alighted from their horses and laid hands on him, stripping him of his clothes and laying on him those of Prince; whereupon they departed, each his own way.

Now to one of Prince's men, and him the wisest, it seemed not altogether as it did to the others. Wherefore, taking a magic crystal from his pouch—through the which looking none could be deceived—he looked through it, and lo! his master, Prince, was riding on a hobby-horse of rubbish and brambles, tied together with thorns and straw, and Prince himself was dressed in rags and tatters. Now, deeming his own eyes might have deceived him, he called a companion, and bade him also look through the crystal—to whom also the same appeared. Whereupon they called Prince and bade him look through, which doing, he was furiously angry, and made them ride after that vagabond thief who had thus cheated him; and, as he was not far before them, they soon overtook him, laid hands on him, and carried him bound to Prince, who, seeing him, told him he had cheated in their bargain. But Master Piers—for it was he—said there had been no bargain.

'Nay', said he, 'twas thy own greed had made me turn to my enchantments; for hadst thou not wished to rob me, then had I not bewitched thine eyes to fancy me so apparelled.'

Then Prince, being angry, dragged Piers with him to a certain bridge nigh the sea, meaning

to hang him thereon; and so closely did his men hold him that they thought him as good as dead for all his magic and enchantments.

But Piers looked up and spake. 'I am bound', said he, 'yet will I be loose.' Whereupon he sat loose upon the bridge. Then it seemed as if he took a piece of chalk out of his pouch and drew a ship upon the wall, with all the tackling that a ship should have: whereupon suddenly behind them they heard a great ship riding through the waves, and, looking, they saw Master Piers upon that ship, hoisting sail. Then Master Piers and the ship sailed away out of their sight.

And this is the second story of Master Piers and his enchantments; but there is a third to come, which is as follows.

There were once on a time in a far country two brethren, who had taken the rule thereof after their father: the name of the one was William, and of the other Eric. Their sister was named Ingibjorg, the fairest of women, and gifted in most arts. Their counsellor was Piers, who had chief share, under those brethren, in guiding the land. He had asked the hand of Ingibjorg, but they refused to give her to him, for that he was a man of no wealth or name, though of all men the keenest in mind. It is not

told that the brethren were greatly wise. Now their sister had a bower apart from the palace, where she took her meals with her ladies. And Master Piers had made it a condition with the princes that from the moment he went to dinner till evening none should come to him for advice or say a word to him; for he desired to have that time to himself, and to be free from business. Now there were certain courtiers of those princes who greatly envied Master Piers the honour he enjoyed, and sought occasion to set him at odds with their lords. And it happed one day that the brethren were going out at the time of evening meal, and came nigh Ingibjorg's bower, whence they heard a sound of great joy: wherefore they came into the garth to know what was the cause. And looking through a window they saw their sister with Master Piers; and it seemed to them that the twain took great pleasure in each other's company; and they deemed they had sufficient occasion now against Master Piers. Wherefore, hastening home, they went to the dining-hall, and there sat Master Piers according to his wont, with two servants waiting on him as he was at meal. They could not tell what this meant, and did not dare to speak of it at that time, but thought they would wait

till they knew what the truth was. So they departed; but another evening they went again to the bower, and saw once more Master Piers and the maiden blithely talking to each other; and hasting back, found as before Master Piers sitting at table, after his custom. And yet they were sure of this, that he could not be in two places at once. So they entered the hall and spoke to him; but he answered not a word; so that they were more than ever at a loss as to what was the truth. At length, gaining courage, they tried to touch him, but could not, and perceived that the room was empty and that he was not there. Then, in a rage, calling their men, they rushed to the bower, and broke in. The princess, hearing the noise, said to Piers, 'Thou art a dead man!' 'Fear not', said he; and throwing over him a blue cape which he wore daily, lay down calmly in the high-seat. The princes, coming in, searched a while, and then found him. Then said William, 'Let *me* now repay him for the shame he hath done us, for I am the elder brother'; and straightway hewed him into pieces. The blood poured over the floor; but so furious were they that they forbade their sister to cleanse it: and so departed. The princess fell fainting to see her lover so vilely handled. But

it was no long while ere she came to herself; and lo! there was Master Piers coming towards her, whole and unwounded. How it was in truth she knew not, but deemed him some after-ganger. 'Fear not', said he; 'I am hale and living: when William hewed at me he was really hewing at a stock in the hall, and not a blow did I receive; such a glamour did I cast upon them all.' And she, casting her eyes around, saw there was not a drop of blood in the place. 'Save thyself', said she: 'for they are still not far off.' 'First', said he, 'we will dress ourselves for abroad, and then go to the palace': and so did they. And when the princes saw them, they wondered sore what device had foiled them; and bade their men seize Piers and put him in irons: which was forthwith done. Then, calling a great company, they dragged him to a wood, where they meant to slay him. But when they reached the appointed place, Master Piers said, 'I am bound; but henceforth I will be free. Ye brothers are but fools: I asked the hand of your sister, and ye denied me, for ye thought me low-born in comparison with yourselves. Now though I have less gold than ye, yet have I far more wisdom, and had ye yielded to my desire ye might have used my wisdom for ever, for I

would never have left you. But as it is, ye are doomed to ill-luck and evil fame.' And then it seemed to them that he took a ball of string out of his pouch, and threw it into the air; and holding one end of the string, wound it up, and so vanished from their sight; nor did they ever see him thenceforward.

(From Gering's *Islenzk Aeventyri*.)

## XIV

### THE THREE COMPANIONS

ONCE upon a time there met together in a hunt a king's son, a duke's son, and an earl's son. They were all strong and of full growth, though none had as yet succeeded to his father's place. Now it chanced that the deer were so swift, and the young men so eager in the chase, that they were parted from their attendants, and found themselves alone in a laund or clearing in the wood. Then said the king's son, 'How to pass the time, seeing we have neither meat nor drink?' 'Decide thou', said the others. 'Then', said he, 'let each of us tell the story of the greatest danger he hath ever been in during his life; and thou, earl's son, begin.'

So the earl's son began, and spake as follows. 'Some time since I set forth on a visit, having but one servant with me. Now the way ran along a steep ghyll, and, being eager to see the maiden I was visiting, I set my horse to a gallop; but a

loose stone twisted under his hoof, and he fell sideways over the cliff, throwing me out of the saddle so that I was caught on a projecting ledge of the cliff. As for the horse, the precipice was so deep that I never heard where he fell down to. There was such a long and steep overhanging rock above me that I gave myself up for lost. While I was looking round for a way of escape I heard my servant come along; and loud were his cries when he saw where I had fallen, for he made sure that I was dead. I shouted out and told him to stay where he was; but even so I could see no way of safety, for the rock was as smooth as glass, and even on hands and knees I could not have climbed a yard. At last a sudden thought struck me. Feeling in my pocket I found there a needle and thread, without which no one in our country ever goes abroad. Then with my knife I slit a few strips off my cape, and, sewing these together, made a tolerably long rope. To one end of this I tied a stone which I broke from the cliff, and then, exerting all my strength, threw it up towards the mouth of the ravine. Whether it was by good luck, or because God was willing to grant me a longer life, the stone went up over the edge of the cliff, and my servant caught it. He was thus able to

let down another stronger rope to me, by which I climbed up the side of the rock and so was safe. That was the greatest danger that ever I was in: and so ends my story.'

The king's son answered, 'You showed great presence of mind in getting out of so dangerous a place; but now it is the turn of the duke's son to tell *his* tale'.

The duke's son answered, 'I was in love with the daughter of a certain rich man, who lived an hour's ride from my father's house. When our affection had lasted some time, she took a serious illness, so that she seemed to know her end was near. Accordingly, she sent a confidential messenger to bid me come and visit her. As you may imagine, I hastened to be by her side, and found her all alone. I thought that she wished to talk to me in private; and at first indeed she did speak of her love for me; but afterwards she said, "I wish you would unlock yonder chest, my love, that stands at the end of my bed, because in it there is something that I wish to entrust to you alone". I did so, and found the chest empty, except for some shavings and sawdust, which I tried to search in. As I bent down to do so, I was suddenly seized and pushed right into the box, which was instantly locked over me. Then my

lover sent for her father, and said to him, "It is fated, father, that you and I must soon part; but I wish to ask one favour of you, that you will have that box there carried to my grave, and buried under my coffin: for I have put into it that which I am determined no one else shall enjoy after I am dead; and I desire also that no one should know what is inside". The father replied that he would see it done, though there were three chests instead of one. I thought my case a hard one, and yet I held my peace; for shame seemed to me even harder to bear than being buried alive. There is no need to waste words: she died, and soon after was borne to the churchyard, to which I also was carried in the chest. I was let down into the grave below her; the grave was filled up and everybody went away. Now, as I heard afterwards, the rumour was spread abroad widely that the great chest must hold gold and jewels; for the girl had loved them much during life. This rumour came to the ears of certain thieves, strong and vigorous men, who accordingly came to the grave next night, opened it, and pulled out both the coffin and the chest. When this was done, they deliberated some time as to what to do; for my chest was iron-bound: so at last they decided to set it on end and stave

a side in with hammers. Here, then, I was in great danger of being killed with their blows; and therefore, as soon as the side was stove in, I set up a great cry: whereupon the thieves, thinking I was a ghost or the devil, ran away as fast as their legs could carry them. But they had loosened the chest so much that, though with some difficulty, I got out. Then I threw chest and coffin again into the grave, and made all much as it was before: after which I slunk away home. That was the greatest danger I ever was in: and so ends my story.'

The king's son answered, 'You were indeed in such danger that it is hard to imagine a greater; and indeed you hit on a strange sort of sweetheart, if her love could change so soon to murderous hate. But I will tell you my story, which also begins with a sweetheart, though she was not to blame for what happened. She lived not far from a certain abbey belonging to the Benedictines. I used often to ride over that way. Now it happened—as such things will—that my father's judges had condemned to the gallows three of the worst robbers that ever were known; and the three gibbets stood not far from the road that I used to ride. The night after they were hanged I rode that way, for I thought

myself brave enough not to be afraid of dead men. Now, when I came right opposite the gibbet of the worst robber of the three, he suddenly called out to me, and said, "O kind sir, release me from this torment! I was condemned on a false charge, and therefore I cannot die: come then and cut the rope with your sword." The villain spoke in so honest a tone that I thought he must be telling the truth; and so I went nearer. But when I saw his face, it was so devilish that I was sure he must be lying; and so I turned away. But he called after me, and told me not to be afraid. "What shame", he said, "it will be if you let an innocent man die!" To cut a long story short, I went back again, and a second time drew away from him; but the third time I went and cut the rope over his head. Then he fell down, and I set spurs to my horse to ride away; but a little after I heard a horrible sound behind me, and looking back saw that the demon had torn up the gallows and flung it over his shoulder, and was pursuing me at a great pace and with terrific howls. I spurred my horse to his fastest, and rode for dear life; but I soon saw that it could not be long before I was overtaken. Now my course brought me to the churchyard of the abbey. I threw myself clean

off the saddle and over the wall; and, as I knew the church well, I found the door and slipped in, locking the door behind me. Here I thought I was safe; but the fiend soon came to the door, and banged so furiously at it that it seemed to me as if it must soon fall. "Unlock the door", he cried; "your flight shall serve you ill; I will pay you out for that blow before we part." But, in spite of everything, I would not unlock it. When he saw that, he cried with a loud voice, "Comrade, lying in the church, rise up and help me to catch him!" At this I was ware that a dead man lay near me; and at the call of the fiend he rose up and opened the door. Then both began to seek me; but I, knowing that to resist would have been useless, took to flight. I held my sword in front of me, and cut off great pieces of their strange weapons; for one had the gallows and the other the board on which he had been lying. I ran right along the nave and into the choir and at last to the high altar. I was so tired that I could do no more. The church was well windowed; and the night was moonlit, so that I could see plainly. I gave myself into the hands of God, threw away my sword, and leant myself backwards against the altar. Nor did our Saviour Christ abandon me in my misery: for

the fiend that had sought me longest sank down into the ground, and the other gathered together the pieces I had hewn off his board and lay down again on his tombstone. And soon thereafter I stole from thence, and found my horse, thanking God for all His mercies, and purposing thenceforward to live a pure and good life. And that was the worst danger that ever I was in. And so ends my story.'

All agreed that of the three perils this was the worst, and the one wherein God's favour was the most clearly shown.

(From Gering's *Islenzk Aeventyri*.)

This story and the preceding are examples of later Icelandic tale-telling.

## APPENDIX

FOR the benefit of any who may desire to carry their studies further, the following brief notes, which do not pretend to be exhaustive, are subjoined.

Those who have time and inclination to learn the language might begin with Sweet's *Icelandic Primer*. Noreen's very comprehensive *Grammar* will follow later. As reading-books, Heusler's *Zwei Isländer-Geschichten* (*Hen-Thorir* and *Bandamanna Saga*) and Mogk's *Gunnlaug's Saga* are excellent. These mastered, Vigfusson and Powell's *Oxford Reader* or Möbius's *Analecta Norroena* will be found useful. After them the student can roam at pleasure.

For the English reader, Craigie's *Icelandic Saga* (in the Cambridge Manuals), followed by the admirable Prolegomena to Vigfusson and Powell's *Sturlunga Saga*, will supply a full history of the literature. Ker's *Epic and Romance* is, as might be expected, learned, accurate, and judicial. Chadwick's *Heroic Age*, discussing the 'Homeric' literature of all nations, inevitably takes in the Icelandic. Du Chaillu's *Viking Age* gives copious translated extracts from the sagas, and both text and illustrations are very informative.

FOR THE SEPARATE SAGAS.—*Njala*, the greatest,

and a work worthy of comparison with Homer or Herodotus, is almost an English classic in Dasent's version. The Everyman edition is cheap and accessible; but the reader should, if possible, procure the original edition from a good library.

*Laxdaela*—translated by Mrs. Press, Temple Classics. Straightforward and sound. William Morris's *Lovers of Gudrun* (in the *Earthly Paradise*) tells a large portion of this story.

*Gisli*—translated by Dasent (hard to obtain). Beatrice Helen Barmby's excellent dramatic poem, *Gisli Sursson*, should be read. (Beatrice Barmby, confined to her couch by illness for many years, found consolation in a close study of the sagas.)

*Gretti*—rough and uncouth in places, translated by Morris. There is a useful paraphrase, with personal comments based on knowledge of Iceland, by Baring-Gould (*Grettir the Outlaw*).

Such sagas as bear on English history (Orkney, Harald Hardrada, Heming—including one setting of the William Tell myth—Earl Ronald, etc.) were edited and translated by Vigfusson and Dasent for the Rolls Series, but are not easily accessible. (From this I have taken the tale of Lodin. The Norse story of Stamford Bridge is given by Freeman in his *Old English History*.)

Some of the greater sagas (*Eyrbyggja* and *Faerey-inga* among them) have been translated by Sephton and York Powell in more or less expensive publications.

*Volsunga*, the most famous of the mythical sagas, is not in itself of high merit. It is really but a prose paraphrase of the short epics contained in the so-called *Elder Edda*, some of which it quotes verbatim. These poems are, in their way, of the highest order. The prose saga is translated by Morris in the *Camelot Classics* (Walter Scott): cheap and good. On this saga, with help from the poems, Morris based his great epic *The Story of Sigurd*; and Wagner, blending this setting of the tale with the High-German *Nibelung* poems, made the whole into the libretto of his operatic cycle.

Several of the smaller sagas (*Hen-Thorir*, *Howard the Halt*, *Bandamanna Saga*, and others) translated by Morris and Magnusson. The style of these, however, in my opinion at least, is somewhat unfortunately affected by that love of an antiquated vocabulary which marks so many of Morris's later writings.

Vigfusson and Powell, in their *Origines Islandicae* (Oxford Press: a monumental work in two large volumes), give text and translation of a very large number of the sagas. The reader will notice here the occasional emergence of that perverted ingenuity which somewhat mars the enormous learning of Vigfusson, and which appears also in the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*. But the work is of immense value.

A few of the less-known Icelandic stories have been rendered by Nora Kershaw (Mrs. Chadwick) for the Cambridge University Press.

*The Lives of the Kings of Norway*, largely the work

of Snorri Sturluson (on which Carlyle based his last work), translated by Laing.<sup>1</sup>

*Frithjof's Saga* (a 'skrok-saga', or spurious tale) was chosen by the modern Swedish poet Tegnér as the theme of an epic. This poem has been issued in English under the same title. I am told by Swedish scholars it is a fairly successful version.

One of the two settings of the saga of Eric the Red (narrating the story of the discovery of America) is versified in Lowell's *Voyage to Vinland*.

The *Danish History* of Saxo Grammaticus (from which, at one or two removes, Shakspeare drew the plot of Hamlet<sup>2</sup>) was written in Latin; but it perhaps concerns us here, as it contains an immense and interesting collection of the old mythical and legendary tales of the North. The best portion (books i.-ix.), translated by York Powell and Oliver Elton, will repay the closest study.

The selections in this book, omitting as they do the greatest works, should be read in connection with some of these translations. They do, however, give a fair idea of the saga style from the mythical days, through the historical times, down to the time of the skrok-saga and the borrowed tale of the class of the *Gesta Romanorum*. Thus *Rolf Kraki* is mythical, *Kormak* rough and barbarous, *Hallbjorn* anecdotal, *Bjarni* historic, *Viglund* spurious, *Piers* a specimen of the universal folk-tale.

<sup>1</sup> See Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn*.

<sup>2</sup> See also Gollancz's *Hamlet in Iceland* for the history of the Hamlet saga.

In reading these, or any of the sagas (indeed in reading any ancient work), it is well to remember that printing and typographical aids to style did not exist. Much that would now go into notes and appendices had then to find a place in the text: hence an abruptness which modern writers easily avoid. (There are whole passages, *e.g.* in *Njala*, as in the Bible and in Thucydides, which the student should mentally consign to brackets or small print.)

A *j*, which is often in the manuscripts written *i*, should be pronounced as English *y*.



