

# THE CULTURE OF THE TEUTONS

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HUMPHREY MILFORD  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
LONDON

JESPERSEN OG PIOS FORLAG  
22 VALKENDORFSGADE  
COPENHAGEN

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH  
FROM *Vor folkeat i oldtiden I-IV*  
COPENHAGEN 1909-12  
BY *W. Worseter*

1931

## CHAPTER I

### TREASURES

THE IMPRESSION generally gained by a stranger from first acquaintance with the clan system is: reserve, self-sufficiency, every man against his neighbor.

From a distance, one sees nothing but warriors fighting or prepared to fight, men who sleep with their axe ready to hand on the wall beside them, and who take it with them when they hang the seed-bag on their shoulder and set out for the fields. The very emphasis of the unity among them seems to presuppose uncertainty as the dominant note of life. How mighty then must have been the pressure from without which created such a seamless unanimity – that is the argument nowadays.

Often enough, the distant view is a great help in reducing to order the confusing multiplicity which existence – in sorriest conflict with all sound scientific principles – suffers from; but the observer is in danger of forgetting, in his contemplation of the pure lines, that there are certain features which from their nature are foreordained to show up from a distance, and others which perhaps have equal right to contribute to the total impression, yet cannot penetrate so far. But the correctness of the impression depends on due regard to all factors concerned. Peaceable, perhaps, we cannot say our forefathers were, seeing that it never occurred to them to set peace before all else, but they were something more; they have in their culture and their social life raised a monument to the will to peace, and a mighty will to peace must have prevailed amongst them, forcing all [6] self-assertion into forms that served the unity of the people no less than personal satisfaction. Nor is their daily life and action less marked by intercourse and amenity; hands are outstretched from the clan to every side, after union and alliance.

The most prominent place in Germanic social life is occupied by the “bargain”, the great symbol of intercourse and mutual goodwill. When clans allied by marriage are united in frith, so that one can always reckon with the support of one's new kin in one's efforts at self-assertion, when the woman can rightly bear her name of *friðu-sibb*, the woman who joins two clans in frith, it is because a bargain has been made between two clans, an exchange of gifts has taken place.

Marriage is the great exchange of gifts, the gift-alliance before all others. In the modern Danish word for marriage, *giftermål*, the idea of giving – *gipt* – has been handed down to later generations; in the Anglo-Saxon, the same word – *gift* – is used chiefly to denote a bridal gift, and in the plural, it signifies, without further addition, nuptials. But in the ultimate essence of the matter, the bridal bargain did not differ from friendship, which was also a bargain, and likewise brought about by gifts.

In the gift, the door is opened to the Germanic will to peace; but at the same time, a host of psychological mysteries pour in.

When Blundketil had been burned in his house, and his son's well-wishers cast about for something upon which to base a hope, they could find nothing better than a marriage between the youth and a daughter of Thord Gellir's sister. Thord was a powerful man, but Thord was by no means eager for the match. “Nay”, he says, “there is naught but good between Ketil and myself; once in foul weather he took me in, and gave me a present of good stud horses; and yet I do not think I have anything to reproach myself if I leave this marriage unmade.” The full and considered weight of the words is lost unless the greater emphasis of this “and yet” is noted. The gift carries with it an obligation; under whatsoever circumstances it is given, it is binding nevertheless, and that with an obligation [7] the force of which, in justice to itself, demands such strong words as these: the receiver is in the giver's power.

It is seen when Einar rides up to his brother Gudmund the Mighty, the fox of Modruvellir, and flings him back his cloak; he has realised whither Gudmund's plans tend. But Gudmund calmly opines that it is unseemly enough if kinship should not compel the one to take up the other's cause, and here he has accepted a gift of value. It is useless for Einar to

strain at the bond, and allege that the gift was given deceitfully; he may be right in saying that the words fell more softly when Gudmund brought out the cloak for him to better their friendship – mercilessly comes his brother's retort: "What fault is it of mine that you make yourself a fool, a thing of scorn!" And Einar takes the cloak and rides home. – Gudmund is perhaps of all the Icelandic saga chieftains the one who has advanced farthest beyond the ancient culture into a modern world, but all that is modern fades beside the power of the old custom of exchanging gifts to cow a man.

When Njal's sons come home and boast of the rich gifts with which Mord has honoured them at the feast he had made for them, Njal says with meaning: "He has surely seen his own gain in the bargain; take care now that you do not pay for them in the way he would wish." But the advice is powerless in face of the fateful strength of the gifts; from these spring Njal's sons' attack upon their foster-brother Hoskuld and their own death by fire. – A prudent man would not accept a gift until he had mingled mind with the giver, and knew his plans. Once a man had persuaded another to accept the gage of friendship, then he could be sure of his powerful support. The fact of his saying thank you without further comment would mean, either that he understood the giver's purpose, or that he was ready for anything himself – or, of course, that he trusted the giver never to abuse his right.

The obligation implied by accepting a gift is powerfully manifested in the Germanic ideas of law. As a legal formula, the position is stated as for instance in paragraph 73 of Liutprand's Lombard edict: "A gift not confirmed by gift in return [8] or by *thingatio*, is not legally valid." In other words, the giver could take it back, and if necessary, hale the objecting recipient before the courts. In Sweden, a disputed claim was proved by swearing the formula; "he gave and I rewarded." Iceland also has its paragraph anent this question: "Where a gift to the value of 12 ounces or more is not recompensed by at least half its value, the giver can demand the return of his gift, on the death of the receiver, unless the gift in itself could be properly regarded as recompense or requital." The precise delimitation of value and term in the Icelandic law book Grágás had no reliable foundation in the mind of ordinary men; there, a gift was a gift, whether small or great, and no lifelong consideration was admitted. When Ingolf's kinswoman Steinun came to Iceland, he offered her land from that he had taken up on settlement, but she preferred to give a cloak in return and call it a bargain, thinking that thus there would be less danger of any subsequent attempt to dispute her title.

We have innumerable illustrations to Liutprand's edicts in the legal documents of the period, showing clearly that the effect of a gift made in return for a gift was not dependent on its mercantile value. Thus we find (anno 792): According to the customs among us Lombards I have for greater surety accepted from you in return a glove, to the end that this gift of mine may stand unchallenged for you and for your descendants. Those who spoke thus were familiar with disputes arising between two parties who had exchanged friendly gifts, where a doubt as to ownership was met by the answer: you gave me the land yourself, -- and the answer was waved aside by the retort: Indeed? And did you give me anything in return?

Later, when the impersonal institution of trade had grown out of personal chaffering and barter, it was naturally the gift relationship which not only provided the etiquette and forms, but also the effectively binding formalities. The so-called *arrha*, or God's penny, is a legal adaptation of the sense of obligation on receiving a gift. He who accepts *arrha* undertakes to complete the bargain under discussion as soon as the would-be purchaser [9] appears with the sum demanded; he cannot meantime accept any offer from another party, however tempting.

A gift without return, without obligation, is inconceivable to the Germanic mind. If a man accepted a proof of friendship, and went his way as if nothing had happened, then the chattel received was not to be reckoned as a possession, but came almost under the heading of stolen goods. The obligation incurred by acceptance was more of an ideal than of a commercial nature, it went too deep to be measured in material values. In practical life, the amount of return would depend on the generosity of the receiver, and even more upon his position and standing. A king would not get off lightly in the matter of acknowledging the friendly offices of others. The whole psychology of generosity is given in a little humorous

anecdote of a fellow, who raised himself from poverty to wealth and rank by his genius for exploiting the gift system as a rational speculation. There was once a young man with the promising name of Refr (fox) – thus the Gautrek saga. His youth was, according to the usual fairy tale conception, promising in itself, for he was one of those exceptional types of genius that never trouble to work, but simply lie on the hearth and feel themselves getting dirtier and dirtier. One fine day, his father turned him out of the house, and when he had realised all his resources, he stood on there on the road with a whetstone in his hand – his sole asset. With this he set out and made his way to King Gautrek. He had heard that the king, since the death of the queen, was sick in his mind, and did nothing all day long but sit on her grave and pass the time watching his hawk fly up, now and then encouraging the wearied by throwing stones at it. Who could say, now, but that natural stones might fail, and a whetstone be a welcome gift to the pensive king? And thus it proved. Refr took up his post behind the king, and then, when the king fumbled behind him in search of a stone, Refr thrust his sole treasure into the king's hand and went his way with a ring by way of recompense. The ring was then offered as a gift to King Ella, and Refer did not fail to mention the fact that King Gautrek gave rings for whetstones. Whereafter, a [10] king of England could hardly give less than a ship with men and a dog. The dog was the item Refr found easiest to dispense with, he gave it to King Hrolf, duly mentioning its origin; and after this fashion did Refr lay up a store of ships and weapons, until one day he was able to present himself again with a fleet and a following, to King Gautrek, as an eligible suitor. Thus he had well deserved the addition to his former name – Gjafa-Refr (Gift-fox).

We cannot at once discern from this story what it was in its flourishing period. Even the comic element which goes deepest into the foundations of human nature must purchase its power over laughter by a perilous dependence upon the external side of life, and it forfeits its power of directly raising a laugh when the social forms upon which it flourished disappear. But having once got the significance of a gift into the foreground of our consciousness, we can at least understand that the story of Prince Refr the Gift-sly once had power to make men's lungs shake and the tears roll down their cheeks, from the very fact of his idea being so entirely reasonable; and perhaps, by sharing their laugh, we may attain to some degree of intimacy with those people.

The gift is a social factor. Passing from man to man and to man again, it draws through society a mesh of obligations so strong that the whole state is moved if but one or another point of chain be properly grasped.

To many a one it may perhaps seem that he has fallen among chafferers, bargain-makers of the keenest lust and ability. "A gift always looks for its return," the proverb fits excellently in the mouth of these clever bargainers. But going round to the other side, and regarding their conscientiousness in finding the due proportion between gift and return, one is tempted perhaps to set up gratitude as the grand principle in their ethics and jurisprudence.

Our forefathers themselves can teach us better. They take gratitude and calculation for what they are, without feeling ashamed themselves of either. They pass by all that is accidental, [11] and go straight in to the object itself. It is not the giving that acts, they say, but the gift. None can, we learn, free himself from the influence of things about him, such as are in his own guardianship, and such as lie near enough to be entangled in his acts.

The Northmen admit openly that they are slaves of gold and silver – and of iron. And then they raise a hymn to the metals, that must grate upon all pecuniary sense of decency. They make the greatest poems frankly in praise of gold, and teach us, with the irresistible logic of life, that the gold-road in to human kind does not end blindly in the lower passions, but cuts into the sublimest centres of spirit and feeling. The figure which civilization has rendered comic, by reducing his brain to a straight line, that of the miser, is set up by the ancient culture simply as the pathetic symbol of the thousand devious windings of the human soul.

Rejoicing over gold rings out broad and strong through all Germanic poetry. A poem such as the Beowulf is illuminated by the yellow gleam. The poem tells, we should say of the

dire straits of the Danes, when night after night they are doomed to suffer the visits of the monster from the marshes, and of the heroic deeds of the strange hero, when he waits for the beast in the hall, and afterwards meets its mother in combat in the depth of the swamp, and thus delivers the land from plague. Yes, the monster is there, and the Danish king, and Beowulf and the fight and the deliverance, and much besides. And the poem really tells of the hero and the monster and their coming to grips, of agony and relief – but taking the epic as a whole and letting it unfold itself again in memory, one may arrive at a totally different view of its contents. First of all an echo of laughter and play in the most splendid of all kingly halls; then suddenly the rejoicing dies away in an ill-boding silence, when the beast has made its first visit; it rises again with drinking and song and the dealing out of gold on the arrival of the stranger, falls silent a while in expectation of the result of the battle, and then bursts forth in the hall, where the king proffers gifts of price to the victor, and Beowulf

[12] joyfully accepts them. When a poem, or a piece of music has been heard to its end, it appears, not as a series of individual details, but as a total impression, the character of which depends on the art of the producer; it lies with his phrasing to determine whether the correct rhythmical proportion shall be given, between that which in the creator's mind was yearning, pointing forward, and sinking, dissolving; whether its arsis and thesis have that balance which they ever had in his ear as he wove them together, and made them so nearly of equal weight that they could reinforce each other. What is the rhythm in the Beowulf, or rather, what was the rhythm to those hearers? One thing is certain; the scene in the hall, where the gold is given and received, is no less weighty than the episodes in which the reward is earned. The old listeners would not let themselves be cheated of any of the excitement of the fight, they demanded that all horror and dread should be shewn dark and threatening as they were; but they would also enjoy calmly and at their ease the spectacle of the hero, as he stands in the firelight with the necklace on his breast and sword in hand. The portrayal of the feast in Heorot after the fight, when the “happy” ones moved to their benches and took their fill of the laden board, when cups of mead unnumbered passed around, when Hrothgar gave Beowulf war-treasures, helmet and mail and far-famed sword – and the helm was encircled by a finely wrought curl – when the queen gave him arm rings and neck rings – and these were the finest the world had ever seen since the famous Brosings' necklace was brought home – this description is at any rate no coda where the past excitement is gently resolved, and thoughts given back to the daily routine. The rejoicing in the hall – the hall dream – and the joy of gold are the keynote which unites the different scenes into one whole. For us moderns, accustomed to seeing the poetry of a narration come to an end at the point where the hero has set his foot on the last of his foes, or the last of the demons, it is strange to see how in the old days – and not only in the north of Europe – men could swoop down upon the sense of victory, create therefrom a counter-tension no weaker than the tension [13] of the fight, and write half the epic on the themes of triumph and feasting and games.

And the poet is true to himself, even in little things. He surrenders himself with emotion to the story of gold and treasures, of men who give and men who receive, and the same transport shows through again and again in his images and phrases. Through the poetic formula of which the Beowulf, in epic wise, is composed, gold rings audibly and unceasingly, the king is always ring-breaker, meter of treasures, his men are gold-cravers, and the hall is the place where the prince of battles is heard handing out rings amid the cries of men: and the meaning is not less sincere because these images belong to the traditional speech of the poets.

Yes, the heart of the Northman or the Greek laughed in his breast when he received a copper kettle or a bracelet. Odysseus' first waking thought, after he has been brought ashore sleeping by the Phæacians, is to count his copper vessels, and see if they have honestly given him all his gifts: “And then he counted all his splendid tripods and cauldrons, the gold and the woven magnificent garments, and lo, there was not one lacking; then he sighed for his homeland.” The Germanic people have even more heroic expressions for the dependence upon gold. Beowulf, at the hour of death, wishes to look his fill upon treasures he has won:

Full well he knew that his days' burden of earth-luck was borne to the end, ended the number of his days, death trod upon his heels . . . Run with speed, Wiglaf, beloved, to the serpent stone, where the treasure is hid; haste thee swiftly that the treasure of eld, the brand of the gold, the gleam of the stones, may fill mine eyes, and life and rule pass away more gently for the treasure.

This heroic tendency to care for gold and bronze and heap them up in roomy vaults and halls beats through the souls of men, without, however, involving any apparent effacement of all great feelings, or any withering of the mind. Egil, perhaps the deepest, and certainly one of the most wholly human personalities of old time, this Egil has in the fragmentary verses he left behind him, given us a Song of Songs upon the theme [14] of greed. Love of gold lends expression to the feeling of friendship, as when Egil pours his intense sorrow at the fall of Arinbjorn into the little verse: Scattered and thin shine now the men who flamed as a fire in the light, they who strewed the embers of the gold far apart. Where shall I know seek men quick to give, as those who sent the snow of the melting-pot (silver) hailing down over my hawk-seat (*i.e.* the arm of the hunger).

If greed assumed heroic proportions, its opposite, generosity, was no less grandly framed. In a king, this quality must necessarily prevail to such a marked degree that no one could ever make any mistake as to who was meant by the "giver of treasures". The worst that could ever be said of a prince was that he was sparing his gold. The sons of Eric made themselves generally hated and despised throughout Norway by keeping their money buried in the earth "like peasants of no account". Part of the king's luck was the will and power to strew "Frodi's meal" about in the light of day, and thus the men in the *Beowulf* could from the miserliness of the king conclude that lucklessness was eating him up from within. In the monarchical Norway, it might perhaps be a suspicious usurpation of a royal prerogative to exert this power to its full extent, but to a certain degree, openhandedness was necessary in any great man. It amounted to a proud self-declaration, indicating that a man reckoned his luck roomy enough to shelter others under his wing.

These two opposite traits in the Northmen's view of gold and treasures, cannot be smoothed over by individual psychology. Each of them can be separately developed to a degree of perfection almost unknown to us, without cancelling each other or limiting each other's justification; generosity did not involve blame or illwill towards fondness for gold, even where the latter amounts to what we should call positive greed. When the radii run so near the parallel, the centre must lie deep indeed. The sharpest contrasts in human life mark the deepest unity.

There is hardly a sorrow in the world that gold has not power to cure. In the *Volsungasaga* we find the might words: [15] "Giver her gold, and soften thus her wrath." So Gudrun, weeping, to Sigurd, when Brynhild sits kneading her plans of vengeance firmer and firmer, and all are waiting with dread for the end. But Brynhild was beyond the measure of women, and her indignation beyond all woman's pain, and therefore, and for that alone, gold was powerless to move her. In gold, Egil could find comfort and forget his better sorrow at his brother's death. After the battle of Winheath, he sat stern and wrathful in *Æthelstan's* hall, did not lay aside his weapons, but smote his sword up and down in its sheath, while his eyebrows worked convulsively; he would not drink when drink was offered him – until *Æthelstan* took a great and good ring from his own arm and passed it across the fire; then his eyebrows settled into their place, and he could enjoy the drink. *Æthelstan* added thereto much silver, and then Egil began to be glad. He broke out into the enthusiastic verse, that bears the poet's marked features in every line: The overhanging cliffs of the eyelids hung down in anger. Now I found him who could smooth the furrows of the brow. With an arm ring the prince has thrust open the barring rocks of the face. Dread is gone from the eyes.

But no less surely can a gift plough up hatred of the giver in him who receives it, when it does not come at a fitting time. We, too, feel, perhaps, somewhat offended if a mere casual acquaintance seeks to honour us with gifts presuming that his warmth of feeling is absolutely sufficient to produce a reciprocal warmth in us. But here there is something more, a flare of anger, exhibiting hatred and bitterness outwardly, and fear within. The illwill finds its most

violent expression the case of unwelcome gifts from a king. When Kjartan, on his first meeting with Olaf Tryggvason, was given his cloak as a present, his friends expressed their marked disapproval of his having so freely demeaned himself, placing himself in the king's power and under his friendship. On another occasion, the recipients of kingly gifts are scornfully called thralls. But the king too could flare up when any dared to show him a challenging honour by offering him a "gift of a friend".

The two poles in the effect of a gift are united in the story [16] of Einar Skálaglam and Egil. The promising young poet once visited his famous brother artist, and not finding him at home, left as a present a splendid shield. But Egil was wrath. "Ill-fortune fall on him," he exclaimed, and by way of doing what he could towards the fulfilment of the wish, he proposed to ride after him and slay him. Einar, however, had gone too far for the matter to be thus easily settled; what then was to be done? Egil sat there with the gift, could not get rid of it, and – "the friendship between Egil and Einar lasted as long as they lived."

It is not the treasure which causes fear or anger in the receiver; it is something in it which he timorously feels clutching at his arm as he touches it.

Such transfer carries with it more than the mere passing of property in externals; the gift has an inner value in proportion to the giver, something which is expressed in the name which goes with weapons and valuables. In Iceland, the name is generally formed by combination with *nautr*; this suffix is derived from the verb *njota*, to enjoy or to be able to use, and expresses a spiritual connection between the thing and the original possessor, and the deeper meaning involved is made clear by such expression as the Anglo-Saxon *wæpna neólan* (in the verse of "the Battle of Maldon"), to make good use of his weapon. *Andvaranautr* is the name given in the saga to the fateful ring which Loki took from Andvari; *Konungsnautr* was the name given in real life to weapons or garments received from the king's hand.

A gift carries with it something from the former owner, and its former existence will reveal itself, whether the new possessor wishes it or not. A king's gift has not only a more than usually sharp point, a particularly finely worked hilt – it strikes with luck. In order to know with what feelings the gift was received, we must go to the gift while it was in the possession of the clan itself, and see what it counts for there. When Glum took leave of his mother's father, Vigfus, in Norway, the latter gave him a cloak, a spear and a sword, with the words: "I feel that we shall never meet again, but these valuables I will give you [17] and while you own them, I am sure that you will not lose your good fame; but if you part with them, I have great fears for your future." And Glum and his kinsmen are not alone in their faith in these heirlooms. When he, later in life, presents them to his best friends by way of thanks for valuable assistance in one of his many difficult affairs with his neighbours, his opponents consider that the time is ripe for a successful action against him. They are not mistaken; for the first time it happens that Glum is overmatched. And with this, his luck is really at an end once and for all, at any rate, he never again became the great man he had been. Hoskuld, on his deathbed, gives his illegitimate son, Olaf the Peacock, the gold ring called Hakon's *nautr* and the sword King's *nautr*, and with them his own luck and that of all his kin: "and this I do not say as being unaware that the luck of the family has taken up its dwelling with him." The murmur of the eldest son shows how significant Hoskuld's disposition was considered in those times.

The new ting of unreality – symbolism – that is almost imperceptibly beginning to creep into Hoskuld's and his sons' relations with the gifts in question can be seen growing up even in the saga times. The transition had set in, whereby "it means" imperceptibly thrusts itself forward in front of the more robust "it is." Nevertheless, there is no lack of clear reminders that the gift retained throughout its relation to a certain circle of people. In the words of the saga of Grettir: "the sword was their treasure, and had never been out of the family," there lies an understanding of what such a sword really was, and how sacred, and as long as the unity between kinsmen still draws on the old customs, reverence for the heirlooms as such preserved something of the old conviction. The axe which Thorgrim Helgason, in 1450, gave Olaf Thorevilson "in full and complete reconciliation", was not an ordinary weapon, it had

been the axe of Olaf's family, -- as the contracting parties find it worth putting down in the legal document.

Right down to the late traditions, the connection between the family and its possession has retained its value as the poetic essential. In Denmark, we read of the Rautzau family, that [18] its fortunes were bound up with certain heirlooms, a golden spinning wheel and a golden sabre – or, according to other sources, a handful of gold pieces – which a countess of the blood had once been given by the folk from underground in return for aiding one of their women in childbirth. A variant of the legend has the peculiar addition that those branches of the family which carefully preserved their part of the inheritance always threw out fresh shoots, while others, less punctilious, became extinct. Family treasures are more often met with in local legends, as in the case of the wild boar's pelt that guards the manor of Voergaard in Jutland against fire and other mishap. Whether these legend be the direct outcome of ancient family tradition, or perhaps are localised folk-tales, the idea is the same as that which once inspired the Icelandic pictures of real life.

Poetic symbolism and experience meet in strange wise in the story of Sigmund the Volsung and his treasured weapon. He goes through life with victory and luck residing in the old sword, Odin's gift. The last battle is struck from his hand by the god himself, meeting him in the midst of the affray and shattering the sword with his spear. When the battlefield is searched, and he is found bleeding, he refuses to have his wounds bound up: "Many indeed have kept their lives where hope seemed slight; but luck has deserted me." But in his son, the broken luck is to become whole again; when he grows up, the fragments of the weapon are to be forged together. "He will wield the sword and do many a mighty deed, and his name shall live while our world stands." His wife, Hjordis, carefully preserves the pieces, and when the time is come, Regin forges from them the famous Gram, wherewith Sigurd slays the serpent Fafnir. The poet refines his reflection almost into profound wit in emphasising the parallel between the human and its image; but the profundity is of that warm sort that rather feels than thinks its way to a result.

Beside the Volsungasaga, the saga of Hord appears as the stay-at-home beside one versed in the ways of the world. There, the thought comes simply and naturally, in a form which has not been polished by any clever poet. Before her hated marriage

[19] with old Grimkel, Signy gives her brother all she possesses, with the exception of two treasures, a neck ornament and a horse, which she valued most. And in what manner she valued them appears from the course of the story. She is angered at her own son, Hord, when he, having but late learned to walk, on his first expedition across the floor towards her, stumbles and grasps at the ornament lying on this mother's knee, and breaks it. "Ill was your first going, and many such shall come after, but the last shall be worst of all," she exclaims. The prophecy is fulfilled, in that Hord is outlawed, and obliged, much against his will, to take up robbery. The chattel is Signy's, but the luck that is bound up in it affects the race.

As the Volsungs, as the descendants of Viking Kari – Vigfus and Glum – so also each family had, in ancient times, its lucky things, which it regarded as security for good fortune and prosperity; but the luck was not of any other sort than that which inspired all family belongings, down to the humblest implement. The sword and the cloak represented the wealth of the family, that is to say, according to the old mode of thought, that they held in themselves the power of wealth.

Luck was not restricted to such valuables as were stored within doors, it might also be out in the fields. Answering to valuable articles of property were such lucky beasts as not only counted for more than ordinary cattle for the welfare of the herd, but were also an assurance to the peasant of life and blessing. One of Signy's valuables was an ornament, the other a stallion, and when the latter perished on her way to the wedding, she would have turned back at once, knowing that nothing but sorrow and misfortune awaited her in that marriage. A good friend of the sons of Ingimund, Brand, had a horse named Frey's Faxi, which once did what an ordinary horse would be equal to. Jokul and Thorstein were most anxious to be up to time, and not to fail the other party at a single combat, which had been offered and accepted



with many sounding words; the more so since, from the snow falling ever thicker about them, they could see that certain persons were [20] evidently eager that they should not appear, and were doing all in their power to make them call a halt on the way. In spite of all difficulties Faxi forced their way through, set them down on the spot, and took them back home again, after they had set up a cursing pole – *niðstöng* – the sign of derision, for the laggard to find when he appeared. Brand knew what he was talking about when he bade them leave all to himself and his horse, when it was a question of making their way onward through obstacles of witchcraft; and others too, no doubt, knew what they were saying when they called the yeoman after his beast, and changed his name to Faxibrand. It is such chieftains among the livestock of the homestead which are honoured with gold ornaments on the horns and plaitings on the mane.

In many stories we have to read our way to the truth through the distortions of superstition, or those of Christian zeal. The account of Olaf the Peacocks's terrifying dream has itself perhaps taken on something of a legendary fashion, but there is no mistaking the reality. At Olaf's homestead, there was a huge ox that went about as an object of general, and perhaps somewhat timorous, respect on the part of the men about the place. Olaf at last decided to have it slaughtered, and then there came to him in a dream a woman, who declared herself to be the mother of the ox, and warned him of the approaching death of his favourite son.

Half myth, half fairy tale is the story of the good ox Brandkrossi, which caused the yeoman Grim so great a sorrow; he had taken special care of it always, and could not do enough for it; and then one day it set off out to sea and did not return. All attempts at consoling the peasant for his loss, urging that he could easily get another, that he might be proud to think that the bay which had seen the ox disappear should for the future bear its name, Krossavik: all went in one ear and out the other; Brandkrossi was lost, whatever they might say. We further learn that the peasant would not rest until he had journeyed to Norway to make enquiries there about his precious ox, that he at last found it in a giant's cave, and that the giant's daughter became the founder of the an Icelandic family. Behind [21] this rather confused narrative we clearly discern a family legend – or a tale founded on a family legend – connecting the origin of the race with the existence of a cow, and the animal's desperate fondness for long distance swimming is probably due to the necessity of linking the emigrant family with their ancestral seat in Norway.

Even though several of these lucky beasts may be but pale and washed-out ghosts of reality, they have faithfully preserved certain links with their home; there is a relic of life in the faith which united them to their owner; he trusted in them, we are told, and in the same way, the dependance of the owner may be emphasised in the words: this was a treasure, he set great store by. These eminent animals were doubtlessly hedged about with special protective measures in the way of fines, out of regard to their importance for the welfare of the whole herd; but what was their protective and guiding power save a higher expression of the owner's cattle-luck as well as his honor? It was not an accidental coincidence that Faxibrand's horse was a mighty combatant at the horse-fights, strong as a bear, and at the same time especially dear to his master. In the generalised decrees of the laws, the direct relationship to man cannot appear, but on the other hand, the laws were not able altogether to overcome the personal element. Not only were the cattle of the Frankish king valued at a higher fine than those of other men, but his oxen were more costly than his horses, and we recognise their dignity in the oxen that drew the car of the Merovingians, when the chieftain set out upon a ceremonial procession.

In the carefully weighed words wherewith the law set a thief apart as a monster, deserving of no human consideration, the jealous regard for the luck in things finds a more passionately moved expression than any poem could give. Woe to him who lays a man in bonds, but a thief is dragged to the law-thing with his hands bound behind him. He is treated as a being beyond the pale of humanity, one who can be stricken down as a monster or even mutilated as to his person as a spectacle unto the world. A thief is always a thief. The law can attain to the establishing of a practical distinction between theft on [22] a large scale and

petty larceny, but the distinction affects only the external consequences of the action; the fundamental point is common to both; there is no right in a thief. His act is that of a niding, and he is classed together with the murderer, who steals upon his victim in the dark, and slips away without leaving his weapon in the wound to tell the tale, whereas the robber, who openly falls upon his fellows and snatches their goods out of their hands by force is reckoned one with the homicide, who takes life. The intense Germanic hatred of one whose fingers are longer than his courage originates in the fear of secret wrecking of honour and luck. These men know, as did the men of southern Sweden in later times, that he who steals a man's fishing gear impairs its power of capture, and destroys the owner's fishing luck, just as one who uses a strange bull without leave robs the beast of its reproductive power. The niding-like character of attacking a man through his cattle or his good lies in the fact that the criminal attacks him from behind, and steals strength from him at a moment when his is unable to defend himself and show his right.

Attacks on cattle were no less hated than feared. Cattle-wolf, cattle-niding (Icelandic *gorvargr*, Danish and Swedish *gorniðingr*) is the name given in Scandinavian laws to him who secretly interferes with another man's cattle. The names tell us that the act is reckoned worse than homicide, for *vargr* and *nidingr* are particularly used to denote one who commits a crime against honour, as distinct from one merely offending. The Icelanders recognise the right of vengeance on the spot, but in certain cases, punish the act with unconditional outlawry. In the Norwegian laws, we still find indications that the deed was reckoned beyond the limits of a fine, sending the criminal irrevocably to the forest. And the Danish Erie's Law has the principle clearly, when it states with regard to killing of cattle to the value of half a mark, that "this is villainy, and villainy shall be paid for to the king".

In order to understand the people, it is not enough to know what the law condemns, but one must also see the motives which impel a man to break the law. The calculating criminal's [23] estimate of the value of the crime itself displays, at times, the most powerful testimony as to the secret strength of the offence, and its depth. There is a story from Iceland which, from the very fact of its having, so to speak, one leg outside strict morality, exposes the person, and shows something in him lying deeper than the average of social morality. In the history of Iceland, the "fight on the heath" about the year 1015, stands out as a notable event, which stirred men's minds to a great extent, and also had its effect upon the public life, -- the nearest Al-Thing was reckoned one of the most remarkable ever held, not because Bardi, who here avenged his brother Hall and took nine men's lives in exchange, was at all a prominent character, but because he, by the help of his foster-father, the wise Thorarin, had carried through his cause in the face of almost insuperable difficulties. He had no influence, he was, as he himself says, not a man of money, whereas his opponents, Thorbjorn and Thorgaut, were men of standing, with a host of friends, who had already long forced the young heir to Asbjarnarnes to bear with insult and be treated as an inferior. But in return, the vengeance taken in this affair was established firmly with all the luck of careful precaution. It was due to Thorarin's depth of wisdom in counsel that the day of reckoning came upon the opposite side like a thief in the night. To being with, he put a stop to all great assemblies in the district, the nurseries of rumour; then he spirited away a couple of rare horses, "all white, with black ears" which belonged to his neighbour, and further kindly undertook to search for them far and near; for if one had to have spies out all the time there in the south, it was better that they should be out on a respectable errand, than merely wandering about in search of a couple of old hacks -- as he explained to his young friend. Naturally, the owner was pleasantly surprised to get his horses back -- when Thorarin had no longer any use for them; as to the matter of a reward for having found them, there was no need to trouble about that; and so the foundation of one useful friendship was laid. When Thorarin had accomplished his preparations, he had about him, in the neighbouring homesteads, a little army of friends and willing helpers, [24] who needed but a word of reminder when the time came. But with all these preparations, Thorarin did not forget to arrange matters so that the vengeance could have an overweight to make up for the delay in effecting it. When Bardi, after riding round to gather together all those helpers whose assistance had been arranged for, met his foster-

father, he noticed at once that the old man was sitting with a strange sword across his knees. Thorarin answered the thought before it was uttered: "You have not seen that sword before? True, I have not had it very long; let us two exchange weapons and then you shall hear whence it comes; my son has another, that really belongs to Thorbjorn; this one is Thorgaut's." Thereupon he told of the pleasure he had in making the acquaintance of Lying-Torfi. Torfi was a kinsman of the opponents mentioned, a man with a crafty brain and a brave tongue, and was also to be trusted as one entirely free from any conscientious scruples. How he had lied and how he had wriggled need not be told; here was the sword. "And," said Thorarin, "it is most fitting, to my mind, that their insolence should be pruned with their own knives; you could take no better vengeance for the dishonour they have brought upon you and yours." On the field of battle, Bardi proudly dashes forth and treats his enemies to a sight of their own weapon in his hand, he moves it hither and thither goading them into fury with "that they surely know," – and "there they both were slain with their own weapons."

Even though one read with half-closed eyes, one must perceive that the story differs from ordinary stories of theft in something more than the rank of the thief and his superior art. In watching Thorarin, we have the same uncanny feeling as when we see a human being procure demoniac power by stealing into another's soul and using his innermost secret to crush him helpless to the dust.

Thus enlightened by the tricks of Thorarin, we find it easier to understand a sort of invulnerability, which might otherwise easily appear as the privilege of half or wholly supernatural beings. An ogre like Grendel or his mother can only be overcome by mortal heroes with the aid of weapons wrung from [25] the very hand of the enemy, or found in the beast's den. The Northmen have the same explanation of this phenomenon as that which contents the Anglo-Saxon heart; it is not merely the hardness of the bones that turns the edge, there is witchcraft behind it, they say. But the reality of life shows through the romantic element, when we read in a fairy tale of a family of half-trolls, that the father had sung himself and his kin to invulnerability against all weapons save their family sword, Angrvandill. Men with a good stout luck went unscathed from fight to fight, it was necessary to wait until, like Glum, they left themselves open, and when all is said and done, the surest way to deal a man a mortal wound is to strike him with his own weapons, or in other words, to use his own power against him.

In a tale such as that of the viking Svart Ironskull, who asked all his opponents if they knew Bladnir, trumped up and sophisticated thought it is, there is then an easily recognisable undertone of everyday fact. Bladnir was a family weapon, which, when Svart last heard of it, was in the possession of his brother Audun, and Svart was always on his guard against the chance of its turning up against him; it was plainly a case of gaining time, in case of need, for using some magic formula which should render it harmless in the hand of a robber. But he was overcome by craft at last, and that, shame to say, by the treachery of his own brother. Audun had once given Bladnir to his friend Thorgils, and then it came about that Thorgils one fine day was staying at a place where Svart had announced his own coming to visit the daughter of the house, and he willingly undertook to do the honours for the guest. The night before the meeting, he was surprised to be visited in a dream by his friend Audun, acquainting him with his anxiety with regard to this brother, a good-for-nothing, who simply wandered about the country making the place unsafe for the daughters of honest men. Bladnir could overcome him if only one were careful to place it in the sand of the fighting ground, and then assure the other party that one did not know its hilt was above the ground.

Many a man behaved in real life as did Arngrim in the saga. Arngrim harried the land of Svaflami, and when they met in [26] battle, Svarflami wielded his famous sword Tyrting. Svarflami struck at Arngrim, but he met the blow with his shield and the sword slashed off the tail of the shield and fastened in the earth. Arngrim severed the hand of the king, snatched up Tyrting and dealt his enemy his death-wound. And the supposition that such a manner of death might prove fatal to the family's hope of vengeance is hardly so bold as it is at present unfounded.

## CHAPTER II THE SWORD OF VICTORY

For an implement to be serviceable it must have luck in it or it would be idle and good for nothing. To the luck of a sword pertained sharpness, beauty, a good hilt, and then of course the corresponding quality of victory, progress. Once when the Vatsdoela Jokul was exposed to more than usually powerful witchcraft, he was surprised to find that his sword, the family blade called *Ættartangi*, failed him; though he struck his mightiest, he was not able to draw blood; he looked at the edge in wonder: "Is luck gone from you, *Ættartangi*?" In the same manner it happened with Beowulf's sword in the fight with Grendel's mother; for the first time it failed him; its *dóm*, its honour and power, were at an end. A ship must have luck to behave well in the water, to utilise a wind to the best advantage, both when tacking and when sailing before the wind; it must not be given to letting in water, or running in where landing was dangerous. The Vatsdoela family had a perfect ship of this sort, which Ingimund had obtained from King Harald. It was called *Stigandi*, "the smart ganger", and was unusually good at keeping up into the wind and with great luck in faring.

But we know that there was great difference between sword and sword. Some might simply be called weapons of victory, as the Beowulf calls them: such as assured their owners progress wherever they went. In the Nordic we mostly find, with a broader characterisation, "And there was this about the sword that he gained victory who bore it into the battle", or "It bit through iron as it were cloth, would not rust, and victory was [28] with it in battle and in single combat, whoever bore it"; but Thorarin, speaking to Torfi, can also explain his wish to possess the strange swords by merely saying, he had heard they were "victorious". Undoubtedly there was victory in spear and sword, and favourable wind in a ship, and he who acquired those prizes, enriched himself thereby with lucky qualities. Hence the eagerness for items from the burial mounds; the mounds were dug up, and if needed, the searcher entered upon a bout with the grave-dweller into the bargain – if we may trust the sagas – in order to possess himself of an old and tried weapon of victory. The good sword *Skofnung*, which was the pride of *Midfjardarskeggi*, and played a certain part in the life of his successors, was brought from the barrow of *Hrolf Kraki* himself; *Skeggi* had been in person to fetch it, and had seen both *Bodvar Bjarki* and the King; *Bodvar* was for attacking him, but the King held him back. The prize was undoubtedly worth while; so fierce was it that it would never return to the sheath without first having penetrated into living flesh; it declared of itself when the stroke was well delivered, by singing aloud, and no wound from it would ever heal; but on the other hand, it had its own ways; would not suffer a woman to see it drawn, nor bear the light of the sun on its hilt. --- Down in the south, *Paulus Diaconus* reminds his readers that "in our time, *Giselbert* opened the grave of (the Lombard hero-king) *Albuin*, and took his sword . . . and thereafter with his customary vanity boasted to the common people that he had seen *Albuin*."

But we must not imagine that such a treasure could be used by anyone; that the sword laid about it in battle and let the man simply follow. "The sword fights of itself – when it is wielded by a skilful hero," says the *Skirnismál*, and the sword *Hrunting*, Beowulf's faithful companion, "never failed in battle him who bore it, when he dared to go the peril-bristling way through the host of his foes." In everyday life, a homelier form of expression was generally used, but more precise; the weapon would be handed over with a warning to the effect that only a "skilful and fearless" man could use it. Stress was laid upon the needful harmony between the user and the thing used. [29] *Ingimund* once arranged a test for *Stigandi*; he wished to ascertain if it would ride the waves when he himself was not present; and the attempt succeeded; the crew returned from Norway with nothing but praise for the vessel. But it might also happen that both weapon and ship refused their service, as in the case of *Olaf Tryggvason's* ship, the *Long Serpent*, which declined to answer to the rudder after the death of *Olaf*. It was always a question whether one was skilful enough to "take" the weapon in the proper way, if one knew its luck, and respected it, or – expressed from another side – it was a question whether one's own character and that of the sword could agree. When *Kormak* wished to borrow *Skofnung*, *Skeggi* was very loth to allow it, for the very

reason that he had doubts on this point: "You are a quick-tempered man, but Skofnung is of the cooler mind." And it is certain that Skofnung and Kormak could not get on together, with the result that both suffered from the incompatibility.

The *sine qua non*, for using another man's weapon was that one had either wit to make its soul one's friend or power to compel it. One might perhaps be surprised by a sudden stubbornness on the part of the treasure, a dark will that ran athwart one's own; this was the spirit of the former owners, suddenly made manifest. A will once engrafted into the sword was hard to overcome; when Geirmund "lays this charge" upon Foot-bite, that it shall cost the life of the best man in Olaf Peacock's family, then the sword will have its will sooner or later. Bolli must one day come to wield it against his cousin Kjartan, and will be driven to use it for that deed which should "be long in his mind". The good sword Greyside, in the possession of Sur's sons, had been give the word by its former owner that it should bring days ill-pleasing to the kinsmen. After a long time it was turned into a spear, but before its transformation it had witnessed strife within the family, and afterwards caused the death of two men bound to it by friendship and marriage. Therefore it was, that on the transfer of a sword or necklace, its history was given; the receiver was made to understand what a treasure he was getting, what honour and luck were stored in it, but also [30] its nature, the will inherent in it. "This coat of mail was given me by Hrothgar, the wise king, charging me first to tell you what was its goodwill; he said that Heorogar, king of the Scyldings, had borne it for a long span of time," with so much ceremony does Beowulf offer his kinsman the coat of armour he had brought with him from the seat of the Scyldings.

A weapon called King's Bane or Sel's Avenger – the spear with which Selsbane had been avenged – tells its past history at once in its very name. The Anglo-Saxons, with their epic composure, have time to enroll the whole tale; in the little moment when Wiglaf springs forward to aid Beowulf, the poet finds time to call attention to the sword Wiglaf bore: "He drew the sword, a relic of Eanmund, Ohtheres son, the friendless, the exile, whom Weohstan slew in battle, and he took home his dark helm, his ring-woven mail, his old sword forged of giants; that Onela gave him, and spoke not of feud though it was his brother's son that was fallen. The treasure he held many years, till his son was able to do great deeds like his father before him. Then, in the midst of the Geats, he gave him wargarments unnumbered, and so he strode forth out of life." The sword, then, had come into the family when Weohstan, Wiglaf's father, slew Eanmund on the field of battle; and Onela, in whose host Weohstan stood, left him the prize, despite the fact that the slain man was his own brother's son.

It is, then, no abstract blessing, not mere good fortune in the ordinary sense, that abides in these heirlooms, but an actual luck, the soul of a particular clan. In the words of Grettir's mother, when she hands him the precious family relic *Ættartangi*, the stress is also laid upon the community between the sword and its owners: "This sword my father's father, Jokul, owned, and the ancient Vatsdoela men before him; and victory went with it." And this is the same as when the legends say that only the right man can take possession of the sword. The sword which Odin brought into the Volsung's hall and struck fast in the beam was sought after by many, but it would not yield to any until Sigmund came; and when Bodvar Bjarki, following the advice of his mother, comes to the cave where [31] his ill-fated bear-father had hidden his weapons, then the sword falls loose into his hand, as soon as he grasps the hilt. The first of these legends is doubtlessly fashioned in the form of a family myth, the second is composed as a fairy tale, but both are based upon thoughts familiar to all; when like met like, the two sides of the hamingja slipped into each other.

Praise of the sword's power to bring victory emphasises but one side of its being, the side facing outwards towards the rest of the world; in the respect for its dangerous quality there is understood a more characteristic, more personal estimate of the value of the thing as being bound up with a particular family. However lucky the average man may be within his own limitations, he would hardly have every sort of war-luck with him, and it is only the weapons of a chieftain that held in themselves every sort of victory and every manner of fighting. So that the addition with regard to Tyrting, that it was lucky both in battle and in single combat, is not so idle as might seem. But on the other hand, the gift of victory

attaching to a weapon presupposes versatility like that of the kinsmen themselves; both sword and spear and shield must possess the entire luck of the clan, also its healing power, fertility, food-luck, and wisdom. I should imagine that a sword or a hammer as well as a cloak could open the womb of a woman when more offspring were needed; she could be wrapped in the garment as in a cloud of power, she could receive the hammer into her lap, as the bride does in the *Thrymskvida*. I should also think that dipping the spear into a milk pail might ensure luck in preparing the food, and give all their fill at the table. In Norway, down to the latest times, the use of heirlooms in the daily economy of house and homestead was known. Here and there would be a family with an old knife, which healed all sorts of agues and cramp by the mere touch; and in a direct line with these knives is the victorious axe *Skrukke*, which has left behind it so mixed a record among the good people of *Kviteseid* in the *Telemark*. In the first place, it was largely responsible for the fact that the village was never overpopulated, secondly it was used to relieve the survivors from boils, and such pains as might be [32] brought on by the touch of certain nightly wanderers; it needed but to stroke the tender part some few times a day, and the limb would soon be as good as ever.

An explanation of the fact that the Norwegian knives and axes have retained their healing power so far down through the centuries might be sought in the numerous bones and fringes of saints, splinters of the Cross and evangelical books, which served throughout the Middle Ages to maintain the health of Europe. One thing, however, the instruments cannot have obtained from without, and that is their inner justification in the minds of those who used them, to wit, the fact that their power was derived from honour. Men had faith in the power of the knives to cure the palsy, for many men had been slain by them, that is to say, in old-fashioned words, they had wrought many great deeds, and drunk much blood – *fjör*. *Skrukke* had a remarkable power, because it had belonged to a very stern and murderous person.

In the Icelandic sagas, we learn but little of the daily round and everyday doings, which are now of particular interest from the point of view of culture history, because they were undertaken by all. Both the contents and the style of the sagas are marked by the concentration of life; they invariably show honour and luck in closest tension, and everyday happenings are never included for their own sake; only when they serve as springs to great deeds do they enter into immortality. Our knowledge of life in saga times is therefore not one-sided, but strangely fragmentary. We learn sufficient as to what a feast might give rise to, but curiously enough we do not know how an Icelandic wedding took place – not the smallest fragment of the ceremony is handed down to us. We hear enough about an heirloom to enable us, with our knowledge of the nature of luck, to form sure conclusions as to its value at home, but if we want authentic illustrations, we must look for them elsewhere than in Icelandic literature, and perhaps after all have to content ourselves with the peasants' doing as their fathers did. Yet we have one piece of evidence from the ancient times, which may be placed beside the Norwegian experiences of *Skrukke* and the [33] knives, and the memorial is the more engrossing from the fact that it refers to the birth of *Olaf the Saint* and his relations with his departed namesake. In the days when *Olaf*, later called the Saint, was awaiting birth, one of the former *Olafs* of the race, *Geirstadaalf*, appeared in a dream to a good man of the Uplands, named *Hrani*, a close friend of *Olaf's* father and mother, *Harald Grenski* and *Asta*. *Geirstadaalf* confided to *Hrani* his own history, and begged his aid to the securing of its renewal; he told him where and how he was buried, and urged him to break open the barrow in order to find a gold ring, a sword and a belt. He had even – if our story-teller be well informed – an intricate plan ready made, whereby *Hrani* was to secure the needful assistance; the barrow dweller himself would take good care to frighten the helpers off in a hurry as soon as they had rendered the service required of them, and ease *Hrani* of their prying curiosity. Whether now the good *Geirstadaalf* was so particular as to details, or whether he, after the manner of the departed, left something to the initiative and boldness of the mortals concerned, it is at any rate certain that *Hrani* managed to secure ring, sword and belt. He went with the treasure to *Harald Grenski's* homestead, where he found *Asta* lying on the floor unable to be delivered; and as soon as she heard of *Geirstadaalf's* wish, she

promised willingly that Hrani should be entrusted with the business of naming the child. He then went up to her and set the belt about her waist, and at once the child was born. It was a boy, and he called him Olaf, and gave him, from his namesake, the sword Bæsing and the gold ring.

As soon as we pass over to honour, the ancient time steps in with its many-tongued testimony. Through the life of viking days runs the keen sense of gratification at being honoured with gifts; how often do we not read that guests were honoured with gifts on their departure, and went on their homeward way in the well-being of that honour. The Anglo-Saxons, who are prone to use the most high-sounding words, let Beowulf tread the greensward forth from Hrothgar's hall proudly rejoicing in his treasure; the Northmen, on the other hand, whose strength lies in

[34] the fact that they use language as a damper to give emphasis, are content with the simple indication that the gifts seemed worthy of a great man, or that they were considerable. To Egil, the ring and the silver were true gifts of honour, an addition to his self-esteem, he straightened himself up under them, just as does the wife at the moment of receiving her "morning gift", wherewith a man honours his wife, as the Uppland Law of Sweden puts it. The receiver, indeed, obtained a solid lump of honour; he laid hands on a piece of precious metal composed of old achievements, old high-mindedness, old chieftainly prodigality, the glory of the owners and the words of praise uttered by admirers. The old fashion of speech, to the effect that "boldness went with the treasure" and passed into the ownership of the new possessor, is to be taken literally as it stands. And when a man set out in a fury on the track of a thief, endeavouring by all means to outwit him ere he had found time to profane what he had stolen, it was literally because he wished to get back his honour before it had been soiled, harmed, or possibly turned aside from its rightful owner by secret arts.

It was shame to lose one's weapons, even in battle, no less a shame than a misfortune. And it was shame to be wounded by one's own weapons, even though no lasting harm appeared to be done; and so we can perhaps have some idea of what untameable feeling boiled up in men's mind when a kinsman's blood was shed by a weapon belonging to the family itself. When a villainy had been committed, it entered into the weapons of the family, so that the kinsmen wielded them in fear, as if, in some inexplicable fashion, their own flesh and blood would come to lie in the wound; they never knew what moment the weapon might turn back as it swung, and strike its owner in its fury. The imprecation: "May the sword you draw never bite save when it whirls down on your own head," only discloses the lamentable state of the villain who has forfeited his luck and lost touch with his own possessions.

And if men's honour lay in such treasures, then, too, both frith and fate must lie there concealed. In sword and pick, the kinsmen took firm hold of luck itself, and if they kept their [35] grip, the implement would carve and hew the same way out for them that their kin had gone.

Upon this experience, that history and fate are bound up with the possessions, the Northmen have founded their most famous poem, that in which they have gained representation in the literature of the world. The Volsungasaga is interwoven throughout with the fate that begins when Hreidmar, on the point of death, invokes vengeance upon the son who has slain him. Again and again this fate marks its passage by an "ill-fortune"; the death of the patricide Fafnir, planned by Regin, his brother, and executed with the sword forged by Regin himself, Sigurd's fall, due to broken oaths, and the final settlement, when his perjured brothers-in-law, the Niblungs, are lured to their doom by Atli, and perish as his guests, one in the king's hall, the other in his den of serpents. And the fate, which unites these links into one continued hamingja, lies in the gold which Andvari cursed in long days past, which Hreidmar kept from his sons, which Fafnir hoarded in his dragon's cave, and

Grani bore to Gjuki's home, the treasure of the Niblungs, that at last drew fate to rest with it at the bottom of the Rhine.

Less spiritual, and more bound to the clan, altogether more original, we find expressed in Hervor's saga the old truth that possessor and the thing possessed supplement one another; that only the treasure can explain the man, and only by the man can the treasure be explained. The saga writer sees first the sword, Tyrfing, and beyond it the men who own it. In all its fearfulness it rises up; victorious, ever unconquerable, so fierce that its slightest nip carried death, and it never paused in its stroke till it touched earth; wilful, wayward, so that it would not endure to be bared out of season, and must ever have its fill of blood ere it would return to the sheath, and yet recklessly ready to rush forth into the light without need; and its fate was ever to bring down villainy upon the head of him who bore it. Thus was the family, ranging from Angantyr through Hervor down to Heidrek, composed of violent characters throughout, fighters from inner necessity, whose luck in light and dark kept pace with the fierceness of Tyrfing itself. Of Angantyr we know [36] little more than that he had borne the sword all his life, and took it with him into his barrow, not knowing that he had any offspring to succeed him; from the burial mound it is fetched away by his posthumous daughter, Hervor, and the ancient heirloom is thus brought back to life. But no sooner is it back in the world of humankind again, than it forces its will to the front; Hervor must punish curiosity with death when a man gives way to his unseasonable desire to see the naked blade, and by that killing she is entered to the wandering life of a viking. The time comes for her to fulfil her destiny, and raise the family to new life; she bears two sons to King Hofund, and in the younger, Heidrek, she finds one to whom she dares entrust the sword. At once it rushes out of the sheath under his hand, and he turns hamramr, like his ancestor, and is forced to leave home after having slain his brother. Tyrfing carves him a way to honor anew, and a kingdom into the bargain, but not until he had betrayed and slain his father-in-law. At last he is slain by his own thralls, who carry off the treasure, but the king's avenger finds them, and brings home the sword in token of the deed's accomplishment. And here the saga of Tyrfing comes to an end. With Heidrek's son, Angantyr, the saga moves over into other, as we might say, more historical subjects, and in that continuation, Tyrfing appears only as a sword among other swords.

The main stem of that race which was known to posterity as the Ynglings, and which ruled over the Upsala treasure, is composed of a series of bold men, who were unfortunate in their relatives-in-law, a fate which rendered women's counsels rarely to their advantage. Vanlandi harried Finland, and there took wife to Drifa, daughter of Snow the Old; she waited for him from spring to spring till ten winters had passed, then sent witchcraft to seek him, and the mare trod him to death. Visbur took up the inheritance after the father, and inherited also his vacillating temper: he left his first wife for another, and also kept back her "bridal gift" – *mundr* wherefore she egged on her sons to burn their father in his house. The fate of Vanlandi and Visbur is repeated line for line in that of Agni. He went [37] on an expedition to Finland, and there took Frosti's daughter Skjalf against her will; but on the night when he celebrated her father's "arvel" and had lain down drunk to sleep with Visbur's necklace about his neck, Skjalf tied a rope to the collar, and set her men to hoist the king up to the roof tree. Of Agni's two sons, Alrek and Eric, we learn only that they were found in the forest with their skulls split open, and each with a bloody horse-bit in his hand. Alrek's two sons, Alf and Yngvi, who ruled after him, pierced each other through at home in the hall, because Alf's queen too often reminded her husband that she would be a happy woman who should marry his brother. Tyrfing, in the Hervor family, has its counterpart in the family of the Ynglings in the necklace in which Agni was strung up. Visbur's sons uttered the curse that in their father's race, peace should ever be broken, and ill-fortune ever lie in that ornament which the king had withheld from his wife.

In the legends, the identity between the psychic and the material is clearly apparent. The poets call gold the ore of strife in the emphatic sense that the treasure was the cause and necessity in the actions of the parties concerned; but the fate is inherent in the owners: the kinsmen are in the power of their treasure in the same way that they are slaves to their own



will. In spite of curses all are eager to gain possession of the rings and weapons. Given a gentle warning, the recipient would answer exactly as does Sigurd, that every man will have wealth until the inevitable day shall come, or as the Gjukungs: "It is good to rule over the Rhine-gold, with joy to possess wealth and enjoy luck." And thus they relegate the curse to its proper place as something in, and not above, the hamingja, the shadow of great strength. Hervor goes to Angantyr's barrow to demand the old weapon of her clan, -- all Angantyr's warnings are wasted on her. Tyrfing will destroy the whole of her race. -- but she does not listen. With the sword in her hand, she breaks out into verse ringing with the old joy of race: "you did well, son of vikings, thus to hand me the sword from out the grave, there is more joy to me in the feel of it in my hand than in having all Norway for my own. Now the chieftain's maid is [38] glad at heart, little I fear what is to come, what reckoning my sons may take one against another." And Angantyr cannot but join in: "You shall bear a son, the time shall come when he shall bear Tyrfing safely in strength; greater luck than his is not born under the sun." When later Heidrek slays his brother with the sword, the shame of his black deed cannot break through the all-surpassing joy; his mother bade him never to forget what bite there was in his sword, what renown had followed all those who bore it, and what greatness of victory lay therein.

Ultimately, it is the feeling of community between man and thing which is the decisive factor. Angantyr is in dread lest his daughter shall be lacking in knowledge of how to treat the sword, but he knows that if she do as she should, and is capable of carrying out what she undertakes, she carries with her "the lives of twelve men, their *fjör*, their power and strength, all the good that Arngrim's sons left behind" -- the whole treasure of the race. Angantyr and his eleven brothers, the sons of Arngrim, really step from the barrow to enter on a new career, when Hervor carries out their sword and flashes it in the light of the sun once more.

Beautiful as the fate poems are, sure as we may be that save for the aid of the immortal exceptions we should never participate in the unspoken element that bears the life of the common man, there may yet creep into our minds at times the wish to exchange one of them for an outburst from some clan that did not aspire to the fame of tragedy, but was content to conquer in order to live.

Fortunately the yeoman has left behind his history. A large number of highly respected families in Iceland were proud to claim kinship with the Hrafnista men, sturdy fisherman-peasants from the outlying islands in the northernmost part of Norway, and had their traditions registered in series of small sagas. And though the late story-tellers of Iceland, intoxicated with the glamour of the mediæval romances that poured in from England and France, have tried their best to spoil these homely records by polishing them up into fashionable literature, those ancient roisterers were too stubbornly real to be transformed into [39] wandering knights. The seafarers of the northern waters, Keting Hæing, Grim Lodinkinni and the rest go adventuring with a truly Arthurian swagger, but the motives that lead them into thrilling adventures are anything but knightly. Generally it is simple hunger that rouses their spirit of enterprise, for in their northern home the crop fails often as not, and then everybody, chief and peasant alike, must harvest the sea for daily bread. And for these heroes to rise to the full of their adventurous activity needs the inspiration of an actual famine year in all its glory, when the seed freezes off and the fish move away from the shores, so that food is far to seek. It is on the fishing grounds that the combats take place, where the young Hrafnista man sits a whole day to catch one poor scraggy cod and afterwards takes vengeance on the other fishermen for their jeers by consecrating the catch to them, and sending the cod over into their boat, so deftly that the blow whisks the steersman overboard. The adventures that keep their heroic powers on the boil are fights for a stranded whale on desolate coasts; voyages in rowing boats in foul weather, when whales with human eyes pursue the boat, and the fisherman ends on the rocks among the wreckage of his craft. And the men answer to their experiences; not sword-wielders but archers and hunters, who may well have learned of the spirits up in the Finmark, to follow up their prey and hit what they aimed at; a race of brawny, fearless North Sea fishermen, who showed their prowess by launching big boats single-handed, and whose luck consisted in getting a fair wind the

moment they hoisted sail, and bringing down by their arrows any edible creature of earth or air. And their world then is not to be mistaken. When Hallbjorn teaches his son of the waters to the northward, his words are uttered with the reliability that stamps one who knows: "First comes Næstifiord, thereafter Midfiord, and the third is Vitadsgjafi." This world is a landscape of fiord on fiord and fiord again, each more terrifying than the one before; on the narrow beach at the inner end of the fiord are huts, where the fisherman can lie and listen to the air above him wild with the passage of monsters; he never know what unbidden guest he may find in the hut, and [40] the farther the place, the more surprising are the creatures that receive him with the inhospitality of the usurper. It consists of a strip of coast, where men rule as long as they have power to strike, and a hinterland of barren mountain, inhabited by ogres and ogresses greedy for human flesh, coming down often enough to take possession of the fiord and islets. True dragons of the established type are to be found in that happy land which the sagas call indiscriminately Gautland or Valland (Welshland) or Blackman's land, if one will but step a little out of the way to seek them; up here, one meets with monsters both when one is in the mood for something a little out of the ordinary, and when one is properly engaged on other matters; and one must take them as they are by nature, as horrid ogres and nothing else. Now it may happen that a fisherman comes out in the morning and finds two ogresses busy shaking his boat to pieces, now it is a monster taking up its post by the spring to drive him home in a fright with his bucket unfilled.

These stories are not like legends that can enter the service of whatever hero it may be; they are firmly fixed to the ground, and attached to men. We can see, too, from occasional hints in the saga literature, that the memories as well as the peculiarities stuck to that clan which traced its descent back to the Hrafnista men. The craft of archery ran in the blood, in fact most of the noted bow-men in Iceland, including Gunnar of Hlidarendi, have Hrafnista blood in their veins. Despite the fact that Orm Storolfson has become an ornamental figure of adventure, he stands out clearly none the less as descended from Ketil Hæing; a mighty archer who astonished Einar Thambarskelfir by letting him find an arrow in his bow, and the bow drawn to the arrow's point; a wielder of baulks who showed Earl Eric how one man on a ship against fifteen could set the water alive with swimmers if he had but a thirty-foot beam in his hand. And that Thorkel Thorgeirson, who had a carving made on his high seat showing his battle with the trolls on the evening when they sought to hinder him from filling his water pail, he too could rightly reckon up his pedigree to the Hrafnista father. [41]

The treasures of the Hrafnista family were the sure-flying arrows Flaug, Fifa and Hremsa, which were always ready to hand for use whether against men or giants. They were called Gusisnautar, and the legend can account for their name and their origins as well, recording the happy hour when the earliest of the kinsmen met the Lapland king Gusir up in the Finmark, and the two shot each other's arrows down in the air, until Gusir's shot flew wide, and Ketil's struck him in the breast. In them lies the simple luck of a clan, without any tragedy or curse, the fate of going forward from strength to strength, to live long, have children, and see kinsmen's luck in the them, to rejoice in one's fame and taste the sweets of renown – as every man himself would choose his fate if he could. We must not be led astray by our predilection for the interesting, and forget that the essence of culture is the everyday. In viking days, men listened with delight to stories of the tragedy that balances its way between luck and unluck, but they did not conceal the fact that they wished for themselves swords and arrows free of curse, without anything "laid upon them", as the saying ran. The perfect man of luck, he it is who deserves the place of honour in the history of culture, and we shall hardly come so near, to the normal human life as in these homely legends.

### CHAPTER III NAME AND INHERITANCE

At the point where the new-born child is adopted by the clan he is brought into contact with the power that resides in the possessions of the race. When the father gives the little one a name, and thus determines his fate by speaking a soul into him, he confirms his act by a gift, and thus makes his "I look for, I wish", a reality. The gift is intended to "fix" the name, as the act is expressly called in the North, and what happens at the ceremony is nothing more nor less than this; that the portion of luck and soul which is set in the name is actually hung upon the bearer, and by contact set in himself. If the weapon or ornament wherewith the child is consecrated to its future had been the property of a kinsman newly deceased, one whose memory had not faded away into the common honour of the clan, then the young kinsman steps immediately into the place of his predecessor, takes up his portion, and raises him up; he receives all his *heillir*, as that youth, thirsting for life, promised the child who should renew his name. In the story of Sigmund's naming of Helgi, we have the transfer of luck in its threefold confirmation; he names, he gives, and he "wishes" that the boy may prove worthy of the honour of the Volsungs. Helgi was born while Sigmund was at the wars, so the saga tells, and the king went from the battle to meet his son with a lily, gave him with it the name of Helgi, and in confirmation, Hringstad, Sulfjoll, and a sword, and wished that he might be furthered in strength and take after the race of the Volsungs. Of another famous Helgi, to wit, Helgi Hjorvardson, we are [43] told that as a youth he was silent, no name was fixed upon him, he was one of those exceptional characters who go about soulless in their youth, as if no luck had entered into them, and as if the name had fallen loose away from them, if they had ever been given one. Then one day while he sat idly on the hill, a valkyrie came to him and said: "You are slow in winning rings and treasures, Helgi." He answers: "Where is your gift to go with the name of Helgi?" "Swords I know lying on Sigar's holm," she returns, "one of them is better than all, gold-inlaid, a spoiler of weapons. A ring is on the hilt, courage in the middle, fear at the point, all these he shall enjoy who owns the sword, and along the blade lies a serpent, bloodred, its tail curled about the base." Then he becomes a human being, and sets out to avenge his mother's father.

As often as the youth shows himself fit to receive more soul, he meets the gift as a confirmation of his kinsmanship. The appearance of the first tooth was regarded by some of the Germanic peoples as a happy event, and was celebrated by a "tooth-gift". Olaf the Saint's tooth-gift was nothing less than the family belt that had brought about his mother's delivery.

The promotion of a boy to right and seat among the men was probably the next step, and undoubtedly the day he laid aside his childhood for ever was accompanied by an increase of *hamingja*. Step by step he accumulated honour to himself, until he stands as full personification of the clan.

In the same way as the infant was consecrated, so the grown man had to be born into the clan. Theodoric once honoured the king of the Herules by an adoption; undoubtedly this ceremony, formal as it may seem in our eyes, was for Theodoric himself something more than a mere titular appointment, and the diploma prepared for the occasion by the chancellery of the Goths still bears the old reality stamped in the words: "It has always been regarded as a great honour to be accepted as a son by arms . . . and we give you birth as a son by this gift, as is the custom of peoples and manly fashion . . . we send you horses, swords, shields and the other implements of war." From Norway, the circumstantial ceremony which secured to the new- [44] comer full right of kinship is known in outline, and we know also that the confirmation of name was not forgotten. When the leader of the clan had uttered the old formula: "I lead this man into all my inheritance, to all the goods I give him, to inheritance and land, gift and return, sitting and seat, and to that right which the law-book provides, and which one so adopted shall have according to law," he gave power to his words by adding: "and in witness of this adoption I give into his hands a cup."

With the honourable surname, the giver, by virtue of his own surplus of luck, set something new into the receiver, and he too confirmed his act by a gift. "You are indeed a poet hard to please – a wayward scald, -- but you shall be my man for all that, and you may

keep the name," says Olaf Tryggvason to Hallfred, half in admiration of his obstinacy; and Hallfred at once breaks in: "What do you give me with that name?" The inner connection between the giving of a nickname and the adoption into one's own luck shows clearly through this little scene; both the king and Hallfred quite understand the exchange of words as carrying with it admittance to the king's immediate following.

The Lombards appear to have regarded themselves as the apple of Odin's eye, and the legend wherein they have proclaimed position as a chosen people is itself based upon the obligation of the name-giver towards the named. Odin had once just when they on their wanderings were about to enter upon a decisive battle, called them by name, saying: "What longbeards are these?" And as soon as the warriors heard the voice from above, they cried: "He who has given us a name must also give us victory."

Any wish, any blessing, was to a certain extent akin to this naming, inasmuch as their power lay in a psychic transference of what lay in the words. The giver must in some way or other make his words whole, and generally speaking, there was a tendency to regard his good will with suspicion, if he did not offer some tangible token of his well-wishing. If a man wished another joy of a thing gained or done, he would be required, [45] in ease of need, to strip the clothes from his body, or, as Harald Gilli, clear the board before him, if he would not stand as an empty hero of words. When Bishop Magnus was about to set off for his see in Iceland, he came to take leave of King Harald, and while the Bishop uttered his parting words, the king was looking about him – what could he give? The treasury, he knew well, was at a low ebb. So he emptied his drinking cup and gave it as a parting gift. The bishop then turned to the queen, who said: "Luck and good fortune on your way, Lord Bishop." "Luck and good fortune on your way," exclaimed the king: "did you ever hear a noble woman speak thus to her bishop and not give him something with it?" "What is there here to give?" asked the queen. And the king had his answer ready: "There is the cushion you are sitting on." – In like manner, we may imagine, the king would give a man something of his own luck to take with him on his way, when he said: "I will lay my luck on it."

A peculiar position among the goods of the clan is occupied by those treasures which more than others indicated its place in society; they possessed luck, in its purest and strongest form. Generally, they consisted of objects which more especially displayed wealth, the best weapons, swords of victory, very often no doubt in the arm rings and necklaces worn by warriors as marks of their standing. In the North, we often hear about the ring. There was one, according to the legend, in the clan of the Scyldings; it was first in the possession of Helgi, and given by him to his brother Hroar, in place of his part of the kingdom, and when, owing to the envy of his sister's son, Hrok, it had been left lying a long while at the bottom of the sea, Hroar's son, Agnar, fetched it up again, and from that deed alone he attained greater fame than his father.

The collar of the Yngling clan has its counterpart elsewhere in the Germanic world. Among the princely gifts which Beowulf brought home from the Danes' hall, was a precious necklace which he gave to his friend Hygelac, and which the latter wore on the battlefield in that unlucky fight when the Franks took his life and his treasures. And what gold was among the chief- [46] tains, woven fabrics were presumably among the peasantry; here, often enough the valuable – perhaps invulnerable – cloak serves as the bearer of the kinsmen's pride. Sword in hand, necklace at throat or ring on arm, and cloak over the shoulder, this was no uncommon form for the fulness of a great luck.

These marks of distinction pertained to the head of the clan, or its leading man, as the one who bore the greatest share of responsibility for the health of its honour. According to ancient and deep-rooted sense of what was fitting, the dead man's weapons must pass to the most distinguished among his kinsmen, the one who would naturally feel chiefly responsible for bringing about due vengeance for his fall. So said Hjalti, after the death of Njal and his sons, when he took up Skarphedin's axe: "This is a rare weapon, not many can bear it." "I know one who can," puts in Kari, "one who shall bear the axe." -- "Who is that?" -- "Thorgeir Craggeir, for him I take now to be the greatest man in the clan." The feeling of being allied to what is right gives Gunnar's mother, Rannveig, her authority, when she declares her son's

favorite weapon is not to be touched by any but him who intends to take full vengeance for him. Codified, this feeling becomes a definition of the law of succession, as we find it in a German law-book. "He who takes the land as his inheritance, to him fall the garments of war, that is the coat of mail, with him lies the vengeance for next of kin and payment of fine." The transfer of these treasures then, would be equivalent to an act of abdication of a sort, in that the centre of gravity passed from father to son or to some younger kinsman. Glum and Olaf the Peacock had from their childhood part and share in the strength of the kin, but as and when they take up the old heirlooms and put them on, they move into the focus of luck and responsibility, becoming greater men thereby. The great turning point in young Beowulf's life is when he had shown himself worthy of his clan, and his kinsman laid in his lap an old family sword, left by Hrethel, and with the sword gave him "seven thousand with house and kingly seat; to both of them fell the lands of inheritance, though the one of them, foremost in the clan, ruled the kingdom." [47]

In the treasures of kings lay the luck of a ruler, and when the Ynglings, as the legend runs, so faithfully bore Visbur's ornament, one of the reasons for their doing so was that land and kingdom lay in it. In the princely families, then, such an investiture as that with which Hoskuld honoured his son would mean consecration to rule over peoples. The Vatsdoela sword, Ættartangi, fell, on division of the inheritance, to the second son, Jokul, but his brother Thorstein, who acted as the chief of the clan, and maintained its leadership, wore it when he presided at law meetings. This transference of luck is the reality which lies behind the act of the Frankish king Gunnthram, when he hands his lance to his brother's son, Childebert, with the words: "This is a sign that I hand over to you my kingdom; go forth, then, and take all my cities under your sway."

The Lombard king Theodoric who adopted the Herule and sent him a patent of adoption in the form of an elaborate diploma, could not, perhaps, any more than Gunnthram, think the thoughts we attribute to them, but they had this advantage over us, that they had no need to think the justification, for the force of the treasures themselves at that time outweighed any lack of understanding as to how this was possible. In course of time, the treasure separates itself from the luck which originally gave it strength, and assumes a self-sufficient might of its own. The spear-shaft becomes a royal symbol, or sceptre, an incarnation of abstract kingship, but a sceptre that has its authority from within, and needs not to draw its right from the jurists' exposition of the meaning of such regalia. The lance, in Childebert's hand, was both an evidence and a power, the mere presence of which closed men's mouths and bowed their head, and of itself added something to the man who grasped it.

In such treasures then, the luck of the clan resides, and in them it is handed down from generation to generation. They form that backbone which keeps the race upright throughout all changes. In the heirloom is gathered together all that men are; and therefore it contains an illustration both of the intensity wherewith men assimilated one another in friendship, and of [48] the complex character of every hamingja. They illustrate how the clan gathered honor and luck from many sources and thus grew and changed in continuity. When the treasure was assimilated by the family it came to carry not only the new conquest but all the ancient deeds and fate as well, since it was filled with the ever present hamingja of the circle of men to which it belonged. In such an idea of possession, the distinction between new and old falls away. Poetry rightly honours every weapon with the epithet of old, for even though a sword had been forged but the year before, it assumed its antiquity, and its quality of heirloom, from its companions in the men's equipment. It drew up the ancient strength that inspired all things worn or used by the family, and in the same way, the last adopted is a relic from the ancestors the moment reception has been completed. In fullest agreement with the truth, Grettir's mother calls to mind, by the sword, all the former Vatsdoela men, even though she and all the others knew that Ættartangi had come into the family through Ingimund.

The question of inheritance and order of succession then becomes a vital problem in Germanic society, though in another sense than we are apt to surmise. On this point the laws

fail us because their provisions date from Christian times, when the spiritual welfare of men and their life hereafter was looked after by a professional body of dealers in eternal life; the testator was possessed of eternal life everlasting for good and ill, and it was assumed that he had made to himself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness – these words are often quoted in the deeds of gift – to receive him into everlasting habitations, and further that he had handed over a sufficient amount of the dross of this world to the church. The question of inheritance has changed – in the official documents, though by no means in the minds of the people – into a temporal problem as to who was to take the chattels left by the deceased, and the solution of this modern problem naturally fell under the influence of foreign legal principles. The anxiety that formerly overshadowed all pecuniary interest, how the hamingja which had inspired the dead man and resided in his belongings, should

[49] be secured without loss or infringement in his successors, is barely indicated in isolated survivals, such as that rule which assigns the weapons to the chief avenger. The intricate systems of the mediæval law-books regulating the order of succession give practically no positive clue to ancient custom; what evidence they contain is of a negative character insofar as the weak points of the systems sometimes suggest spontaneous assumptions from ancient times, which were but slowly and laboriously overcome by the Roman principle. The difficulty which the mediæval lawyers had in recognising the son's son as rightful heir is an instance of ancient prejudice obstructing a smooth adaptation of the simple rule of succession.

If we wish to view this field in its proper foreshortening, we must set aside the human being as the central point in inheritance, and look at the thing itself. The only possible order of succession was hand reaching over into hand, and the life of grandsons was best guarded by their grandfather's adopting the fatherless, as seems to have been the Iceland custom.

In modern times, inheritance is a question first and foremost of preventing the property from being left without an owner; the general endeavor concentrates upon the providing of a clear and legally defined way for the money to take, along which it can roll according to the law of gravity from man to man, until a hand is reached than can rake it in; on no account must the fortune be left idle and ownerless in the market-place, as a proof that gold can really exist without belonging to anyone. The Germanic mind was never troubled by a conception of property as a casual possession, and consequently it was difficult to realise that an inheritance could go a-wandering after an owner or jump gaps. In ancient society, inheritance is not a question of finding a place for a fortune, but of obtaining a prolongation of life, and the step that seems so natural to us, over to the next of kin, was no solution to the difficulty. The chain of life must remain unbroken, and the natural, almost necessary presumption was that every man had a successor, a son who took over his father's valuables, because he continued his life. [50]

There is no problem of succession as long as the hamingja proves healthy; it arises only when life and luck had failed, and the difficulty consists in procuring a man to fill the gap in the clan, not in hunting out an heir. When the hope of offspring in the flesh was extinguished, a man was given birth to in order to provide a successor; then the widow or the mother or the sister of the deceased hand to raise up the clan and bear a son who should be able to wear the cloak and wield the sword of the father. In the Eddic poem of Reginismál, Hreidmar cries for a son to his daughter, one who could help in the hour of need, when his own sons have cut themselves off from family relationship with him by conspiring against him; and in his deathly fear he adds to his daughter: “then give birth to a daughter, if you cannot have a son, and get your girl a husband that this need may be met, then her son will avenge your sorrow.”

In the Salic law, there is a paragraph which cannot be derived from the actual requirements of the Middle Ages, and which therefore necessarily must lead back to the customs that came most naturally to the people, as long as they followed the ways of their ancestors. It says, that the dead man's mother is nearest heir in absence of sons, after her come brother and sister; failing these, then the mother's sister, and not until she fails does the inheritance fall to the nearest of kin. And then it adds significantly that this rule only applies to personal affects, goods and chattels; land can never pass down through a woman's hands. The daughter is not named, the old legal provisos never start from an abstract standpoint; a particular case is supposed, and the words arranged to fit it, and the case is here evidently that of a young man dying childless. On this piece of law we cannot at any rate establish any dissimilarity between Frankish and Norse custom. Nor can we from this positive rule draw the negative conclusion that the Franks would not acknowledge the solution which evidently comforted the Northmen, that the wife might raise up seed to her husband. Glum's daughter, Thorlaug, renewed, as we know, her husband Eldjarn after his death in the first son by her marriage with Arnor Kerlingarnef. [51] According to the Salic idea, then, the mother is nearest to the task of giving the son new birth, and we have every right to believe that the mother's duty held valid whether the father still lived or were dead, whether the widow continued to dwell in his house, or went back to her kinsmen, or perhaps from them into a new marriage. After the mother, the dead man's sister is next called upon; she has to look to the interests of the deceased before bearing a child for herself and her husband. From her, the duty passes to the one who was nearest to the mother, and not until woman in the nearest family community is altogether wanting the hope of continuing the branch of the family is relinquished, and the family takes the hamingja contained in the chattels into itself.

The woman's inheriting means that she took over the treasures of the dead man in trust for the son to be born, and brought them out when he had reached the years of maturity. In such a way the famous sword of the Vatsdoela men, the Ættartangi, came to Grettir through his mother, Asdis, daughter of the son of the old Jokul. When Grettir left home to travel and cut out a path for himself, his mother went with him along the road to give her parting salutation. She took from under her mantle a precious sword and said: "This sword has been the possession of Jokul, my father's father, and of the ancient Vatsdoela men, and it carried victory in their hands; I will give you the sword and bid you use it well." The last words contain in exhortation and a blessing, or rather, an induction to the right and enjoyment of the power inherent in the weapon; the power of the sword be yours to use! In this case we know that Asdis had a brother, and the reason why the heirloom went into the distaff line is to us obscure. As an illustration of the inner meaning we may cite a scene in Glum's saga. When Glum visited his mother's father in Norway, Vigfus, the old man invited his grandson to settle in his maternal home and succeed to the chieftainship after his kinsman, but Glum wished for some reason to visit Iceland and look after his paternal inheritance before emigrating. When they parted, Vigfus said: "I think it is your fate to raise a family out there, I will give you some [52] treasures, a cloak and spear and a sword in which our kinsmen have put trust." This means really that the Norwegian chief awaits a future for himself in the offspring of his daughter's son, and in point of fact the hamingja or genius of Vigfus appeared to Glum in his sleep; when he saw the mighty woman stride up the valley he knew at once that she announced the death of the old man and had come to dwell with him for evermore. Another family legend tells how Olaf the Saint got the sword Bæsing, the old family heirloom. When Olaf was eight years old, he excelled all boys of his own age in wit and skill. One day his mother, Asta, opened a chest and the boy espied a glittering object among its contents. What is it? -- It is the hilt of a sword. --- Whose is it? -- It is yours, my son; the sword is called Bæsing, and it has belonged to Olaf Geirstadalf. -- I will have it and wear it myself. And Asta gave him the sword.

These passages are prosaic parallels to the high-strung words of the legend, where Hervor transmits the famous sword which had belonged to her father, Angantyr, and had first gone with him into his barrow, to their son, and begs the young hero ever to bear in

mind how keen is that sword of his, how much prowess had manifested itself in the men who had borne it, and how victory was bound up with it. We recall the words of the dying youth who prayed his brother to raise up seed to him: "And to him will I give all the luck I had, and then my name shall live as long as the world stands."

The question we have to solve is now that arrangement the ancient Teutons made regarding inheritance, but what inheritance meant in their case. Through all branches the same clan luck flowed down to posterity, and it would be misleading to interpret the exclusion of women from inheritance in later times as indicating that the sons assumed all the riches themselves and abandoned their sisters to the luck of strangers. Through the gifts wherewith a maiden was attached to the bridegroom's clan, and probably also by further exchange of valuables by gift, the daughter's sons were bound to their mother's father and their mother's brothers by the very strongest bonds. But [53] the central treasures in which the hamingja was found at its purest and strongest descended from father to son as the string of life that linked one generation to another. How the matter was settled in detail between brothers we have no means of ascertaining; thus much only is certain, from the hints in law and history, that the insignia, the weapons and ornaments which contained the chieftains luck of leading the clan went to the son who made promise to be a fit representative of the hamingja. This would normally be the eldest heir, but it would be merely drawing upon our own prejudices, were we to lay down a hard and fast line of law where procedure was always governed by the firm but plastic laws of life. There may be a kernel of truth in Tacitus' casual remark as to the Tenchtri who were addicted to riding and gave their horses after them to the finest warrior among the host of sons; at least it is not out of keeping with the intimations of history and legends.

Should it come to so ill a pass that the clan dries up, then the last of the race hides its barren luck in the earth, no other shall enjoy it; he says – if he be an Anglo-Saxon --;

"Now hold thou, Earth, the heirloom of athelings, since the noble no longer can hold it. On thee it was won by the brave. Battle-death, the fierce life-destroyer, has reft away my people to the last kinsmen . . . There is no one left who can wield the sword or grasp the cup richly chased, the precious beaker. The manly host was hurried off afar. From the hard helm, embossed in gold, the plating will part; the mindful owners sleep who should burnish the battle-mask. The coat of war which offered itself to the bite of steel in the battle at the clanging of shields crumbles with the bones of the hero. The rings of the byrnie do not fare abroad on the breast of the chieftain . . . There is no delight of the harp, no hawk winging through the hall, no fleet horse stamping in the courtyard. Dire death has carried off the host of men."

#### CHAPTER IV EXCHANGE OF GIFTS

When an article of value is passed across the boundary of frith and grasped by alien hands, a fusion of life takes place, which binds men one to another with an obligation of the same character as that of frith itself. The great "bargain" beyond all others is that of alliance by marriage, and its seriousness is apparent in the reciprocal interest of the relatives on both sides, a feeling of unity which is not dependent on the mood of the moment. They could not sit still and see each other beaten either in combat or at law, for the defeat of their brothers-in-law would jeopardise their own good fame; either part considered it impossible to maintain their own honour without helping the other, as the Icelanders would express it. It was indeed frith that was woven when a woman passed from clan to clan as *friðu-sibb*, "kinswoman in frith".

Frith lay in the *mundr*, bridal sum or bridal gift, which forms the centre of that bargain which was formed between two circles of kin. The persons acting are on both sides the clan as a whole, through its personifications; the bridegroom's spokesman and the maiden's



guardian act on behalf of all their respective kin. In historical times, the bridal sum had come to be the right of the father or guardian, an increase of fortune accruing to the happy procreator of daughters; even now, however, there still remained something of the ancient solidarity which demanded that the gift should percolate through the whole clan. The ancient customs held in extraordinary cases; as for instance when the bride's father and brother were lacking, and a more [55] distant kinsman stood guardian; then, the rights of the kinsmen reasserted themselves.

In the Germanic system, it is not the wife who brings a dowry, says Tacitus, but the husband who offers gifts to the wife. "The parents and relations are present to approve these gifts — gifts not devised for ministering to female fads, nor for the adornment of the person of the bride, but oxen, a horse and bridle, a shield and spear or sword; by these gifts the bride is won, and she herself, in turn, brings some piece of armour to her husband." And Tacitus is substantially correct, though not in the romantic sense he imagined, when he adds: "Here is the gist of the bond between them, here in their eyes its mysterious sacrament, the divinity which hedges it."

Exchange of gifts is the only way to friendship and alliance. "They gave each other gifts, and parted as friends", "they exchanged gifts and made a pact of friendship together", such phrases occur again and again in the Icelandic sagas, and the best commentary upon the relation between the two things lies in the identification of language: "there was between them a warm friendship and exchange of gifts".

The ancients could not define kinship better than they have done in the formula of adopting into the clan: to sitting and seat, to full inheritance, to fine and rings, to gift and return — that is to say, the kinsman is known by the fact that he has a seat in the hail, a right to inherit, to share in fines and vengeance, and to make friends.

It makes no difference then, either way, in the unanimity between men, whether the one side or the other have precedence in the words; for when the gift is mentioned, friendship sits down beside it, and if friendship be invited in, the door must be held open for the gift. The normal order of life is for him who seeks friendship to hold forth his gift and thus declare his inclination. Or he goes to his neighbour and opens negotiations with the words: "There has for many reasons been a coldness between us; now I would enter into friendship with you, and you shall have as a gift from me the best stud horse in the district." Even though perhaps a sharp ear may discern here [56] and there a somewhat business-like ring in the voice of these Icelandic chieftains offering gifts, there is nothing in the words themselves to betray them. The words come glibly to the tongue of the English poet when he lets his beloved apostle Andreas speak to the "creator of the world" in the guise of a sailor. Andreas was, according to the decree of the highest, on his way to the distant anthropophagous Mermedons in order to declare the good tidings unto them, when he was ferried across the sea by an unknown ship's captain; during the voyage, the experienced fisherman sat watching with ever-widening eyes the stranger's skill in seamanship, until at last he burst out delightedly: "Never met I steersman stronger, quicker of wit or wiser in words; hear me now that I ask another boon: though I am poor in rings and hammered treasures to give in exchange, yet I would gladly have your friendship." The poet who created these verses, had experienced a new age and new customs, the wealth of which lay in emancipating itself from the mammon of unrighteousness; he had learned to imagine foster-brotherhood between men whose only wealth was the word; but in order to express this experience, he must first come to terms with the language at his disposal.

When ancient enemies could settle their differences out of hand, and establish lasting agreement between themselves and those near to them, it was because they could exchange gifts and enter into a bargain. Gregory the clerk tells of an amicable ending to the disputes between Leuvigild, king of the Goths, and Theodomer, king of the Suevi, in terms which can be matched almost word for word from the sagas dealing with reconciliation of enemies in the North: "they exchanged gifts, and returned, each to his home."

The weregild carried with it a real reconciliation, which to later generations has become dimmed by the passing of value into coin. True, the paying of blood money might be, and

often must be, humiliating, but at the innermost of its being there lies an idea of amending, or reparation, which sets minds straight again, and makes it impossible for the two clans thereafter to think crookedly of each other. The Anglo-Saxon and Scan- [57] dinavian word *bót* or fine means nothing more and nothing less than mending or restoring. The bargain produced frith, or, to express the same thing in another way, and make its full validity more plain: the bargain brings about a relationship between the two parties which implies the impossibility of a breach of frith in the sternest sense, and therefore, all members of the offended circle of kin must have a share in the payment, so that the minds of all might be affected in like manner. It is not intended to take effect for a little while only, but wholly and for all time: as long as “wind sighs from the cloud, grass grows, tree puts forth leaves, sun rises up and the world stands.” It is not intended merely to settle one matter, this particular one, but to make minds more willing to frith in case of further dispute arising. Even in Eric’s Law of Sealand we still find the old idea, that men should be milder towards an enemy when he has paid his fine than towards any other, and even should he later give further cause of offence, one must not set off at once after vengeance, but first endeavour to obtain restitution at law. It was no mere empty phrase when the frith formula in Iceland called the parties reconciled by the most intimate name, and declared that they should “share knife and joint of meat and all between them as friends and not as enemies, and should cause of quarrel arise between them in after days, then goods shall pay for the wrong, and never spear let blood;” it must necessarily mean the words as they stand, since it can cold-bloodedly pass on to the conclusion that “the one of you who tramples on peace made, and strikes at frith once given, he shall wander aimlessly as a hunted wolf, as far as ever men hunt wolves to their farthest.”

It has been rightly said that the more drastic the decrees set up as a guard for peace and order, the gloomier prospect for peace present and to come; a threat is of its nature ineffective, since its guarantor is a future that men may always hope can be outwitted. But the solemnity of such a curse as this lies in the very fact that it is not a threat, and does not rely on a fickle future to make its words good, but proceeds out of a conviction that what is feared, far from being a thing [58] that may or may not take effect upon the trespasser, is actually at the moment taking its course within him, if the will to evil be there. The long series of anathemas is not a heaping up of terrifying effects calculated to hammer good will down into the soul stroke by stroke, — it is a description of the niding, with the addition that the peace here concluded has the same hardness as any other natural frith and no less than any other will serve as the test of whether a man is to belong to the world of humankind or not.

One might safely trust to the gift and give it full power to speak on one's behalf, for the soul in it would of itself reach in to the obligation, to honour, must bind luck and weave fate into fate, must produce will, or place a new element into it. Therefore, no power on earth can check the effect of a gift halfway, when it has once passed from hand to hand, and therefore, none can resist the spiritual effect of that which he has suffered to come too near.

On the day when the free state of Iceland was near breaking into two pieces over the conflict between the old religion and the faith of Christ, Thorgeir the Law-speaker saved his country, because he was old-fashioned enough to realise that one can become peaceable by an effort of will. The matter had gone so far that the old heathen party stood ready armed to drive the Christians from the thing-place, and the hosts of the Christians renounced the law-state of their countrymen, to form a Christian state beside the old; and the moment this new law had been proclaimed, Iceland would have been two peoples, territorially intermingled, like a body with its organs divided into two opposing groups. Siduhall, leader of the Christians, shrank from the responsibility, and took the remarkable step of buying over the old leader of the free state to formulate the Christian laws. After Thorgeir had lain a whole day with his cloak over his head pondering on things present and to come, he came forth, the old heathen, with a law that forced all in under the new regime and made Iceland a Christian country. In a speech he set forth peace and its opposite before his countrymen, and led them to the proper choice by a story of old times: Once, the [59]

kings of Norway and Denmark were at constant feud, until the people wearied of the unending war and forced the kings to peace against their will, by the simple means of exchanging gifts at some years' interval, and so their friendship lasted all their life. — Thorgeir could never have spoken so, still less could anyone later have let him speak so, if he and his hearers had not understood the point of the story, and the point was strong enough to convert a nation.

Men who could relate, and could understand, such a story as that of the kings of Denmark and Norway felt an instinctive unwillingness to have others' souls in their immediate neighbourhood. And they showed their uneasiness. On the evening before Æthelstan fought his decisive battle against the Northmen at Brunanburh, there came, according to William of Malmesbury, a strange harper into the camp, sat down at the entrance to the king's tent, and played so skilfully that the king asked him in, to delight the company at meat. After the meal, when a council of war was to be held, the harper was dismissed with a gift; but one of the men, having his own reasons for observing the stranger closely, saw that he hid the gold in the earth before he left; and he counselled King Æthelstan therefore to move his tent, for the guest was none other than Olaf Sigtryggson, the Northmen's king.

William of course, does not fathom the Norse king's motive — he considers the act due to his contempt for the gift — and Olaf himself would perhaps find it difficult to explain if questioned, but he felt that if he suffered the alien will to cling to him, he must be prepared to find it taking his own luck into service against himself; nay more, that his own will and insight would turn treacherously against him, and not only check his progress, but break him in his headlong career. A man like the crafty Frank Chiodevech knew well how to use the power of dead things as a means to bias people's will. The Frank had secretly sent gifts in offer of marriage to the Burgundian princess Chrotilde, but when later he made public announcement of his proposal, he was met with a curt refusal from the lady's uncle. Then the people cried: First see if there have not been gifts

60] sent secretly from him, that he may not find a way to fall upon you; otherwise “you will not conquer in the fight for the justice of your cause, for terrible is the heathen fury of Chlodevech” — as the poor annalist words the utterance, in order to get as much civilized meaning into it as possible.

But the position could also be viewed from another side. The giver has entrusted a lump of his soul to another, and should the receiver chance to be clever or powerful enough to use the chance thus given him, the original owner may come to feel a stab in his will. A Frank of the 6th century, one of those wild fellows who, apparently, feared neither God nor devil, nor knew good from evil, dared not renounce his gift-brother, or take any decisive steps against him, as long as the gift-pact was not broken. Gundovald, the pretender, had shut himself up in Convenæ, when his slender luck had grown so worn that even his faithful friends realised they must look out for a future elsewhere. Then one of them, Mummolus, persuaded Gundovald to sally out and give himself up to his enemies; but on the way, he gave the unfortunate claimant to the throne this friendly counsel: “Those yonder might perhaps think it presumptuous on your part to come striding up in that golden belt of mine; better put on your own sword and give me back mine.” Gundovald's answer is plain enough, even in Gregory's uncomprehending paraphrase: “I understand your words; that which I have borne out of love for you shall now be taken from me.”

The gift was an unmistakable manifestation, or rather crystallisation, of the goodwill, and to make sure of the sincerity of the other party one might wish to see his cordiality step out into the light. When Magnus the Good stood forth at the Uplands thing and promised forgiveness and favour to all who had conspired against his father King Olaf if they would turn to him with goodwill and a whole mind, Thronð accepted the offer as spokesman of the people: “My kinsmen have been unfriends of the king's race, but I myself had no part in

Olaf's death; if you will exchange cloaks with me, then I will promise and keep good friendship." The king was willing. "And will you also exchange weapons with me?" Thronð continued. This too [61] the king agreed to do. And afterwards Thronð invited the king home to his house and gave a splendid feast.

One who has exchanged weapons with a stranger can lie down to sleep by his side; he can do no harm. One can even leave the other to keep guard against a third party, for the security produced by the gift is not restricted to a passive refraining from action. "As father to son, as son to father, thus the two now reconciled meet in all doings together where need shall arise," runs the formula. What jurist or moralist would have hit upon the idea of painting those colours above all upon the ideal to make a difficult virtue more enticing? Noble forgetfulness may be idealised into a noble consideration, but to encourage enemies to be reconciled in order that they can help each other is only done when there is a reality behind to dictate the conditions. And the reality is this, that the gift comes dripping with memories and honour, and surrenders itself with friends and foes, gods and forefathers, past and future purpose. The will is bound, in the only way will could be bound in the old days, by having new contents and a new aim engrafted on it.

It is solely by virtue of these regenerating qualities that a gift is able to touch the wells from which feelings arise; it fosters not only unity of will, but also affection, joy and well-being in a relationship.

Marriage was founded on love, but according to the Germanic conception, there was no idea of love appearing before the marriage had been solemnised and married life commenced; all anticipation could be spared, since it was known that when all formalities were duly and properly carried out, affection would surely come. "And they soon grew to love each other," say the sagas of happily married couples. But we know, too, at what tune affection grew and became strong between the two, it was on the morning of the second day, when the husband, by his gift, confirmed, or "fixed" the reality of their first embrace. The bride had her morning gift promised the day when their union was finally decided upon, most commonly perhaps, as in Sweden, on the day of the wedding, and it was due to her from the morning after the pair had slept one night together. These [62] two acts, the embrace and the gift, are the origin of love; and therefore they hold good — in place of a law that only respects realities — as the two necessary conditions for true marriage, and therefore also they express all possibilities of warmth of feeling between man and woman. In a world where love is thus given and taken there is no room for sentimental longing and sighing; a lover feeding upon fond wishes is simply sick in mind, and would perhaps be well advised to consider whither such sickness leads. For healthy romanticism in the old days we should look to Margaret of Stokkar, and seek behind the simple words wherewith she bemoans her fate, when King Magnus, on his way through the place, wishes to share her couch: "Heavy it seems to me, first to find love for him and then to lose him."

This utterance of the maiden who suffered at the thought of a morning which should not fulfill the promise of the night, together with the words of the Swedish Uppland Law anent the morning gift whereby a wife is "honoured", furnish the explanation of the womanly element: the wife's anxiety, when she, dreams of danger and wakes to warn her husband, as well as the maiden's ambition, when she sits among her kin considering possible suitors according to their birth, their wealth, their fame — or their scanty self-assertion; when she sends a lover away because he has proved himself hardly up to her standard in his dealings with his neighbours, she does so because she hungers for love in her marriage. It needs honour to wake her senses, for family fame and family wealth, clan traditions and ancestors' deeds make up the minds of women as well as of men. And the affection with which she regards her husband is frith: which is to say, that far from being a mere intellectual appendage to her spiritual life her love is instinct and energy that makes her fight for the one she loves, and it can never become so tender but that it will maintain its character as zeal. Let us take widowhood immediately beside wifehood, see that the widow's sorrow has the bitterness of an affront, that it is permeated with an active element which drives out all despair.. and all resignation, that it is healed by restitution, and then we are perhaps as near

as we can ever get to feeling what the [63] love of those times really was — that love which gives Thurid the Great Widow her greatness. Then we may also come near to realising that love has its origin in taking over the honour of the husband, with all it contains of possessions and acquisitions, and that if the suitor can but get so far as to lay his gift in the maiden's lap, he has already won her favour. And in return, should the bargain be broken, the wife goes away without a lingering glance. The dissolution of an exchange of gifts causes a separation of the feelings so united, whereafter they seek back each to its original owner.

From this point of view, the old stories take on a different appearance. Much of that which seemed distorted will show forth in natural proportions, and much that slipped away from the modern conception as immaterial stands out with tragic force.

The old author of the *Beowulf* has a peculiar ring of rich experience in his voice: he thinks many thoughts about these Danes and Geats, and for the most part, his thoughts are melancholy. When he mentions Hrothgar's daughter, he cannot but remember that it was she who was to marry Froda's son Ingeld, to settle the old dispute between the two peoples, her Danes and his Heathobards. But luck was destined to fail her. When she went to her new home, it would be bitter for the warriors there to see her Danish retinue openly bearing trophies of old Heathobard weapons. Some grey-haired retainer, no doubt, will remember too well the day those weapons changed hands, and cry to Ingeld: "See, know you that sword, the precious one, that your father bore to battle for the last time, when the Danes defeated him and took the arms of the slain?" One day his words ring through, and the alien boaster pays forfeit with his life. Then all oaths are broken, hatred wells up in Ingeld's heart, and his love to the woman turns cold. There is something in this psychic catastrophe which we cannot bring out in our words; as soon as the bargain is broken and the Danes, who were thereby engrafted on the king's honour, torn out, there is no longer love in him.

It is the same immediate breach which makes Brynhild's story a test of our understanding of love among our ancestors, [64] and the despair of the writer who would express his understanding in a tongue smoothed to the needs of lyrical sentiment.

"I will tell you my wrath," this is the portal of entry to Brynhild's confession. Her brooding is not the self-consuming turning and twisting that drives the musing of the bereaved farther and farther down into the soul, opening on to ever deeper and deeper sorrow. She ponders, her thoughts are turned forward, as she builds her plans for restitution or vengeance. As she lies there with the bed clothes drawn over her head, all know she lies there to think, and when she opens her mouth and speaks to her husband, the word is ready forged: "You shall lose both kingdom and goods, life and me, and I fare to my kin, if you will not slay Sigurd — and see to it that you do not let the whelp live after the wolf."

Her rage is naturally directed towards Sigurd; she must be worst to him whom she loves best. Not because love is paradoxical in its being, but because it is rational. She had sworn to love only that man who had no peer and proved his prowess by leaping the flames with which her bower was encircled. This feat was achieved by Gunnar, and she welcomed him and loved him; but this Gunnar was in reality the dragon-slayer Sigurd, who had changed shapes with his sworn brother to help him to his heart's desire. One day Brynhild's eyes are opened, she is not married to the greatest hero in the world. She can claim that he has not played fair, in transferring his own feat to Gunnar; but the affront has its force in something else: Sigurd sins most unforgivably in being the greatest, greater than Gunnar; his crime is not less that he slew the serpent and took the gold, as Gunnar did not. We find the same undeserved fate when Brynhild's later personification, Gudrun Usvif's daughter, was led to hate Kjartan because Bolli had falsely spread the rumour that he had settled in Norway, and by that lie had taken her from the one with whom she had exchanged vows; Kjartan's crime lay in the fact that he came home, and by being unchanged himself, left her as the breaker of their compact, that she had thought herself freed from.

The misfortune in the life of these two women is not, as we [65] assume, baffled love, it is a feeling of guilt, a dishonouring of themselves; and Kjartan as well as Sigurd is — whether wittingly or unwittingly — the cause of the sin that their betrothed committed by marrying another husband. For our culture, which never accords responsibility more scope than

circumstances grant it, the emphasis lies on the will to wrong; for us a Brynhild and a Gudrun become heroines in a tragedy of marriage. If on the contrary, it is experience of the effects of guilt that fill the soul, the question as to will and mischance and necessity is overshadowed by other problems, and to gain insight into the nature of passion and the right of passion, one must understand the logical calculation of ethical gain and loss which alone applies in the self-examination of our ancestors. The sternly cold definition of a promise is: not a pledge to truth or any similar third party, but a two-sided bargain between you and him. If the bargain be broken, your soul suffers thereby, because a part of it is fixed in the other party; and the damage is equally dangerous whether it be you or he that fails, or some accident that upsets the contract. Inevitably the disappointment glides in under ethical earnest, which, while knowing well enough the difference between a flaw from within and a breach from without, does not recognise the two as essentially opposites. A wrong for which one is oneself to blame is the nearer to dissolution of self in that there is nowhere to seek restitution; but to the ethical judgement it is no less a fault to suffer affront than to cause it, inability to preserve oneself is on a par with failing to do so. And before this feeling of responsibility, one's neighbour shall be judged: between him who prevents me from asserting myself and him who is the cause wherefore I cannot there is no distinction — both are guilty.

The soul-sickness which brings about the wreck of Brynhild consists in a sin against the sacredness of the word. She had by a solemn vow bound herself to wed none but him who should be greatest, and here she found her word broken; whether knowingly or unknowingly, whether she had acted in good faith or not, her honour, her self, was sundered. "Ill comes to those whose promises turn against them;" in this outburst

66] of Brynhild's lies the whole curse of self, from its ethical humiliation, to the dread of the future as a storm of misfortune gathering round the breach of troth committed and driven forward by the nidinghood that lurks behind an irreparable act.

The catastrophe comes in a moment. Brynhild married Gunnar, and the two soon grew to love each other. This we may safely add, even though the story itself had not both directly and indirectly given us to understand that there was nothing unusual to remark about that marriage; healthiness was a patent of greatness and nobility, and Brynhild was greater than all women, therefore her greatness must show itself in the fact that what was healthy and natural was eminently present in her. But the moment the truth is made manifest, her love is transformed and fastened upon Sigurd; and yet, change and transformation have little to do with men and women whose passion is ever to maintain their inner continuity and whose ethical hatred is directed against the offender, who seeks to effect a breach in the personality of another. She gave herself the day she bound herself with an oath of loyalty to the man who should penetrate into her fastness of fire; not Gunnar, not Sigurd, nor another, but *him*, and the unity in herself is based on the fact that the vow is her love, and the day Sigurd stood forth as the rightful claimant to Gunnar's place in the world, it was him she loved — and thus it was he who had offended her.

There is the conflict, in the insoluble opposition between two realities each of which excludes the other. Sigurd has the promise, and Gunnar has the love, as the consequence of marriage. The modern tragedy of love will come to centre round the misfortune that a passion should exist which can never attain to fulfilment; Brynhild perishes from the impossibility of being the woman she is. When Gudrun twits her with possessing only the next best hero in the world, she points in proof to the ring on her own arm; Brynhild looks at the treasure and recognises it: it is the ring she gave Sigurd in exchange the day he came to her through the flames. In the gift, he and Brynhild have [67] mingled mind, and only now does she learn that she has broken their interchange of soul.

The poet who now in full earnest re-experienced and recreated the intensity of this old love, would in and by his work have ostracised himself from the culture of his age; and despite all the laudatory words that have been lavished on the Davids and Jonathans of the

past, the old friendship is likewise a dead glory which cannot be resuscitated in modern words, because words can only express that which exists. We are incapable of reconstructing the ancient harmony. Friendship in the ancient sense implied cool calculation of interest and unreserved loyalty, and so far from limiting one another, self-assertion and self-oblivion grew in the same proportion; friendship is not maintained by affection; on the contrary, the bond of union gives growth to and upholds affection; its joy is the loving converse in words mingling mind with mind, and nevertheless, the complete surrender which we feel germinating through spiritual intercourse was then the primary condition of confidence. In the story of the foster-brothers Thorgeir and Thormod, we learn what friendship will enact of its votaries. When Thorgeir was slain, the slayer fled beyond the sea to Greenland; Thormod followed, disguised himself as a beggar, suffered himself to be hunted like a wild beast, lay stricken with wounds in eaves and desert places, and returned home with the lives of five men in his axe as vengeance for his friend. And yet there is not a whit of self-sacrifice, only honour. Friendship is will all through, but a will that has its roots in the unconscious regions of the mind scorning the inclination or lack of inclination of the moment, yet the affection is at an end when the gifts have been returned. To us who see only the elements at play, and laboriously try to reconstruct the harmonious feeling of frith that fired the souls, friendship will probably leave an impression of something cold and intellectual, and yet friendship is filled with emotion almost to overflowing.

The devotion of the warrior is one of the oldest and best established virtues of the Germanic character. Half astounded, half impressed, the civilized Roman looked upon the chieftain's [68] guard, that fought as long as their leader fought, or voluntarily shared his captivity, and to his conservative Roman mind the whole-hearted devotion of the barbarian warriors was a splendid manifestation of duty. Tacitus understood that this self-devotion was unreserved, and could thus hardly choose his words otherwise than with a predominant idea of duty; but those who have themselves experienced the rejoicing of an army hardly see the duty for the enthusiasm that holds the will supple. In history, a hundred years may sometimes be as a single day, and the feeling has hardly changed much from the generations which shook the first centuries to and the Christian poet who interpreted the loyalty of disciples in German, in the words of St. Thomas:

"It is a man's pleasure to stand fast by his Lord, and willingly die with him. This will we all; follow him on his way, counting our lives of little worth, and die with the King in a strange land." And again; the lapse of time which separates the Heliand from Hallfred the Wayward Scald is as nothing in spiritual history, so differently do the centuries run in Germany and the North. To Hallfred, King Olaf's fall is a heart-felt sorrow, the only sorrow that could ever bring him to his knees. "The northlands are left waste on the death of the King, all joy is faded on the fail of Tryggvason, the shunner of flight," so he makes his plaint, and the plaint awakened sympathy in all listeners. Even his opponent, Gris, dull everyday fellow as he is reckoned, realises most keenly Hallfred's plight, merely because he himself has served kings. The saga relates that on the day when these two men were to settle their painful differences by single combat, came the news of Olaf's death, and Hallfred went off as if stricken by a stone and took to his bed. When Gris heard words of scorn sent after him, he said: "Nay, nay, not so; I myself never attained to such honour in the service of the king of Gardariki as did Hallfred with Olaf, and yet I have never known such heavy tidings as of my chieftain's fall."

But this exstasy, which welcomed death at the master's death as a boon, can find no explanation of its own being but this: he gave, and I received; he, the gold-breaker, I, the receiver of treasure. [69]

Wiglaf spake, the son of Weohstan, —mournful he looked on those men unloved:

"Who sooth will speak, can say indeed that the ruler who gave you golden rings and the harness of war in which ye stand

— for he at ale-bench often-times bestowed on hall-folk helm and breastplate, lord to liegemen, the likeliest gear which near or far he could find to give, —threw away and wasted these weeds of battle, on men who failed when the foemen came!.. ."

Equally pure is the note again in the youngest of all heroic poems in the Anglo-Saxon, the Battle of Maldon, written, so to speak, upon an historic battle-ground. First of the traitor:

“First turned to flight Godric, and left the lord who had given him many an horse,” then of the faithful: “All saw they, hearth-fellows, that their lord was dead; eagerly they hasted forward with courage, all would perish or avenge the dear one,” and finally, the bravest of the brave: “Then he had won that he vowed to his chieftain, uttered aforetime in the ring-giver's hall, that they twain should ride to the burgh, home with whole limbs, or both should lie weary with wounds on the field. Like a true warrior, he lay by the side of his lord.”

The poem of allegiance par excellence in the Nordic, the Bjarkamál, is only preserved in the Latin paraphrase of Saxo. We can form no true idea as to its ring in the old language, but the matter of Saxo's meandering verse tells on the other hand plainly enough of his general adherence to the spirit of the original; all that lay outside his culture and therefore outside his power of conception can only have been taken from his source. The poem runs through the entire soul-gamut of the body-guard, from the coolest assurance of will to self-forgetfulness in another, and the king's man returns again and again to the joy of gold, in order to be certain of himself. Here the poem takes its first flight:

“Gladly we render again to the prince his gifts, gladly we grasp the sword and harden our blade's edge in honour. The swords, the helms, the rings Hrolf strewed among his men, the [70] byrnie reaching to our heels, these whet our hearts for the fight. Now is the time come, now is the honour, that we with good blows give worth again for what was given us when we stretched our limbs in frith upon the bench...

“All these vows we made above the cup with the ale to our lips, each one an oath sworn by the high gods, those we now fulfil. Greatest of Danes is my Lord...

“The King is fallen, and with his fall their day was come, those who were none so craven as to let their blows fall upon earth, so little battle-wont as to fear to avenge their chieftain, flinging away honour, the prize of the bold...

“Go we forward now as Hrolf taught us. Hroerek he slew, the miser king, the heaper-up of treasures to rust in dishonour, whose hall grew void of honour-loving men. Hrolf slew him; plundered his closets and made his friends to shine in the bright gear of the niding. Never a thing so fair to him but he strewed it abroad, never too costly to clothe a henchman. His years he reckoned by harvest of honour, not by store of gold...

“Naught withstood him whereas he strode, blazing with boldness, no meaner in strength than mighty to see. As the river foams into the sea he flung himself into the fight; hasting to battle as the hart leaps over the land.

“I see him, the atheling of Frodi, stand laughing in the wave-clash of battle, sower of gold, upon the Sirtvold. We too are filled with joy, with firm steps following our splendid father down the road of fate . . . There is fame after death. What boldly men built in time of might no time shall destroy...

“Shields behind! Let us fight with bared breast. Make heavy the arms with gold, hang rings upon the right, that blows may fall the harder. In, under the swords, to avenge our loved lord. Him I name happiest, who with the sword heaps up the slain in payment...

“Honour receive us as we fall before the eyes of the King. The little time left, let us use to spread our death-place with renown. By my chieftain's head will I suffer myself to be stricken to earth; at his feet fall thou stumbling to thy death; that they who search among the slain may see how we repaid our lord [71] his gold. . . Thus it behoves us athelings, the war-fain, to fall, close to our king, one in our death and in fame.”

Thus it goes on, verse after verse. Again and again the mighty feeling gathers itself together in preparation for a fresh outburst, with new images, new expressions, to make the strong stronger yet. The poem is inspired throughout with the complete fusion of the warrior with his lord. So completely do the king and the king's honour fill out the whole horizon for his faithful men that his fall means night over all. The ecstatic rejoicing in common death concentrates in itself all the passions of the warrior: joy in his own fame, thirst for vengeance, zeal for the praises of posterity have their life in devotion to a master, and are nourished by



memory, flaming up about those moments of the past where he is seen at his highest. But one thing is always uppermost whenever enthusiasm gathers to a fresh culmination:

gold. The need of repaying the king's generosity is the moral incentive in the appeal, yet no gratitude, not even the most exalted, could shed that splendour about him, if it were not gratitude for the gift of life, and life in the old, full meaning it was that he gave his men, through the rings and weapons old. The moment the man feels his master's ring on his arm, or his weapon in his hand, then the king's honour, ancestors, aims, pride, flow up through the arm of the receiver; at once he feels and lives the contents of the ring. He is re-born, as one could be in those days, and the union with the giver is completed in conditions of life as well as in thoughts. The followers of the king are called by the same appellation as his clan, Scyldings, because they have been incorporated in the hamingja of the house they served.

By long and difficult detours we must struggle forward to that which was the direct experience of the men of those days. But the road which was their only way of entry into friendship, that of the gift, leads also us best to experience of what that feeling meant, and thus to the experience of its nature. In Bjarki's cry: "Make heavy the 'arms with gold. . . that blows may fall the harder," lies the test that is to show whether we have understood or not.

[72]

Lying so near to the centre of human life, a gift may have double-edged effect. It is a sign of honour or of dishonour, of subjugation as of submission. Now it calls forth boldness in the receiver, now it flings him back on his defence; a man may fear his neighbour's gold, or he may make use of it; but he never plays with it. For two men who cannot share the world between them in other wise than by the decision of arms, caution will be the normal attitude; Olaf Sigtryggson does not blindly challenge fate, by carrying away with him the gift of Æthelstan. Only he who feels in himself unshakable superiority and can safely call every stake his own beforehand, ventures upon such a game as Chlodevech, according to the story — or the legend — won over the Burgundians.

The effects produced by exchange of gifts will depend on the relation between the two lucks colliding. When a man resigns after long service, and the king gives him the sword he himself has long borne, with the words: "I think luck will go with it, and thereto you shall also have my friendship," then the man has luck added to that he previously possessed, he gains *era*, honour, as the gift is actually called in early Saxon. But surely as alliance with an equal or a superior gives an increase of strength, so also union with a luck of inferior character will prove a hindrance. The refusal of a gift thus easily takes on a touch of affront; a plain and distinct: "my luck is too good," and at the same time its equivalent: "I do not trust in your honour, your will." This thought is clearly expressed in Hord's saga, when the hero declares his doubts anent the acceptance of a friendly gift by saying: "I do not quite know about this, for it seems to me likely that you will not keep your friendship with me." The same thought underlies the dialogue between Einar Thambarskelfir, the Norwegian magnate, and Thorstein, the son of Siduhall, an Icelander of good standing who had made himself obnoxious to the king of Norway. Thorstein sought refuge with Einar and offered him a stately gift, but Einar was reluctant to bind himself to the outlaw, being loth to involve himself in any conflict with his king. When Einar gently draws back, Thorstein urges his gifts in these [73] words: "You can surely accept a gift from such a man as I." Einar's son Eindridi, on the other hand, approves of the gift, and of the man as well. "There is good man's worth (*mannkaup*) in him," he says to his father, meaning: he is a man with whom it is worth while to close a bargain (*kaup*), and when, in opposition to his father's wish, he has accepted the splendid horses, Einar is forced to urge the cause of the outlawed Thorstein before the king, even going to the length of threatening to renounce his allegiance and stand up in arms against his lord.

Where an inferior man is dealing with a greater, and especially one with king's luck, the effect can only be of one sort; that the greater luck will swallow up the less. The king's men, those who must have their centre of will and devotion in the king, are his "ring-takers", and their power and good fortune are dependent upon his progress. As long as they accept his gifts and eat his bread, they fight only for him and for his honour, and only thereby for their own. The enormous superiority of his luck renders the position one-sided, amounting almost to submission. Between two who reckon themselves as equals, the gift must necessarily be reciprocal, lest one should by craft acquire the advantage; it is altogether different between warriors or subjects and their king, and therefore, a king's gifts are not requited, as were ordinary gifts. When the king of Norway gave one of his men a title and lands, the name and honour were confirmed with many honourable gifts. If the people conferred on a claimant to the throne the name of king, this was not confirmed by tribute from those conferring; here also the king was the giver. The manner in which a gift might serve to emphasise self-assertion and the feeling of equality is shown to all posterity by the peasants of the Telemark in their conflict with King Harald, when he would teach them to pay taxes. The King's endeavours to instil into the Morsemens the new and difficult art had gradually taken effect on the slow pupils, more especially after the more unruly elements had been removed; only in far off Telemark did the old benighted ignorance still prevail, with the principle that the king, albeit a mighty man enough, was no superman; again and again the king sent glib [74] spokesmen to the place, but despite all their efforts, the theory failed to penetrate into those thick skulls. "Nay," says one of the great yeomen at last, Asgrim of Fíflavellir, "tribute we will not pay, but we are nowise unwilling to send the king our friendly gifts," and they send him gifts of very stately worth. But Harald refuses to accept them: "Carry his gifts to him again; I am to be king over this land, and declare what is law and right; I, and not Asgrim."

Another story from a far later time shows the power of a gift to teach the receiver his place. When Swein Estridson had been staying for some time at the court of Magnus the Good, the king one day offered him a cloak and a bowl of mead, with the words: "With these I give you the name of earl and power to rule in Denmark." But Swein, instead of putting on the cloak, flushed fiery red and handed it to one of his men. And Einar Thambarskelfir's exclamation: "This earl is all too great," shows how deeply all parties present realised the seriousness of the action.

But that which is in touch with men's innermost soul life has a certain elasticity, definite though it be. The king was not excluded from all exchange of gifts; he could accept a kindness, and could repay the gifts of good men, and that with a good heart. The giver was not necessarily, obliged to appear in humble guise for the king to accept his friendship without hesitation; as long as there was no possibility of official misconstruction, prince and noble could meet in equal assurance of goodwill. But the king must, of course, be careful not to accept unwittingly what might prove a claim to equality, for in such case, opposition would wax great upon his own hamingja. For the luck contained in a gift is not only a soul, but a disposition and a wish, the actual state of the soul, and it is this question: what does he want, what does he mean? which leads a man to ask for time to consider the gift, and makes him loth to touch the honour sent to his door from afar. It was demanded that the goodwill should accompany the gift in open words; the receiver could trust the words because they were "laid upon" the gift, or entered into it, and passed with the object from [75] hand to hand. "Take this sword; therewith I give you my friendship," or "See this sword, for that, ill-luck shall ever spring forth in your race," such words are real; the sword is inspired with friendly feelings or with hate, just as the name and the father's prophecy are ratified in the gift that fixes the name of the child.

In the case of fines for killing, the old feelings must come forth to meet us in their full strength, partly crystalised into legal forms. At one time, the man bereft of his kinsman thrusts the gold from him in contempt, almost as a defilement, at another he welcomes the restitution with both hands, or says, as does Gunnar when Njal comes with the fine: "No man dashes honour from him when it is offered." Both sides of the thought have here again been chiselled out by Egil; it is he who utters the contemptuous words of an age that has grown

used to selling its kin for gold — “the striker-down of kinsmen” he calls one who accepts a fine, as if by so doing, the man with whom vengeance lay were depriving the dead of his last hope of rebirth, — and he it is again who sits in Æthelstan's hall and offers thanks for the gift with the words: “Now I have found one that could smooth the furrows of the forehead and raise the lowering brows.” It is of no avail to seek the explanation of Egil's varying judgement by analysing his moods in the two moments; his words are in both cases founded in the same ethical value of the weregild. The fine is not a payment intended to dull the sense of honour in the offended party, but on the contrary, is to add honour to honour. Therefore, it behoves a man to see exactly what sort of rings are thus brought into the family. The condition for acceptance of a peaceable settlement is that both parties feel themselves as equals; neither family must consider its luck so much better and nobler that the alliance impoverishes the receiver instead of enriching him. Legally, this fear of inequality in alliance finds its expression in the oath of equity, that is to say: the parties offering payment shall first swear that they themselves would have accepted such fine had they themselves been the injured party. In later times, when the old view of the spiritual value of property had faded, [76] and was replaced by a purely mercantile valuation, the fine took on a loathsome ring of coin, and men came to fear the accusation of “carrying kinsmen in their purse”, even though the feeling of the fine as a proof of honour shown never entirely disappeared.

## CHAPTER V PURCHASE AND PLEDGE

“It was an unforgivable misfortune that this sword should go out of our family,” says the hero of a legendary saga despairingly, on seeing the ancient weapon of his clan turned against him; and at that moment, he speaks on behalf of his forefathers and all his kin. Men watched over their treasures, lest they should be lost by any incautious action; as a matter of fact, every transfer of property, even when most well-considered, had some slight element of risk. Modern peasants, at any rate those from isolated parts, have still their misgivings in matters of buying and selling. They would not challenge Providence by refusing the aid of a loan to one in need, when need comes to their door, but they would not, on the other hand, give Providence's opposite their little finger by shaking off their own good possessions, at the risk of never being able to make them cling on properly again. In order that the receiver shall not be able to filch the luck out of their hands, they carefully take three grains of corn from the bushel they lend, three hairs of the head of cattle sold, thus retaining the luck of the farmstead themselves. They give the receiver to understand: “The seed-corn you may have, the seed-luck I will keep.” But if the one acts thus with anxious care, the purchaser is no less on tenterhooks for fear lest overmuch rethain behind; it is no pleasant thought that the seller should stand behind him, gloating over the sight of a man solemnly walking off with an empty halter, the steps he hears at his back being merely those of a sham cow, with no more milk-soul in it than the hempen cord. And [78] if he come home with the assurance that everything possible has been done to secure the personality of the animal, he is careful to incorporate his new acquisition into the luck of the house, and see that it can be assimilated into the new sphere of action. He takes it with him into the room that it can see the fire on the hearth and take a wisp of hay of the lap of the housewife, so that it may not feel any longing for its former home. Or the cow is led three times round a stone set firm in the earth, that it may thrive, and feel no wish to run away.

The same thing was done in the old days. It was demanded that the owner should lay his whole mind in the transfer, and give the soul as well as the externals; care was taken to prevent his sucking up the luck himself, before handing over the property. We know the Nordic form for transfer of land, *skeyting*, as it was called: the owner led the purchaser out into the lot, bade him be seated, and poured some of the soil from the field into the tail -- *skant* -- of his cloak; a later age found it more convenient to let the ceremony take place at the

law-thing, or in the house, but always with the necessary condition that the soil be taken from the piece of land to be sold. In Norway, transfers of house and home and property were effected by taking earth from the four corners of the hearth, the high seat, and the place where field and meadow, woodland and grazing land met. In all essentials, the southern forms agree with those of the North; somewhat fuller, perhaps, but no less tangible or indispensable. There, one had to hand over a branch cut off on the spot, and the knife with which it was cut, a piece of turf of handful of mould from the soil, in order to ensure the buyer full enjoyment of the property – invest him with the ownership; and on handing over house and home, the bargain was fixed “by hinge and door” presumably by the owner taking the other party's hand and leading it to grasp the doorpost. Even then the buyer was not content, until the other had demonstratively left the place, throwing something of his own – generally perhaps a stick – behind him, and therewith his luck in the place. [79]

The buyer was concerned to see that the thing in its entirety left its former owner and attached itself to the new. The test would be seen when he commenced to use what he had bought, it would then become apparent whether it willingly served him to the full of its power. There might come a day when his honour depended on whether the property was for him; for he would be little better than a thief if it did not declare itself one with his luck. If for instance, he had bought a piece of land, and the former owner would force him out of possession by simply denying his right of purchase, then the matter can be decided by a single combat; the two men meet, each first thrusts his sword into the earth, or into a turf from the land, and the result of the battle will then show which of the two has succeeded in assimilating the luck of the land into himself and his strength.

The right of the Saxons to their land was created on the day one of the immigrants sold his gold to a Thuringian for as much of the soil as would cover a strip of his cloak. For a brief while the Thuringians went about deriding these vikings who sat on the shore starving their wits away; but the Saxons spread the soil carefully around to enclose the space of a camp, and from that day forward their luck changed. Hitherto they had fought in van, in constant peril of being driven into the sea, but from now onwards they drove the Thuringians ever farther and farther inland.

That the party relinquishing gives his “whole” mind means that he gives a gracious mind, not turning his evil thoughts toward the recipient and letting him carry them away with the goods. Men would have things so that nothing was “laid upon them”, so that they were not inspired with a prejudice fatal to the user. When Hreidmar in his simplicity accepted payment from the gods for the killing of his son, and the, after being promised peace, was surprised by Loki's words: “The gold is taken, a rich ransom for my head, but there waits your son no luck of it; it shall be your bane and his,” too late he complains: “You gave gifts, but not gifts of goodwill; you gave not with a whole mind; for your life had been forfeit to me here had I guessed your crafty plan.” [80]

The giver was expected to add his significant utterance: “I will give you the sword, and may you enjoy it.” In the *Beowulf*, the gift scene is again and again brought before our eyes: “Weapons and horses gave he Beowulf to have, and bade him use them well,” or, “Beowulf, dear one, use this ring and this byrnie with luck, have joy of these gifts and thriving go with them.” Even though this “enjoy it well” may perhaps at a pinch be interpreted as meaning “use it well”, it is but a poor rendering of the ancient word *neótan*. Used of a weapon, it means to assimilate its power and move it from within through mastery of its luck and soul – and then to wield it with force. The same lies in the words wherewith a Norse king confirmed his gift: “Here is a sword, and with it goes my friendship,” or with the further addition: “I think that luck goes with it, and therewith goes my friendship.”

One might wish for a still safer assurance of the other party's goodwill, and would then ask him for an independent proof. It lies in the nature of the gift itself, that such a gift also had legal significance, it contained a proof that the deal was honest, and it might serve as a proof of ownership. In the south, a glove or mitten was a traditional addition to a deal, so that it either figures beside mould and brand and turf in a sale of land, or independently, as a

means of transfer, testifying to the buyer that the land is his, and shall be made over to him in due form.

If the handing out of a gift did not mean a declaration of friendship, then it was a promise. Gift shades into a pledge. The Anglo-Saxon *ved* contains an indication of the original value of handing over an object, meaning as it does both a gift and a pledge and further, in a derivative sense, a promise or covenant.

The soul surrendered in the thing was, as we have seen, an individual actual mind, or, as we should say, a psychological state, only backed up by the whole, past and present and future power and responsibility of the hamingja. And in handing over his pledge, the giver could and would state in words what were the attitude of his mind in giving, if only he understood the [81] by no means easy – art of guiding words aright and driving the right hamingja into them. All that is said and promised, reserved and required is “laid upon”, or as another expression runs in the north, “laud under” the thing and thus handed over to the opposite party. What the opponent took was the actual asseveration, the surrender of the will – the man gave his word literally. So obligation holds good through all; no tacit reservation, no circumstances occurring, no question of what is reasonable can break or even soften it. If, finally, the party promising ran from himself, then the effects would be very soon evident in him. Not until villainy had come to be a purely social misfortune was there any need to add: “that he shall be beyond the law.”

The ancient sense of right always imposes one condition for the recognition of legal validity, to wit, reality. It asked: did this really happen, and where is the sign of that transformation in you and in the thing, which must be the consequence of any bargain? Then came he whom the dispute concerned, and answered: See, here is my proof that he acted, and thereupon he hold up the other party's word and will. To the Teutonic mind, it was certainly true that a word is a word, but men understood thereby that the word must be alive, or simply must be the man himself; and then it is a consequence of the nature of the soul that it retained, down to the very smallest particles, its character of hamingja, and must answer for the tiniest fraction of a promise left in the keeping of other people. Hence the power of curses; they do not bully, they do not threaten, they describe a state of things which will come about as soon as one has, in the straightforward sense, suffered damage to one's soul, and their doomsday earnestness just depends on the words' containing a correct presentment of something actual.

If one could only be sure of getting hamingja directly, one could very well place one's trust in a man who had not the external word ready at the moment; the Northman took the other party by the hand and let him give his mind in the touch, the two thus building a bridge by which promise and will passed [82] from man to man. A man would give his kinswoman in betrothal to another by offering his hand to the other to take. An agreement was confirmed by “laying hands together”, and in northern legal procedure, we have the expressions to “fasten” or “fix” oath, witnesses, judgement, meaning that a man pledges himself to bring evidence or to abide by the decision of the court, without any indication that material addition was the first condition for recognition of the promise. A purchase, a right, a task, etc. would be “handselled”, that is to say, a grasp of the hand served to transmit to another either property or the conduct of a lawsuit or a responsibility. “We name us witnesses to the fact that you fasten me your kinswoman with lawful right, and handsel me the dowry – a whole rede and rede without reserve,” runs the ritual in the Grágás, and the words were at first understood literally, so that the right lay in the hand offered, passing thence to the receiver. Because the two parties understood the validity of the bargain, and both felt the change in themselves when the right or responsibility passed from one to the other, the grasp of the hand had legally binding force, so that the law can establish it as a criterion of what has power and what is powerless. A bargain agreed upon and no more may be broken upon payment of two ounces, as the Danish law of Scania expresses it, but after handsel, it would cost six. If the words promise and handsel take each at the extremity of their meaning, they come to stand as opposites; the greatest possible trust in a man's honesty is expressed by saying: “Your promises are as good as others' handsel.”

The hesitation of the ancients in buying and selling was no less strong than is that of the common people to-day – rather the contrary; but their character was determined by the fact that a deal in those days was a different thing from what it is now. A bargain was always an exchange of gifts, which again means: always alliance and brotherhood; it was impossible to sight at the thing itself and exclude the owner from the horizon. No one could buy a horse or weapons without at the same time purchasing the owner's friendship, and with that, the friendship of the whole clan; as long as the power of the sword and [83] the utility of a beast constituted luck, the one could not be conceived without the other. In order to utilise a thing at all, it was necessary to enter into relations with the whole circle of men in whose keeping it was. And this double acquisition of the bodily and the soul-part in once is just what the Germanic mind understood by a bargain; they bargain about a thing, as they bargain about friendship and marriage.

Long before the Germanic peoples come forth into the full light of history, they had to some extent changed barter and alliance into merchandising. The very word for a bargain, Nordic *kaup*, Anglo-Saxon *ceap*, derived from Latin *caupo*, contains evidence of an advance in mercantile experience, while at the same time the linguistic usage immortalises the temporary victory of the old thoughts. In the interval which lies between the very early century when the word was brought into Northern Europe, and the time when our law-books were made, a fateful change has taken place in the estimation of things as regards their value to the owner; the gold ring has found its supreme court in the scale, with its weights running into one, two, three, and fractions; treasures have changed into capital yielding interest, the earth has come to be a sort of small change that can pass from hand to hand. From a people living on the soil and on their cattle, settling their accounts among themselves in cloaks and cows, the Germanic tribes have advanced to the rank of tradespeople, occupied with agriculture and stock-breeding, counting in yards of cloth or units of the value of a cow, and the effect of this change in the fundamental economical conditions forces its way irresistibly into all institutions – nowhere, perhaps, more victoriously than in the bargaining for a bride, where the payment of bride-money serves as the foundation of the wife's pecuniary security, or even to assure her a decent pension in the case of widowhood. Such a rearrangement of the world constitutes the irrevocable commencement of the emancipation of things, whereafter they must, sooner or later, break through the piety which tied them to clan and parish, and learn to trip it nimbly from land's end to land's end; and men have already begun to acquire the adroit fingers

[84] of the merchant, who gathers up goods only to dispose of them at a handsome profit.

But the old sense of ownership, which must prove inadequate in reckonings with coinage, places itself involuntarily in a posture of defence, as soon as it is brought face to face with the thing itself. For the present, the Germanic mind cannot go so far as to see things as objects; they were individualities, known and encountered with the reassurance of recognition. The world from which the laws and established customs of these people proceed is one in which articles of value have their proper names and their personality; it is the world where the haughty warrior, strutting about among his former enemies in the spoils of war, gives rise to the exclamation: "Look, Ingeld, do you know that weapon? It was the one your father bore the day he fell." And wherever these men go, they reveal themselves by their inability to sever altogether the connection between themselves and things. The gift a man had given to another was and would ever be an outpost of his soul in the alien territory, and he had both a right and a duty in regard to it, which rendered his will significant even to later recipients. For an Olaf the Saint, this feeling oneself in the thing was nothing less than a personal experience. One of his men, Brand Orvi, had once received a cloak from the king, and shortly after, given it away again to a poor priest, Isleif, who had come home from his

studies in foreign parts and was short of clothes. Olaf had something to say to Brand about this readiness of his to rid himself of a king's gifts, but when he saw Isleif in the glory of his learning and holiness, he realised at once that the cloak had found a worthy wearer. "I will give you that cloak," said Olaf, "for I can see from the look of you that there is a blessing in being counted in your prayers." It may be a Christian hope that is here expressed, but the grounds for so hoping are heathen enough.

Apart from the personal feeling of ownership, the importance of land and goods to others besides the nominal owner was a fact not to be disregarded in daily life. As long as a clan was not entirely dissolved, it was difficult to exterminate the right [85] of the heirs to consideration in any transfer of inherited property, whether it appeared as a claim to be heard at the sale, or a demand for right of pre-emption. It may be forced back within certain limits, and then it stands firmly as a claim that not more than a certain portion of a fortune may be given away, and that all beyond the reasonable amount can be claimed as returnable on the death of the giver.

The legal provisions are but surface signs of the anxiety with which the clansmen as a whole watched any transfer which involved spiritual revolutions and obligations. The family never lost touch of its gifts, and the clan could not surrender itself for ever as a passive instrument into the hands of strangers; so they rebelled at the thought that the receiver of a gift should freely dispose of what he had received to a third party.

This kicking of culture against the pricks of alien influence gives rise to a peculiar duality in the character of the trade-loving German people. Their laws for trade and commerce are nearer the commercial routine of a Roman than the chaffering of the true Germanic type; in their wrestling with sale and pledging, hire and rental, their speech is in reality that of a modern society, but they disguise their experienced wisdom in curious terms, which are only properly appreciated when one passes them by and approached them from behind, through the past. There is no getting round the old forms, and consequently, thought and expression are stubbornly in conflict, the meaning ever tugging and straining at the form till it is near to bursting, and the forms resisting, striving to keep the transactions within the confine of the ancient bargain system. It may end by the institution falling to pieces, as is actually the case with the old marriage and betrothal contracts, where the gifts which constitute the obligation have lost their significance as enrichment, and retained a ceremonial value as *ved* or present, while the pecuniary arrangement has maintained a separate position under or even outside them; a Lombard maiden becomes a bride in virtue of the old-fashioned betrothal, but her main interest lies in the document whereby the husband secures her to a fourth part of his fortune. The result may establish itself as a temporary [86] compromise, as when transactions dealing with things presuppose the seller's obligation to uphold the purchaser's right in face of his own kinsmen as well as of other possible objectors, so that he not only guarantees the rightful transfer of ownership once and for all, but declares his willingness to accept responsibility for the same as often as opportunity may arise.

But here and there, half or more than half stifled beneath all this flourishing legislation, we find an occasional etiolated shoot of the prehistoric idea of trade. Provisions such as those of the Grágás: A giver cannot revoke his gift, but if he gave in hope of return, or if the receiver have promised value in exchange, then the giver has a claim to as much as was promised, -- or as that of the Östgötalag which provides that ownership can be asserted by saying: he gave and I rewarded, -- contain in reality the Germanic trade legislation. They hark back to the idea of exchange of gifts as the true mode of procedure when things change hands; an object in one man's hand proffered a suit to an article of property that belonged to the neighbour. The gift which a Swedish suitor carried in his hand in token of his wish to marry into the house was characteristically called *tilgæf*, meaning a gift (*gæf*) for the obtaining of (*til*) a desire. The suitor for friendship, who gives his gift in order to obtain a certain thing in return, and the giver who prophesies blessing in the article transferred, have in reality long since told us all there is to say anent Germanic sale and purchase, and Gjafa-Refr, the Gift-Fox, is as a trader, the highest type of Teutonic bargaining.

Thus all distinction between unselfish desire to give and egoistic lust to possess, between an offer of friendship and haggling over a bargain, between noble self-surrender and ignoble demands for payment, melt away. Germanic culture knew no better than that possession was obtained by means of an offer of friendship, and neither affection nor cupidity were lessened thereby. To a Teuton, love and interest could no more be separated than were the soul and the body of the ring or axe. When, then, Gunnar, in the Edda, says: "One thing is better to me than all, Brynhild, Budli's daughter, she is above [87] all women; sooner will I lose my life than lose that maiden's treasures," there is true pathos and depth in his words, and in no other way could the passion be adequately expressed.

On this point, the ideas of the barbarian and of the educated man clash more helplessly, perhaps, than anywhere else. Tacitus has seen the guest emerge on departure with his arms full of costly gifts, and has seen the host remain behind content with a little mountain of souvenirs, which he had begged of those who had rejoiced his heart by accepting his hospitality. "It is customary to speed the parting guest with anything he fancies; there is the same readiness in turn to ask of him," he says, but adds: "gifts are their delight, but they neither count upon what they have given, nor are bound by what they have received." If he had been able to peep a little more closely within doors, he would have been considerably taken aback on observing how carefully the cheerful givers saw to it that nothing remained to enter in any account. The same thing has happened to many Europeans endeavouring to understand the ideas of savages as to the value of a thing between brethren. Here comes a native with his present, freely offering his friend the one lamb he has, and lo, shortly after, points out to the grateful colonist that he has forgotten to requite the little attention by giving, for instance, in return that very nice gun there. Then the white man is sorely bewildered, and sometimes becomes a ready convert to certain philosophical systems, which teach that the nobler characteristics of man do not fall in under innate ideas; it is only a pity that European speculation is too provincial to be able to feel with the native, who is shaking his head just as energetically over this remarkable world, in which people can go about and grow up to manhood without understanding the simplest things.

There is soul in the greed of the ancients, and so their desire rises to the level of passion, or should at least retain its sole right to that noble word. It comes over them when they move about the object of their cupidity, looking at it from every side, and unable to take their eyes off it; they cannot resist, they must have the owner's friendship, or take by force that [88] which they cannot win – and let the man of violence look to it thereafter, if he can force the acquisition to obey his will. Because desire comes from such a depth, therefore a refusal strikes at it as an affront. The calm and self-possessed chieftain of the Vatsdale, Ingimund the Old, had an experience in his later years, concerning a weapon. One summer, a Norseman, Hrafn, was staying with him as a guest, and this Hrafn always went about with a most excellent sword in his hand. Ingimund could not help casting sidelong glances at the sword; he had to borrow it and look at it, and he was angry in earnest when Hrafn flatly refused his eager offer to buy it. Days went on, Ingimund grew more and more interested in the Norseman's stories of his travels and viking adventures – had had been young himself once, and known the thirst for adventure – Hrafn talked, Ingimund listened, and in course of conversation Ingimund, lost in thought, stepped into his sanctuary, Hrafn following. Then Ingimund turned on him indignantly, for in a temple it was the custom to enter unarmed, not thus to challenge the gods; if a man forgot himself, he would have to make amends by offering the best he had, and begging one who knew the gods to take his case in hand. Thus Ingimund gained possession of the sword Ættartangi.

Desire can do more than set the passions moving, it creates the true tragedies in our forefathers' lives. When the old one-eyed god came into the hall of Volsung and struck the sword deep into the tree-trunk as a gift to the strongest, none but Sigmund could move it, but there was one, his brother-in-law Siggeir, who cast longing glances at it. He offered three times its weight in gold, but the gold left Sigmund unmoved. Siggeir then angrily left the place before the end of the feast, but in return, invited his wife's kin to his place, and there he gained possession of the sword, after having killed his father-in-law and set his sons,



ignominiously bound, as food for the wolves in the forest. One after another the grey one took the young men, only one, Sigmund, the owner of the sword, was left; by the help of his sister, Signy, he got back the sword, saved himself and avenged his father – and it was this sword which Odin [89] himself struck from his hand in the battle, which Regin forged together for his son, which served to slay Fafnir; the weapon of Sigurd Fafnirsbane. So one treasure after another comes with its tragedy. The collar of the Yngings, the arm-ring of the Scyldings, the Andvari hoard, -- in these names are indicated not only the tragedies of the Germanic people, but the tragic element in their life.

## **CHAPTER VI THE COMMON BOARD**

When King Magnus, perhaps a little by surprise, sought to bind Swein Estridson to subjection as his vassal, he did not only offer him a cloak, but added thereto a bowl of mead. Swein did not put on the cloak, and probably did not taste the mead either; he feared the latter no less than the former.

All that a gift could do, food and drink could also bring about; it could mean honour or dishonour, could bind and loose, give good fortune and act as a cheek upon luck.

Men drank to each other, as the saying went in the olden days; just as one drank wedding to a woman and thus drew her into one's own circle, so also one drank to one's neighbor, in such wise as to reach him, obtain him, and draw him into one's frith. Therefore, an answer such as this: "I have enjoyed his hospitality," is sufficient to justify a man in a flat refusal to join in an action against his quondam host, and the argument may perhaps force a man to take sides with the party opposed to that where his place would naturally be. Though it be but a single mouthful, it may, in a fateful moment, suffice to give a decisive turn to the future.

King Magnus was once sitting at meat on board his ship. A man came across the deck and up into the high poop where the king sat, broke off a piece of the bread and ate. The king looked at him, and asked his name. "I am called Thorfin." "Are you Earl Thorfin?" – "Yes, so men call me in the west." -- "True it is, Earl, I had in mind, if ever we should meet, to take care that you should say nothing to anyone of our meeting; [91] but after what has happened now, it would not become me to have you killed." And there were no inconsiderable matters outstanding between the two: Thorfin had played an ugly joke upon the king's plans of sovereignty, killed his kinsman Rognvald, the tool of the king's political plans on the islands of the west, and very ungently swept the king's retainers off the board.

Food has the same power as a gift to reveal the heart's thought and rede. Out of the ale arise honour and dishonour, it can raise a man in his self-esteem, and let loose all the ill spirits of an affront in him. The king honours his guest by drinking to him in his good brew and letting the horn be carried to his place, and guests honour one another by drinking together from the cup; throughout the whole of the Middle Ages and right down to our own times, men have continued to respect the cup of honour. He who would avoid offending the bridal pair must needs drink of their "cup of honor", as it is still called among modern peasants. When equals are seated side by side at table, they watch jealously to see that their advances are fully appreciated, and regard it as a dire insult if the one they drink to fail to "do right", -- refuses to accept the drink, or shows the lukewarmness of his feelings by only drinking half; and a chieftain exhibits the greatest punctiliousness in the matter of what is handed to him and who offers himself as a drink-fellow. King Harald regarded it as a disgrace to sit and be drunk to by King Magnus' half-brother Thorir, and gave vent to his feelings in a scornful verse with an allusion to his birth.

The common people's fear of being ill-used in drinking together is so violent as to show that the instinct has its roots deep down in human dignity itself. When Swedish peasants in, thought not of, the century of enlightenment, jump up and grasp their knives because they

cannot get their respective thirsts to keep pace, they are hardly in a position to explain their indignation, save perhaps by an old proverb -- the explanation of which again lies centuries before their own time -- to the effect that he who fails a man in drinking will fail him in other things. [92]

The final termination of all differences is the sharing of food and drink. A reconciliation did not hold good until it had been confirmed by a common meal. In the year 577, Gunthram and Childebert ate and drank together, and parted in friendly feeling after having honoured each other with rich gifts. Adam of Bremen's heathen contemporaries in the North feasted eight days together when they agreed upon alliance, and the Icelandic sagas tell often enough of how former coolness was turned to its opposite by the parties exchanging gifts, vowing mutual friendship and inviting each other to a feast.

The bargain for a wife was prepared with caution and craft. Where the bargain itself falls into several minor agreements: suit, betrothal, wedding and leading home, each separate item has also to be confirmed by an "ale". When peasants in Norway after the provisional agreement, first assemble at an "ale feast to talk the matter out", at the house of the bride's parents, where further details are arranged and the betrothal confirmed, then at a corresponding feast with the bridegroom's family, and only then proceed to the wedding, they are in all probability only doing what ancient custom demanded.

After the bridal bargain comes the gift bargain, and demands its confirmation at table. Here, we read of the transaction's being effected *per cibum et polum*, by food and drink, in the receiver's house, and this *per* has the same force as the "by" which declares that a deal or a payment as been effected in and through the *vadium*, or pledge, which the party concerned has tendered. Perhaps the solemnity of a meal among our southern kinsmen has fallen somewhat into the background, which may have some connection with the fanciful cult of symbolic gifts which grew so such an extent in German law; but in the North it lasted even more stubbornly than the faith in the pledge itself. Without a cup to soften the parting with the pig just sold, and confirm the joy at the shining dollars paid, it is hardly possible, among the peasantry, to buy or sell at all, and if a man have a weak stomach or a weak head to look after, he must excuse himself by an assurance of his sincerity: "The bargain stands, for all that." [93]

To reckon up all the legal transactions which called for a "cup" in conclusion of the bargain would mean giving a list of all the transactions that could take place in Germanic society, and the demand lies deeper than in a misty impulse to do what is right. The law looks again and again to the convivial wind-up as a legal criterion. Icelandic law does not accord legality to a wedding, unless six persons at least had eaten, drunk and bargained the two clans into alliance, the Swedes are content to register habit and custom, saying for instance: kin shall be asked to a wedding as far as the third degree, *i.e.* as far as normal relationship goes. Or again, as in the Norwegian Bjarkeyjar rétt, ale might be made the arbitrator, so that a son could be declared born in lawful wedlock when his mother was brought for lawful bride money (*mundr*) and a cask of ale had been purchased for the wedding, and drunk in the presence of two brides-men and two brides-women, a male and a female servant.

There is still something vulnerable about this old means of compact, which could so force human beings together that their slightest action under its influence became a fact in law and right. When the sharing of food could thus in course of time become a sign of compact, it was because it had once been established in experience. The legality of the action arose from the fact that both parties felt the change in them, and thus experienced the rightness of the new state; it was demanded that the great bowls, those on which important decisions depended, should be emptied to the last drop, in order that the will to hold by the bargain might be firmly secured. And men knew that an incautious mouthful might deprive a man of his self-control, or at any rate allow some other influence to affect his will and paralyse his power of further progress. The refusal comes with a force of its own: "my errand is of another sort than to eat food," when a man comes knocking up the master of the house to demand a settlement. "If I could but get the stiff-necked clerk to eat with me, I should know how to manage him easily enough" -- this approximately was the thought of the crafty

Merovingian, Chilperich, when, on his meeting with [94] Gregory, he sought to persuade him to take some refreshment; but on this point, Gregory was as good a Teuton as the king, and knew how to take care of himself. "Let us first straighten out what is amiss; then we can afterwards drink our settlement fast," or, as the matter might also be put, with Gregory's not uncommon two-legged logic: "Our eating shall be to do God's will, not suffering ourselves to be tempted by the lust of the flesh, to the forgetting of His commandments; therefore, before I eat, you must promise not to trespass against the rules of the church."

A man surrendered himself completely to his opponent the moment he handed him the cup and drank with him; on those two hands reached out toward each other with the vessel, there balanced a future which the least uncertainty could upset, to the misfortune of two human beings. After the death of the Lombard king Authari, his queen, Theodolind, was asked by the people to accept the dignity herself, and choose a husband with a strong hand to rule the kingdom. With the advice of wise men, she chose Duke Agilulf of Turin, and hastily invited him to a meeting. The two met at Laumellum, and after they had spoken together a while, she had wine brought, drank first herself and handed Agilulf the rest. When he had taken the cup and would kiss her hand, she said with a smile and a blush that it was not fitting he should kiss her hand who was to kiss her lips. She bade him stand up and spoke to him of wedding and rulership.

Thus Paulus Diaconus. And here, we should be poor readers if we failed to understand that the little scene has a tension of its own, great enough to give rise to a tragedy. Theodolind has, with the cup, offered her own honour, and given it into his hand, to do with as he pleases; she has bound herself as Brynhild bound herself to Sigurd by her vow to possess him who rode the flame; hesitation on Agilulf's part to accept the vow and make it a reality would fling her into unluck and force her later vengeance.

Whether the future consists in wedding or in the new acquisition of property, the act of drinking together is a giving and [95] receiving both the joy of the new state and the power to enjoy it. The two parties drank *njótsminni*, a cup that could make the purchaser *njótr*, one who should enjoy the luck of the thing; and the modern formula for *lídkøb* – as the bargain cup is called in Danish – still contains a brief idea of all the effects which the purchase cup produces on buyer and seller as well as on the thing transferred; though I do not mean to imply that the ritual is handed down from earliest times. The seller testifies his contentment with the price, guarantees that the article is full and whole and shall be handed over to be the other's property entirely and for ever, without reserve, without flaw, with the luck in it; and the other party assures himself that the deal is finally concluded and the receiver satisfied, guaranteeing on his part that the receiver shall have the full use and value of the money. And this runs, when Danes are bargaining: "Now I drink the black-faced cow to you, healthy and sound it is in every way, free of hidden faults, 100 dollars is the price I am to have for it; the calving time will be as I have stated; as it is, so you shall have it." "Then I drink to you the 30 dollars already paid, I wish you the luck of the money; so much you shall have, that you have had." "We wish luck on both sides with this deal," says the witnesses.

We can gather the Germanic bargain into one image, in the Norwegian form for freeing a slave. The slave was given his freedom – and therefore he himself was called *frjálsgjaf* – and for the gift of freedom he paid his fee; but until he had held his freedom's ale – eating and drinking with the man who freed him – he was not regarded socially as released from his position of dependence.

Modern research has found endless difficulty in understanding this superfluity of forms, worrying its brains with the question as to what the glove did, since possessions depended upon the skeyting, and what was the use of the latter, sine the vadium was all sufficient, and men have wrestled with the various symbols as a kind of puzzle, that had to be made to work out by some clever arrangement. The same difficulty applies to almost every point in the life of the ancients; name-giving and its con- [96] firmation, betrothal and wedding, bridal gift and bridal ale, are all absolute powers, and yet they get on so excellently well together as soon as they are suffered to act outside our learned heads. We can never arrive at any solution by limiting the effect of the individual acts relatively to one another, simply because their power

of working together lies in the fact that they are all perfect in themselves and therefore each contains its counterpart. Faith in the single action must then, as its balance, have so much earnestness, that a breach of the proper sequence means an affront on the part of him who caused the disturbance and misfortune, since it was not a possibility upset, but a real bargain that was broken and a spiritual connection that was irregularly sundered.

Two antagonists can wash away the feud in a common drink, because there is something strong in the horn, which heals all disharmony and quenches all thirst for revenge, and more than that; something which cherished a new feeling. They quaff the goodwill directly. Therefore the law must deny a man right to seek restitution from his opponent when he has of his own free will shared house and food with him. Like everything else in the world, the drink has its peculiar luck, a concentrated essence of the hamingja belonging to the house and its family. If a bride, on her first stepping forward to the door of her new home, or her first crossing of the threshold, was offered a taste of the food and drink there housed – as was the custom in later times – it was in order that she might be initiated and received into the spirit which ruled in that home, and become minded of one mind with the house. In Sweden, and possibly also elsewhere, it was not enough that bride and bridegroom emptied the wedding cup together with their kin in the bridal house; after the bride had been handed over to her husband, the whole party moved off together to the husband's house and there celebrated a wedding. At the first place, the agreement was drunk fast in all those concerned; at the second, the bridal pair was initiated into its new existence.

[97] It lies in the nature of the drink itself that it should bring with it forgetfulness of something and the better remembrance of other things; in its strongest brew, it assimilated the drinker with itself, and so effaced his past as to make him a new man; it brought that forgetfulness which may suffer facts to stand, but takes away their light and shade and reality. Thus it was with Sigurd, when the queen, in Gjuki's hall, handed him the horn; as soon as he had tasted the brew, he forgot Brynhild and all his promises to her, thinking only how splendid a woman was Gudrun and what fine men were her brothers. The contents of the horn are a cup of memory when it is to wake the soul, and a cup of forgetfulness when it is to shut off the past; the ale in both cases is the same, and the main ingredient in it is the unadulterated homely brew of a strong household beer. The story of Hedin's enchantment, when he slays his foster-brother Hogni's queen and carries off his daughter, needs no more than the simple and obvious explanation that he had once in the forest encountered a woman who gave him to drink from a "horn of ale", and when he had drunk, he remembered nothing of the past, nothing of having accepted Hogni's hospitality, or become his foster-brother, he had only one thought, that the advice of the ale-bearer woman was the only thing worth having and following in the world.

In the Danish ballad of Bosmer's visit to Elfland, the reality still holds that the drink, in virtue of its origin, contained a certain honour and fate, certain memories and certain aims, which of themselves drove out all else. The symmetrical ballad style is here as if moulded to the theme; before he has tasted the elfin food, he knows that

"In Denmark I was bred and born,  
And there my courtly clothes were shorn:  
There is the maid I have chosen to wife,  
And there I will live to the end of my life,"

and he feels that he has come an evil journey. But the moment he has drunk, the little words turn about: [98]

"In Elfland I was bred and born,  
And there my courtly clothes were shorn:  
There is the maid I have chosen to wife,  
And there I will live to the end of my life,"  
It comes about with him, as with Sigurd, that as he  
"Held the cup to his lips and drank,  
Out of his mind the whole world sank,  
Forgotten his father and mother,

Forgotten his sisters and brothers . . .”

Two little grains of Elfland corn dropped into the wine to enhance the effect – nothing extraordinary beyond this, and the grains themselves are, when all is said and done, nothing else and nothing more than an emphasising of the fact that the drink contains the natural product of Elfland.

The ale Sigurd and Hedin swallowed was in the true sense a witch-brew, for it was evil, and carried evil with it. Both come to their senses, and memory finds its way to their former being, but they cannot become their former selves again. They have no will to break, and they go forward unhesitatingly on the road the drink has set them, recognising that which has the foundation of a whole life. Sigurd's loyalty to his brothers-in-law is not loosened after his awakening, and Hedein's contrition at having wronged his foster-brother is not repentance in the modern sense; it can lead him to offer restitution, but when his offer is rejected, he has no chance but to assert himself. The only way for him to stave off nidinghood is by carrying through his present character and making it his honour, just as the owners of Tyrfinn must accept the dark fate of the weapon as their own will. The strength, the tragic grandeur of these ancient heroes lie in their single-mindedness; they never try to be two men at a time, and thus they never know the inner discord that consumes modern men who despise themselves for what they are and hanker after what they cannot be – thus never attaining to tragedy. [99]

The home-brewed ale was an *elixir vitæ* which imperceptibly created the minds day by day in peasant's homestead and king's court. In it frith was born.

If a man died alone in a strange land or on board a ship, it was natural to declare his board-fellow his heir, not because such fellowship was regarded as reflecting the character of family relationship, but because the sharing of food was the heart of the clan, and indeed of every circle whose unity was of the same sort as that of the circle of kin. Without a constantly repeated renewal of frith by the food, and especially by the drink which was permeated by the luck of the house itself, the bond would be loosened and the individual wither; and when we read that none could be declared incapable of managing his own affairs as long as he could drink ale and ride a horse – empty his cup and move among men without help from others – there was an equality between the two items which is no longer obvious. “To sit in the mead-seat” is an expression for being yet among the living, which owes nothing to poetic licence.

Meat and drink can, nay, must, be the sign which distinguishes life from death. When the outcast has been brought to a seat in a stranger's house and becomes a new man, with new life and new thoughts, the transformation has not taken place in any metaphysical sense, he has physically received a luck and taken it in. And when the child had tasted food, it was insured against being cast out, for the simple reason that it had imbibed a reality, and was thus become an unassailable value. It had tasted frith, and was therefore insured in honour, so that not even its parents had now any power over it. There is a story from Friesland of a woman of noble family who had her son's child carried out, in anger at his having only daughters born to him. When she learned that another woman had taken interest in the little creature and cared for it, she sent men with the strictest orders; the child was to be put out of the world; but the men arrived too late; the child lay, licking its lips contently after a meal – and they had to go back to their stern mistress with their errand unaccomplished.

On the other hand, exclusion from the sharing of food amounts [100] to sentence of death upon the outlaw. When the state declares a niding *óæll*, as it is called in Iceland, one against whom every man's hand and store shall be closed, it means that he is shut out from all continuance in humanity; life is no longer allowed to flow into him.

Having arrived thus far, we look about us involuntarily in search of some ceremonial. Even though the sources, as in almost every case of ordinary everyday things, are apt to fail us, we know that just as luck and honour exercised their vital functions through the medium of gifts, so also must the meal, and the intercourse after the meal, when the drink went round, have had its forms, through which the deep breath of frith was visible. A significant view of the life of a peasant homestead is afforded by a that little passage in the Frosta-thing's Law which decrees that “those vessels wherein the women drink to one another across the

floor shall go to the daughters." At the king's court, where the man was linked up into the chieftain's luck and permeated with his will, "by gift and ale" as the Beowulf says, the queen went her way through the hall at the drink hour horn in hand, and offered it all round the bench, after first letting her husband drink. Thus evidently the queen would go on working days and feast days, whether her mind urged her especially thereto or not. The men claimed such attendance as a right. "We think so well, King Garibald, of your daughter, that we would gladly have a foretaste now of the luck that awaits us; let her then, beloved, hand us a cup now, a she will later come to bear it to us;" thus, with innocent directness speak the little group of messengers from King Authari, as they rested on King Garibald's benches after having gained his consent to the maiden's marriage with their master. The actual spokesman was in reality Authari himself, who, out of curiosity, had disguised himself as one of his own retainers, and now took advantage of common custom to approach his betrothed. And since the forms observed in the king's body-guard were but an intensified image of the customs of the home, we may suppose that spiritual service formed part of the Germanic [101] housewife's duty, was indeed her essential work as a weaver of frith. The saga writer can find no more direct expression for Brynhild's manliness than the fact that she will not allow any man to take his seat beside her, or hand ale to any to drink: her mind is set on war and not on marriage.

There is more detail in the ancient descriptions of feasting at table, especially on such occasions as involved a change in the life of those taking part. The feast begins outside the house, where a ceremonial drink awaits the guests as they arrive. The wedding customs of later times, in Norway, present this ritual in imposing forms. The men assemble at the bridegroom's homestead, there to clinch the fellowship by eating and drinking doughtily together. Then with shouts and cries they set off in a wild race to the bride's home, and having neared the place, send off two heralds in advance to ask a night's lodging. In answer to their request, they are given some bowls of ale, which are carried to the party in waiting, and not until this ale greeting has admitted them into the great community awaiting them, do they ride forward and dismount. This life study from the eighteenth century proves is venerable character by its agreement in every item with the scattered indications which have found their way into the Swedish district laws. According to these likewise, two of the bridegroom's party had, on arriving at the house of the bride, to ask the master of the house for frith for themselves and their companions; and after his had been mutually agreed and weapons laid aside, the first drink round takes place, as an introduction to the spokesman's formal demand for the bride.

Whether the cup of initiation were offered in the open air or within doors, the guest could not avoid it. As we learn in the Hymiskvida, the god, on his visit to Jotunheim, among his mother's people, was met on the floor of the hall by his gold-decked kinswoman with the ale horn in her hand. And the man who had been a guest in Olaf Kyrri's hall, calls to mind his welcome there in the same image: "The prince of battle greeted me welcome with friendly mind, when the feaster of ravens, the master of rings, he himself came forward to meet me with [102] a golden horn to drink with me." A Byzantine author, Priscos, from the sixth century, has in his recollections of a journey he made as ambassador to the court of Attila, described the trials which an educated man had to pass through for his country's sake. These barbarians had naturally the queerest customs, and the trouble was that one had to agree to their eccentricities if one wished to make any headway at all. He was invited one day to a private banquet with the queen, and was at once overwhelmed with a circumstantial Scythian ceremonial; each of those present rose on the entry of the Greeks and offered them a full cup, which they had to drink off, after which achievement they were rewarded with kisses and embraces from their dear hosts. To all appearances, Attila's court must have been more than half germanised, as it was in fact made up of Teuton grandees, and Priscos had, in this Scythian ritual of the board, a taste of what it meant to live in Gothic fashion.

There is no break between these old scenes from the south and north, on the one hand, and the simply grandiose forms of the Swedish and Norwegian peasantry on the other, when the host comes out on to the steps with "welcome" in his hand, carried, perhaps, in a vessel

specially kept for the purpose. And the custom of Ditmarsk again, slips into the whole, almost as an exhaustive commentary on the old indications. We find here, that when the guest has shared the first meal with his hosts, the mistress of the house comes forward and greets him in solemn, traditional formula with fresh ale in a fresh, new bowl; after her come in the same manner sons and daughters, and finally, the serving people likewise show him their hospitable mind.

These ceremonials are more particularly aimed at the guest who does not himself form one of the circle, and has therefore first to be admitted to its life; but in the more general features, the forms obtaining at a banquet are merely an enhancement and adaptation of what is always required. The customs of the ceremonial feast teach us to what extent the forms of food-sharing dominated all intercourse between people generally.

[103] Slowly and steadily our forefathers' life moves forward, we may even find the pace desperately slow. These people appear to us to be stuck fast, writhing in a web of forms. Hesitatingly, unwillingly, ever considering and estimated, they move, for every step is rendered a matter of grave moment from the effect which every act might have upon an immeasurable future. There is no way of breaking through the ceremonial; without these forms and fashions there is no possibility of any intercourse between human beings at all; again and again men have to go through them in order to reach other's thoughts. Even the most fleeing encounter presupposes in a certain degree alliance and compact, -- not for nothing did the custom demand so great a reserve on the part of host and guest, that they entertained and partook of entertainment for days together before they could bring out their errand. When a first acquaintance could have such pronounced effects as this, that the host was compelled to take up his guest's suit, and prosecute it as his own, despite his inclination; even, indeed, when this new interest was so opposed to his own former obligations that wit and luck were needed to avoid catastrophe -- then circumspection and diplomacy must be a sure growth among the people.

Then we may perhaps be surprised to find that caution has an opposite with features no less marked.

Not enough that a host is in the power of his guest -- after all, every man is more or less at the mercy of any passer-by. The guest is the stronger; he can force his way in by violence and snatch a man's friendship; he can manage by stealth to procure a mouthful of the luck of the house, and then the hamingja itself takes up his cause and forces it, by the action of the pulse, into its representatives in the flesh, driving them whither they would not. Once inside the door, he has no need to crouch and humbly hide his existence in the gloomiest corner, still less sneak about in borrowed clothes; boldly he holds forth his business in the light, and asks his hosts when they are really going to make an effort and gain him his rights. The guest's authority is so strong that when he throws himself on the mercy of the man he has wronged, he can insist on the bond of hospi- [104] tality; it is a great shame to wrong a man who has placed himself in one's power -- with these words he points his request.

There is a remarkable story of the young Lombard prince Albuin. In order to gain the distinction among aliens which was required to give a man full dignity in his own home, he set out resolutely with a chosen following to the court of Thurisind, king of the Gepidæ, whom he had rendered poorer by a son in a recent battle. As a guest of the highest birth, he was offered a seat in the empty place next to the king, and the meal proceeded in due form. Thurisind was silent for a long while, and all were careful not to utter their thoughts; but when the king broke out: "Gladly I look upon that seat, but it is hard to see that man sitting there," the hall burst into uproar. The Gepidæ jeered at their guests, and called them mares with white socks, -- referring to the white bands they wore round their legs. The Lombards asked whether they had fought at Asfeld and seen the mares strike out with their hoofs, and the Gepidæ suddenly called to mind more than they could control. But the king dashed out into the midst of them, warning and threatening any who should dare to tempt the patience

of God by striking down a guest in the house itself. The men calmed down, and the feast proceeded "with gladness". Thurisind took down his son's weapons from the place where they hung, and set them upon Albuin himself.

Here, hospitality is seen in conflict with great and powerful feelings, and it gains the victory.

Caution was great, but hospitality was greater. The wayfarer was always certain of being received. Tacitus gives his readers the impression that the table is laid as soon as the mere shadow of a stranger falls through the doorway, and he is right when he states absolutely that none need wait for an invitation. "It is villainy to refuse shelter," runs the popular saying in Norway; having tendered hospitality, the host is at once involved in the difficulties of the guest. Headlong we should call these Icelanders, who almost drag in the man pursued, when he comes one evening and knocks at the door as one in a hurry to find himself within doors; who, despite their own opinion [105] of the man, risk their life and welfare to protect him, openly and secretly; who send him with a recommendation to their friends and kinsmen to look after. But Cæsar had already met men who were the equals of the Icelanders, and he has revealed his insight into their ideas of hospitality by saying simply: "These people consider it shameful to affront a guest. Whoever he may be, and whatsoever grounds may drive him to seek the hospitality of others, they protect him against wrong. He is sacred; all houses are open to him, and food is ready for him."

Only by living through the contrasts to their extreme consequences can we partake of the harmony wherein this culture rests. All that a man is he must be wholly, within a luck or outside it – there is no tangent middle stage. When a man stands face to face with his neighbour, one of two things must happen; either one casts words to him across a great, bottomless gulf, and the words then necessarily become weapons, or the two mingle mind, and the words become ready messengers of goodwill. The guest who has tasted of the fat of the house, is really within the soul, for a visitor who fails to let himself be entirely swallowed up by the luck of the house is unimaginable, since no home could tolerate such a dead spot within its organism.

The manner in which later times held, as a matter of course, the master of a house responsible for all that proceeded from his house is but a faint expression of the host's personal feeling of the guest's actions as deriving from his own will, or in other words, as those of a kinsman. He must protect the guest to the uttermost of his power, because the stranger's misfortune will drag the whole house with it to its fall.

Procopius tells of Thorisvind, King of the Gepidæ, who was once tempted by the emperor of Byzantium to hand over a foreign pretender, whom fate had driven to seek refuge among the tribe. As a widely travelled man, who had learned the strange ways of civilized nations, he was able to realise that the old-fashioned principles of morality would not serve in cases of political complications, and he endeavoured to make his people [106] understand that an agreement paid for with something which one did not own was clear profit. But through the words of the alien historian there still runs audibly the people's refusal: "Far be it from us! Better that we should perish with our wives and children." In face of the old-fashioned doctrinairism of the people, the king with all his enlightenment can make no headway – he is forced to settle matters privately with the other party, and attain his end by stealth, as progress often must when seeking its way in the world.

What we call form was reality itself. The intercourse of the ancients did not take place under certain forms, but in them, they lived life itself in the slowly circulating ale-bowl, they shared mind as they drank fellowship together, exchanged fleeting thoughts in the cup as they exchanged winged thoughts in their words; they tasted the honour and the memories of the house in its food, at the same time feasting their eyes with the heirlooms and trophies in the hall, and drawing in the atmosphere of the clan with their breaths. It was an experience unlike all else to handle weapons when they came to the hand so heavy with spirit as to force the owner to open his lips and say: "This byrnie Heorogar bore throughout a long life," – "this sword belonged to my grandfather Jokul, and the ancient Vatsdolea men before him, and kept them in conquest." It was a unique feeling to own a thing of value, when its nature



was to such a degree fate, past, present and future, that the gift not only set the receiver's soul vibrating, but inspired him to a poem on the giver.

Ceremonial forms are the stream of life itself, not narrowing banks against which life grinds in its passage. They are solemn because they are necessary; they are necessary because they come into existence merely from the fact that men do not offer resistance to the need of life, to develop itself. To go with the sun, to grow and let grow with the moon, to carry out the ritual whereby kinship, whether with men or with nature, is strengthened and renewed, whereby the sun is held to its course and earth and heaven preserve their youth and strength, to effect honour and luck, to give the child its name-gift, to drink the [107] cup of brotherhood – this is to live. It is forms which divide the living from the dead. One cannot forbid an outlaw of the woods to eat, and there is no idea of cutting him off from food, but real food, that which carries with it all gladness and thoughts, from this is he excluded. He is thrust out from forms, into the formless.

## CHAPTER VII HOLINESS

Treasure and man are one; but the man has his time, and that done, another succeeds him; the treasure remains, handing on the luck to his successor. Man comes to his appointed day; by virtue of his luck he makes his way across into the other existence; but he does not take the whole sum with him; part, and that no insignificant part, remains in the things he leaves behind him, there to await the man who follows. With very good reason, then, weapons, clothes, household implements may be called bearers of life; not only is the sword a lasting thing, it is a well of life, whence a man may renew his store, through which he can draw up power from the primeval source. The settler stuck his axe into the new soil to mark it as his property, and it has hamingja enough to bring the whole piece of land under its will, making it to serve its owner, and guard him against aggression. The law of Norway retains a memory of the emphatic prohibition declared against unrightful use of land by the owner's placing his mark (called law stick) upon it and thus barring it from all others' luck. Often the weapon manifests its intimate contact with the family hamingja by revealing to the owner some intelligence which his personal hugr was not aware of. The sword knows beforehand when battle or killing is toward, and utters its warning aloud. The victorious axe Skrukke was ever singing loud and cheerily to its owner, the "murderous" Steinar, when the war-path opened before him, just as Gunnar's halberd ever rang out in greeting of news to come. Clothes do not submit tamely to be worn on imprudent expeditions: When [109] Thorgils, despite the warning appearance of his fylgia, had ridden to the law-thing, his cloak uttered warning verses as it hung drying on the wall.

So also cattle are both sharers in luck and a means of luck. There was healing to be gained in the pigsty, even for so serious a disability as the lack of power to see visions in dreams. When Halfdan the Black had tried diverse cures to get rid of his dreamlessness and all had failed, he made his bed in the byre, and presently the splendid future accorded to his son was revealed to him. The regenerative power of animals appears more particularly in certain individuals, of special character, the treasures of the livestock; such cows, oxen, horses, as the owner himself put faith in. He trusted to them more than to others in case of need, and he put faith in their counsels. Thorir, one of the early settlers in Iceland, staked his future on the mare called Skalm; all one autumn he wandered nomad fashion about, following its tracks, and on the spot where it finally lay down under its burden, there he built his home. As early as in the days of Tacitus, there were tribes in the south who had turned the prophetic gifts of the horse to account as regular state oracles; at critical times, when the welfare of the people called for some guide as to the future, the sacred stallions were harnessed to the sacred chariot by the king or the priest, and solemnly led forward until their neighing and whinnying gave the sign expected.

Acting as links between men and luck, such beasts and chattels drew life forth from the ultimate depths of that hamingja wherein they were fixed. But this fund of honour and blessing had other wells too, gaping wide in the house itself. A man could gain new strength and new will by placing himself in the high seat; the ceremony of leading a man into the high seat meant, in the case of a stranger, adopting him into the clan whose centre it was, and in the case of a son, investing him with authority. First and foremost, there is mention of the pillars of the seat, the supports which bore the roof above the master's seat in his home; in these there was wisdom, so that they would move ahead of the venturer when, on nearing the [110] shores of Iceland, he threw them overboard, to guide him to a spot where he might set up his new homestead with good hap. When an Ingolf, a Thorolf, and a host of unnamed besides, so carefully took these pillars with them on board, and so faithfully followed their directions, relinquishing their temporary dwelling the moment news of their finding arrived, it was because the wood contained a guarantee of welfare. The place bounded by these pillars held the seat of the head of the family and was filled with the hamingja of his clan. The peculiarity attaching to Odin's throne — that a man saw all things on seating himself upon it — was merely an accentuation of the wisdom and luck which ever went with the place in the high seat. When the heir to the throne was led by his father to the royal seat, he was clothed in power, and at the same time, it was with him as with Saul, when Samuel had anointed him with oil; his heart was changed within him.

In similar wise, luck dwelt in the *setstocks*, the planks which marked off the floor of the room from the lower central portion where the hearth fire burned. These, like the high seat, could, when thrown overboard, show a way through the sea and find the right place for a dwelling, and, probably, it was due not least to their spiritual powers that Thorgest first borrowed Eric the Red's setstocks, and thereafter refused to give them back, so that Eric had to take them by force of arms.

The whole house is pervaded with hamingja, from the roof to the roots of its uprights, even to the cooking vessels; there is not a corner in or about the home but has its inspiration, from the weathercocks on the gables, that told what weather was to come, to the fire on the hearth, which doubtless also, from its behaviour, indicated any approaching change in luck. Where the fire was carried, it paved a happy way for the clan, and so it was that the first settlers in Iceland, by embers brought from the ancient hearth, planted their luck in the new land, in the same way as their fathers for many generations may have tamed and humanised wild soil. And when it was lit upon a stranger's property, indicating a rightful claim to the ground, it ate its way down and gnawed through the will that had [111] hitherto reigned on the spot, devouring the ground beneath the feet of the former owner. When Glum had made away with the treasures of his grandfather, he was brought so low by his enemies that he had to sell his land, but at the last moment he made an attempt to defy his fate; on flitting day, he remained sitting in his high seat, ordered the hall to be decked with hangings as for a feast, and pretended not to hear the others calling him. Then came the new owner's mother, and greeted him with the words: "Now I have lit fire on the land, and demand that you go out with all that of yours, for the land is consecrated to my son." Then Glum understood that his right and his luck were gone, it was useless to kick against the pricks, and with a bitter word he rose, and left the place.

The power of the hearth is strongly emphasised in legal language as well as in later custom. The Northman demanded, for rightful transfer of a property, that earth should be taken from those places in the house where it was strongest, and when he mentions the high seat and the corners of the hearth, we may be sure that he knew of nothing holier within the threshold. Nor is it impossible that the hearth among certain peoples, perhaps even in certain families, occupied the place of the Norwegian high seat as the heart of the house, — here as everywhere there is, in the midst of homogeneity, scope for the individual character of luck.

When the open hearth in the middle of the house was abandoned for the chimney, the holiness was transferred to the chimney hammer, the cross piece supported by the two side baulks of the hearth; Danish popular custom recognises it as the real foundation of the

house, which was conscientiously taken away on removal, and built into the wall of the new dwelling.

In addition to these natural centres, luck might have an individual high seat of its own in the house. At Thord Gellir's homestead of Hvamm there lay in the midst of the room a stone, which was no ordinary piece of rubble, to judge from the fact that great oaths were sworn upon it. And from the stone at Hvamm, one's thoughts turn naturally to Volsung's house. It was, according to the legend, built about an oak, in [112] such wise that the trunk formed the backbone of the house, while the leaves shaded over the hall, and it is added that the trunk which made up the core of the home was called the child-stock. Tradition further relates that Odin appeared in the guise of an one-eyed old man and struck the sword fast in the stock, dedicating it to the man who should be able to wrench it out; from this sword, which came loose when Sigmund tried his strength, proceeded the fate of the clan, made famous through Sigurd the dragon slayer. It is probable that this legend once formed part of a family tradition, but whether such a house ever existed or not, the interest for us lies in the fact that Scandinavian listeners had no difficulty in realising the bearings of this tale.

The sacred customs lead us further afield; outside the house men would point to a stone, a waterfall, a meadow, a mountain, as the holiest of holy things, the true source whence all luck, all honour, all frith flowed out to pulse through the veins of the kinsmen. Thorolf's family had their spiritual home in the mountain that stood above the homestead — Helgafell (the holy mountain) it was naturally called. One of Thorolf's contemporaries, the settler Thorir Snepil, lived at Lund, and he "worshipped the grove" (*lund*); another, Lodin, acquired the Flatey valley right up as far as Gunnsteinar, and he worshipped the rocks there. Hrolf lived at Fors, and his son Thorstein worshipped the waterfall (*foss*), and all the leavings of the house were thrown into the rapids.

Helgafell was fenced off from daily life by a holy silence; nothing, neither man nor beast, was suffered to perish there, no blood was suffered to flow, no dirt to defile. But it was not only a place inviolable; it was the place whence luck was brought. When it was a case of hitting upon the right decision in a difficult matter, the discussion was adjourned to the holy place. Snorri Godi, the later master of the homestead, whose "cold", wise counsels were famous, knew that plans made on Helgafell were more likely to succeed than all others. From the foss came inspiration to the seer Thorstein Raudnef, so that he could always see, in the autumn, which of the cattle would not live [113] through the winter and therefore should be chosen for slaughter. This power of holiness is the same as that which Tacitus heard spoken of among the southern Germanic tribes; in the land of the Hermundures there lay a salt spring, where the gods were to be found, and where men could have their wishes fulfilled. He knew too, that the Batavians assembled in a sacred grove to make plans against the Romans, and if the meeting, which is not inconceivable, took place in the sacred locality itself, the meeting place must have been chosen for the same reason which led Snorri Godi to go up to Helgafell.

On the island of Fositeland, "which lies midway between the Danes and the Frisians", the missionary Willibrord found a sanctuary. A fortunate hand has preserved to us the account of his experiences during the few days he stayed there, and from the purely external description which the Christian observers could give, the same two features stand out distinctly: the blessing in that spring which was in the grove — for there the inhabitants procured their water — and the peace and solemnity of holiness which marked the resting place of luck. The animals grazed there, sacredly inviolable, all that was found within the boundaries lay undisturbed in its place, while men came and went, the people moved in silence towards the spring in the middle, drew their water, and moved silently away. We also learn that the inhabitants trusted in the power of the place to assert its holiness without human aid; for when the missionaries came tramping in with ostentatious indifference, slaughtered the beasts and baptised in the waters, the inhabitants looked to see the trespassers lose their senses or meet with sudden death. This time, the hope of the natives was disappointed, simply because the luck of the Christians was too strong for the ancient holy place to affect it, but the holiness reasserted itself later on, and forced the Christian God

to do the duty of its former powers. Adam of Bremen tells of an island, Farria, where the Christian hermits led a blessed life, untouched by the stormy times about them; not only did they retain their worldly belongings in peace, but even received visits from sea-raiders, who with the deepest reverence paid them tithe [114] of their plunder. It was, of course, God and the good saints who guarded the land, and deprived thoughtless vikings of ship-luck and sword-luck so that they soon perished at sea or fell in battle, when they had offended the peace of the little island by even the slightest foray; but it is perhaps hardly any depreciation of the honour of those high ones to suppose that they had wrested the place from devils, or point out that it was just the luck of the ancient heathen gods which they here turned against these gods themselves.

We perceive that the clan, in times of crisis, when it was a question of making luck to flow into their kinsmen, and powerfully acknowledge a new commencement of their life, took their way to the mount or to the spring, and derived blessing to themselves therefrom. Thord Gellir, a chief of the renowned family residing at Hvamm, was led up into the hill which was the holy centre for the men of Hvamm, before taking possession of his, chieftainship. The ancient formula whereby the purpose of such a visit was expressed, to *heimta heill* or go seeking luck, has later been applied to the bridal pair's going to church after the wedding, and has been preserved in this form to our own days. In Ditmarsk, the visit is not paid to the church, but to the churchyard, and it is the bride who is led by her sisters-in-law to the holy place — as if she needed to be made familiar with the centre of that home to which she thenceforward belongs.

In the holy place, the store of luck, the life of the kinsmen was hid, and while they, in real life, were mostly seen and mostly active outside the sanctuary, they entered in after death, and fused with luck itself. The settler Kraku-Hreidar chose Mællifell for his dwelling after death, Selthorir and his heathen kinsmen died into Thorisbjorg (Thorir's rocks), Thorolf also intended to end in Helgafell with all his kin. Aud, the Icelandic ancestress of the family residing at Hvamm, had embraced Christianity during her stay in the British Isles, where her husband, King Olaf the White, had carved out a kingdom, and when she settled in Iceland after the fall of her husband, she chose a hill for the scene of her devotions; this place retained

[115] among her pagan descendants its significance as the holy place of the homestead, and they fixed on the hill as their resting place after death. We remember that when Thorstein Codbite was gathered to his kin in Helgafell, it was not a spirit wafted into an immaterial spirit host; the vitality of the assembly made a strong impression on the herdsman looking on from afar the night his master was welcomed by his departed ancestors. But we need only, from what we know, consider their personality in relation to the life that inspired them, to understand that the departed rested nevertheless as a potentiality in the stone.

With regard to the local relation between the seat of power and the bodily dwelling place of the dead, our sources hardly give us sufficient information. Thus much we may believe, that the burial-place was as a rule connected with the holy place, whether the two adjoined or were identical. The problem is, however, of less moment regarded from the point of view of the old thoughts than it would be in our world. External contiguity is, as we have seen, of small account in relation to inner identify. The two regions were one in soul, wherever they lay, in the same way as the dead man and his hamingja, as the various treasures, as every kinsman, whether of human race, or beast, or plant, was identical with all individuals of its species in Middle-garth. The mound was called *vé*, the place of consecration, with the same name which expressed veneration for the divine places, because it was of the same nature, and stood in the same relation to the circle of human beings who died into it. Each clan had its own resting place, and this insularity in death has obtained far into Christian times, so that the churchyards often became topographical images of the village itself. And the sternness with which the law maintained the sacredness of the clan's

right to keep its dead in peace originates first of all in something deeper than the mere aversion from any wounding of the feelings of the living. When a son who considered himself unfairly treated by his brother set himself upon his father's barrow and from there demanded his inheritance and due division, he did not choose the spot on account of the view; the site was calculated to give his claim authority [116] and legal force; his father's hamingja should speak through him. There is also a distinct stamp of authority — of a similar character — in the traditional formula whereby a man counted up his ancestors back to the place where they were buried — “back to barrow”, as it was called in legal language — *e. g.* in a case of proving uninterrupted possession of disputed land; and when he could thus show that the dead resting in the land were his ancestors, the soil declared itself for him as his right.

In the high seat, in the grove, and on the mountain, we stand face to face with a power which seems never before to have forced itself upon us: that of holiness; but in reality, we have traced its influence at every step. It is luck in its mightiest shape. The connection lies in the name, for *heilagr* — holy — and *heill* — good luck or good fortune — are radically akin. From the point of view of form, the one is a derivative of the other: *heilagr* is that in which *heill* resides; but the formal relation does not show that the idea of the adjective should be later than that of the substantive. We can get nearest to the spiritual kinship by viewing both as linguistic expressions of the fundamental idea wherein Germanic culture once gathered the innermost secret of life in one sum; *heill* is humanity, and *heilagr* is human, in the widest sense of the words.

Holiness is the legal expression for the inviolability of a man and his right to invoke the law as his ally. He is holy as long as he has not exposed himself in any way to an opponent; in case he be slain as holy his value as a man rises up and invalidates his slayer's defence. Dying unholy means that he has challenged fate by some guilt of his own, so that his death is his own fault.

The mark which distinguishes man from the dependent individual who cannot act independently is expressed in the Scandinavian word *mannhelg*, which means legally: personal rights, and really: his holiness as a man. If a free-born man happens to have fallen into slavery, and his kinsmen wish, to purchase his release, they must first of all lay upon him *mannhelg* ---*i. e.* claim his rights as a free man — and offer a ransom, after which he has the free man's right to full fine for any wrong [117] done him. If his kinsmen prove laggards, so that the owner sits waiting in vain for the ransom, he cannot do anything to his thrall until he has first appeared at the law-thing and had his *mannhelg* removed.

This legal holiness does not depend on any social contract, which has once and for all decreed that the innocent shall be unassailable; like all legal values, it is based upon an experience. The strong luck, that which is whole and without flaw, is what strengthens a man and makes him inviolable, and on the other hand, holiness itself carries with it an obligation; luck is damaged by the slightest blemish, and whether such weakening come from within or from without, by guilt or by an affront, makes at best but a difference of degree. It is the same spirit which inspires the holy man and the holy place. When we find the sanctuary wrapping itself about a fugitive, while his pursuers stand without, at a loss, or at best determined to await the moment when he shall find himself constrained to steal away from his refuge, we think first of all with admiration of the power which can thus tame excited tempers to veneration or even to fear. But in reality, the pursuers have a better reason for leaving him there in peace. It is not only the inviolability of the spot, but also its righteousness, which has communicated itself to him who presses into its frith; luck is right as well as power, and its ward has the advantage of his opponents in every way. It was by no means mythological eccentricity which caused the gods to deal cautiously with the wolf Fenrir which they had suffered to grow great within their own holy grounds. When the wolf discovered signs of mischievous propensities, they dared not kill him, but bound him securely to the entrails of the earth. They knew that in the wolf they were fostering their own unluck, but the holiness of the place permeated him, and could not be removed — to recur to the legal expression. On the other hand, the fulness of luck is an annihilating judgement upon him who is unable to assimilate the blessing; if a niding, in whom the thread of life has been solemnly sundered,

presses into the holy place, he defiles the hamingja by his touch, and when the luck is sound and strong, it will repel him. It [118] was useless for Glum to attempt defiance, after his son Vigfus had been judged by the assembled court and outlawed. "Frey would not allow him to remain there at the homestead, by reason of its great holiness," runs the saga.

Holiness is the very core of life in men, the life that is engrafted in a child on the day when it is truly and spiritually born; and when the father recognises an illegitimate child and admits it fully into the clan, he is said to hallow it. Holiness is in treasures, and according to the poetic usage of language which sees in to the innermost, and calls things according to their true nature, cattle and weapons are simply holy. Holiness is the heart of ownership. The special consecration which made a sanctuary of a grove or a hill, and the preparation of the land by fire to make it inhabitable, are two degrees of the same act; from Helgafell, or whatever the centre might be called, holiness spread out without a break, only in ever weakening degree, to the farthest limits of the land. The first thing a settler did was to hallow the land to himself; Thorolf, the chieftain-priest, consecrated his holding to Thor, in the same way as he did his temple. Another of the holy chieftains, Thorhadd the Old of Drontheim, laid the holiness of Mæri on his new land; the holiness which had been the soul of Mæri in the Drontheimfiord he drew forth from the place itself, and carried it with him in the pillars of his high seat and the mould from the place where the pifiars rested in the ground; and when he arrived in his new home, he introduced it into his land around Stodvarfiord. When looked at from the social side the settler's act is simply an act of appropriation, because the essence of ownership was identity between possessor and possessed; and therefore the word *helga*, to hallow, applies equally to appropriation and to the higher consecration whereby men added the final touch to the temple and dedicated it to the god. The hamingja which held the property together and made it serviceable to man was the same that resided in his own veins, so that blood spilt by an unknown hand upon the soil would be upon the owner's bead and render him guilty of homicide. The poor Frankish homicide who is not able to pay his share of the were- [119] gild took up a handful of soil from his land and threw it on his next of kin before leaping over the fence; the dust of earth here carries with it not only the ownership but also the responsibility of the unfortunate man, just as duty as well as strength is contained in the weapon which goes to the best man of the family. If the slayer should die before having made reparation, his obligations devolve upon his heir, and this is expressed in Norwegian law in this phrase: the heir takes the axe.

Not all the settlers were great chieftains, with splendid temples on their land, and wealthy enough to have a whole mountain for a holy place, but all had their holiness to plant out in the fields, a luck of the same character as Thorolf's and Thorbadd's, only weaker in force. The difference then becomes apparent in the soil. "Half man's worth shall the freedman have if he come upon an earl's land, full and whole if he come upon the king's," runs an old saying, which has in some inexplicable fashion found its way into the Icelandic law codex of the Grágás, and the words obviously hint at the valueing of a man according to the soil on which he lived. The king's son was born on holy ground, in the poetic language, and the effects manifest themselves in his heroic stature, and we can guess that the fulness of holiness in the earth made demands on' the inhabitants; the ordinary peasant's holding would hardly be as sensitive as Glum's, which thrust an outlaw from it as the plague, or as Thorhadd's on whose fields nothing might ever be suffered to perish save cattle taken for slaughter. In such a general removal as that which took place when families from the most distant parts of Norway settled down side by side along the shores of Iceland, there would necessarily be much readjustment of the old self-estimation. Independent clans from various parts of Norway were shaken up together, and the old, very holy families might find it difficult to maintain that dignity which they had enjoyed in the old country, where veneration had grown with the steady growth of centuries. In the Eyrbyggja saga, we are initiated into a settling of accounts which may have had several parallels. The independent family of Helgafell tried to establish its wonted hegemony within the district, but its supremacy was challenged [120] by the powerful clans settling in its neighbourhood, and the defiance finds its natural expression in the outcry: "Are they to reckon their lands for holier than other

lands about Breidafjord?" They enforced their protest by violently entering and profaning the ground, and a battle ensued which led to a settlement admitting the contending clans to equal rights. This conflict implies in reality a struggle for supremacy, but it is naturally described from its religious side, because it is not a quarrel regarding forms, but a trial of strength between two hamingjas.

To unfold the old thoughts and experience we must remain within the hamingja, and let it unfold itself for us. From the centre, a man's holiness spreads out through the house, fills it with its atmosphere and permeates men with its force, so that they are different beings within doors from what they are outside. We can mark this holiness in the "home-frith", the high degree of inviolability which the law assigns to a man in his own house. He who pursues him beyond his own threshold, and injures him on the bench and by the fire, has dealt him a heavier wound than one who strikes at him upon the open road; he had smitten his luck where it was thickest and bled most violently, and his act is villainy. In Danish law, the more serious character of a breach of peace within the home is marked by its being placed in the same category with killing after reconciliation. In Swedish law, the point of view is so consistently applied, that the judgement passed upon a killing taking place at the gateway of the tún, or enclosure, is made to depend upon the position of the body; if the attacking party lies with his feet inside the enclosure and his head outside, then he is himself responsible for his death; if he fall the opposite way, then fine shall be paid, for "the head fell from there where the feet stood." German laws can stamp a killing within the home-frith as villainy by assigning capital punishment, and excluding the option of settlement by fine, which was available in ordinary cases of homicide.

Actually, a man was no less holy in another's house; any one attacking him there, offended against the honour and sacredness of the third family concerned, and would by so doing [121] make two implacable foes in place of one. So solid is frith within doors, that the holiness of the slain man suffered no damage from the fact of his having called down vengeance upon himself; unless the pursued were branded with some great villainy, his opponent was required to observe certain formalities before he could remove him, or take him within the house. Only a decree of outlawry could annul his right to any refuge; when his holiness, that is his life, had been removed from him, he fell from the stem and could be disposed of without danger.

In those members of the clan who constantly dwelt within the narrowest circle of luck, holiness was at its strongest. Women were filled with frith to such a degree that an attack upon them did not amount to an injury but an outrage, as we know from the special care wherewith their inviolability was fenced about in the legal decrees; and the strong condemnation of the law finds its best commentary in the insuperable loathing felt by the Northmen for thoughtless breaches of this rule. In the midst of a society in which a man was called to account for every idle word pronounced against his fellow men, a woman stood and took the measure of this world of responsibility, as if a word had never turned upon the speaker again, and she knew her power, when she freely dressed her view of a man's worth or lack of worth in words that hid nothing. He who falls under a woman's tongue and feels her words hailing down upon him, never attempts to stop such fateful utterance with the same means as he would involuntarily apply to a male derider, or, if he forget himself so far as to lift his hand, it is to be hoped he may have a good friend at hand to prevent him from committing that unluck. And yet, the reason for this toleration is certainly not that a woman's words have less force than a man's; on the contrary, he goes his way with especial discomfort of soul, for there is a double point in a woman's words, as in a woman's counsel, they come directly from "the powers".

The woman also reveals in her activity that she has a closer contact with luck than the man, under ordinary circumstances, can maintain. These premonitions, this unfailing sense of things to come, which is born of the welling up of luck itself from

[122] the depths, is strongest in her. A wise man would not disregard what his wife said upon any serious matter; we know from the sagas how great was the weight of her counsel in men's

deliberations; and a man would be even more disposed to listen when the ring of her voice told him she was prophesying. Therefore, the prophetess has become an historical figure in the Germanic past. Tacitus knew her, the virgin of the people of the Bructuri, who with advice and prophecy led her tribesmen's campaign against the Romans, and received the best of their plunder as a gift of honour. Almost divine, he calls her, sacred in her inviolability, and he has summed up his impression in general of woman's position in the unquestionable words that the Germani saw in her "something sacred and foreseeing". Long before Tacitus' day, his countrymen had with a shudder seen old women moving, barefooted and white-clad, among the hosts of the Cimbri, doing prophetic service by reading omens in the sacrifice of prisoners.

Full holiness demanded many considerations and much care. The greater luck a man had gathered in himself, the greater power in his movements, but also, the greater danger of any false step. If he failed or sinned, the act was more momentous, and consequently his guilt was more immediately fatal and the wound less easily staunch. The women had their place in the holiness of the home, they were not to carry luck in earthen vessels out into life, they were not expected to possess the lightning adaptation to the need of the moment, which might lead a man to forget the caution due to holiness. The men, on the other hand, lived on the outer boundary, and in order to be able to move easily in their daily doings, outside the house, they had to leave behind them something of their garment of luck, and choose a lighter dress for unencumbered action. Therefore, manhood begins with a liberation: the youth is freed from the unhindered obedience to frith, and moved down to an inferior, masculine degree of holiness.

There were two ways possible in dealing with children; either they might be kept throughout their childhood outside the hamingja, as a sort of aspirants to humanity, — in which case [123] they would, as regards principle of life, and probably also conditions of life, rank with the thralls, so that their soul was first given them on consecration to manhood; or they might be admitted right into holiness, and kept there until manhood opened for them. We cannot venture to say that all the Germanic peoples chose the latter alternative, but many of them did so. The transition of youth from a largely dependent grain of luck, to the state of a self-conscious agent and maintainer of luck, is denoted by the cutting of the hair; until the day of admission to the circle of men, a youth wore his hair long, like the women; his locks marked him as holy and inviolable in the highest sense; from that day forward, he confirmed his utterances in manly wise, by grasping the honour in the weapon, while the women, who all their lives bore their luck concentrated in their hair, took oath with one hand about their plait. What took place with the boy, is sufficiently indicated by his spiritual kin by their veneration for beautiful hair. A penalty was decreed for cutting off a youth's — or worse still, a maiden's — hair without consent of their kin. A mother such as Gudrun, who lived to see her daughter trodden underfoot by horses, sits moaning over the hair trodden in the dust. "This was the hardest of my sorrows, when Svanhild's fair hair was trodden under horse's hoofs," runs her plaint. "Locked" was used as an official title, unmistakably distinguishing the ruler from all other mortals, and men were ready to recognise, in the royal wealth of hair, a higher power. So sensitive was royalty, that a Frankish prince was never allowed to cut his hair; according to the description of a contemporary, evidently that of an eye-witness, he wore his hair parted in the middle and flowing loose over his shoulders. If a razor were applied to his head, he became as one of the ordinary plebs, to quote the words of Childebert when he wished to indicate a means of placing an inconvenient pretender beyond all pretensions to royalty. After Chlodomer's death, his brothers, Childebert and Chlotachar, considered the world by no means too wide for two, and their mother's regard for her son's little boys was, according to their view, only serving to keep open a possibility which were better closed. They got [124] the boys into their power, and sent the queen a sword and a pair of scissors, that she might look at them, and choose for herself which implement should be used upon the lads. "I had rather see them dead than shorn," she cried, "if they are not to have the throne."



It is fulness of soul which unites the youth and the woman and the greatest man of luck, who, all his life, or at any rate from the hour he becomes chief of the clan, retains the intensity of holiness. The peculiar array which distinguished the priests of the Nahanarvales was regarded by Tacitus, doubtless with more reason than he knew, as a womanly fashion; he states that the master of the temple was a priest in woman's garments, and we may believe that the holy man, when attending at the altar, wore his hair loose, and thus enveloped himself in the strength of holiness. What it meant when the women loosed their hair, this too we may learn, if we will condescend to seek the information from witches; the Swedes were severe upon women who ran about with their hair down while good folk were in bed.

Cutting the hair, then, must have been a real offence of some sort against holiness. A piece of the boy was cut away. As far as we can make out, the operation was always entrusted to a stranger, or at any rate one not belonging to his nearest of kin, and the reason for this was probably no other than the natural unwillingness of the family to cut their luck, however needful the operation might be. On the other hand, it was necessary to be fully assured of the operator's goodwill, before he was entrusted with the carrying out of so important an act as the removal of something holy; and the close contact created a mutual obligation in frith, so that the man who cut a youth's hair became his foster-father and gave him gifts. Undoubtedly the opportunity of requesting a man of position to act as a sort of godfather was utilised to a great extent, as offering the possibility of an alliance and increase of power both for the youth and his kin, and in the great ruling families, hair-cutting became a state act, significant enough to be immortalised in history. Paulus Diaconus relates that the Frankish prince Charles [125] sent his son Pippin to Liutprand, that the latter, according to custom, might take his hair. And in cutting the hair from his head, he became his father, gave him royal gifts and let him return.

But although men in daily life tucked up their skirts, so to speak, for greater freedom of action, a man could always put on his greater holiness. The man who stood up on the stone in Thord Gellir's hall to swear mighty oaths, and the fugitive seeking refuge in the sanctuary, show us the Germanic type raising itself to a superhuman dignity. When he is standing on the holy place, both he himself and that which proceeds from him will be stronger than usual; soul wells up from the source, pressing forth in his words, filling them to the uttermost corner, so that they fall from his lips with weight and ringing tone. The words are whole — true, as we should say — only that truth in the old reality is something active; they have power. A man steps on stock, *i. e.* puts his foot on the setstocks round the hearth, when he utters a vow that men shall hear of him in the future, and his innermost life is in the declaration, nay more, the whole power of the kinsmen inspires it. No recantation is then possible, that is to say, the word goes ahead carving out a way for the deed, but also, it draws the speaker with it, because his word would be lost and involve his hamingja in its fall if it were not redeemed.

A similar transformation — less drastic in force, but identical in character — takes place in a man the moment he grasps the treasure, sword or spear or ring, and strengthens his words; by his oath he overwhelms his opponent who has attacked his manly worth. His words are eminently true and strong, so that nobody can help being convinced, because in him and in his speech there seethes an honour and a luck which bears down all before it. But the vow or oath he proffers also binds himself by chaining him to the reality of his proclamation; if he vows to do such and such a deed, the deed must be done; if he says such and such a thing is true, it must be true, because his life is bound up with this truth. His words become an inspired value, a thing to be grasped and held, a thing that can be used [126] and a thing that can hurt. As he swears, he counts for more in the judgement, being to an eminent degree himself.

Even in the Christian form, several of the Germanic laws recognise the oath “with armed right hand”, or the oath sworn upon sacred weapons — where the word sacred is doubtless an echo from the old days; and this gesture in swearing was a thing to catch the eye of the stranger from other lands. The educated Southerners tell one another of these barbarians, the Quadi, who swore by their swords, which they regarded as gods; and when

the Germans became a civilised people and wrote ethnographical notes concerning that land in the north where men were wont to swear by weapons, naturally enough, the observers of these queer foreign customs were struck by the gesture which was the highest symbol of supreme reliability, and outsiders would hardly be aware that the oath among the barbarians was not an isolated form for settlement of conscience. The oath passes by imperceptible degrees into more everyday declaring truth, and it is immaterial, whether we say from an external point of view that the Germanic swearing was merely an emphatic form of utterance, or we express it by saying that they swore their way through life from day to day. Wherever a definite utterance is called for, some material corroboration takes place. The Frank who had some claim to make against his neighbour, and felt that he must get greater men to take an interest in his case if he were to gain his rights, presented himself before the Count, or royal official for the district, grasped the staff and begged him as the guardian of the law to do his duty and deal with the recalcitrant fellow-citizen: "I stake myself and all I have on this my word, that you can safely distraint upon him." And this ceremony is merely an adaptation to new conditions of the old power of a word to move the world. Before the order of society was placed in charge of royal officials the Frank would go to the law-thing, and clench his hand about the staff or spear to let his words ring out over the assembly with the justifying and compelling power that must set all present in motion, and make existence insecure for the person attacked, until he had struck it down with his defence. [127]

The Swedes also confirmed their agreements "by the shaft". He who acted, and with him all his witnesses — as they later become, — grasped the shaft of the spear thus strengthening the word uttered by their spokesman, so that the formula of the bargain had power both over themselves and over all others, and became an assurance for the receiver of the promise.

The man who had laid aside his sword was another than the one who a moment before had stood with it in his hand; he was as a bow with loosened string. So too, it made a difference whether a man still had his foot on the spot, or had regained his earthly footing; but a man would yet hardly be quite the same as before at the very moment his foot shifted from the holy place or stepped down from the high seat; it would probably be some time before he became like his fellows again. A man did not always wish to get rid of his manly holiness so soon; on the contrary, one might purposely fortify the holiness in oneself. At critical times, when it was a question of straining luck to the utmost of its power, one could put off all that pertained to everyday life, and live solely as the initiate of luck. Prior to the setting out of an army, certain ceremonies unknown to us took place, which transformed the warriors into a sacred host, and the effect of that consecration appears in the frith which united them into a whole of the same solidity as the community of kinsmen. A breach of solidarity would then be the utmost villainy, and the land lay in solemn silence; the law holds, that all legal business is suspended while the army is in the field. Tacitus knows that when the gods were in the camp, the power of judgement slipped from the hands of the leader of the army, and passed into those of the priests, the sacrosanct chieftains of the temple. The same consecration is indicated by unhindered growth of the hair. After a great defeat such as that which the Saxons suffered at the hands of the Suevi, they swore a solemn oath not to cut hair or beard until they had avenged the shame; they consecrated themselves and strengthened themselves for the great task, as Civilis when he vowed death to the Roman legions, and as Harald Fairhair when his plans of conquest had taken hold of him. [128]

Among the warlike Chatti, the young men went through a sacred period of youth as warriors, when no razor touched their head; for the majority of these youths, their first killing was the introduction to a calmer life, but many made it a matter of honour to extend the strong and arduous life as sacred to war, until their strength failed them in old age. Similar bands of warriors were found as far as the Germanic peoples extended, and in the traditional laws of the vikings of Jomsburg, there remains an echo of the stern ethics of those consecrated to war. The root of the law was the "warrior's frith", or inviolable peace within the ranks; personal connections and personal preferences counted for nothing compared with loyalty to the band; even kinship and its obligations were dissolved; all questions were

referred to the leader's decision, and plunder was shared. This sacred unity cut men off from the rest of the world, and especially from the normal life of everyday, where work and the breeding of children took place; the warriors were forbidden to sleep outside the camp, and none was allowed to have any dealings with women.

Among the songs of the Edda there is preserved a poem which may be called the epic of warrior holiness, the *Hamdismál*, but unfortunately the old thought has slipped away from the poet, — unless it be the incomplete form in which it is handed down which renders it vague; the prose narratives of the contents afford us little help, as later saga writers had evidently lost familiarity with the then obsolete technique of war. This much we know, that Gudrun, on sending out her sons to avenge their sister, consecrates them in invulnerable mail and gives them rules to observe which they dare not break. With irresistible force the “battle-holy” men force their way into Earmanric's hall, and strike him down despite the efforts of his retainers till he lies as a shapeless mass, without hands or feet; but they had broken the commands laid upon them, and therefore were bereft of victory, Sorli falling at the gable end of the hall, Hamdir at the rear wall of the house. Disaster came upon them at the moment Hamdir, in his boasting, forgot his mother's order to observe silence during the fight; then Earmanric gained [129] mind and speech, and was able to urge his men to see what stones might avail against those whom iron would not scathe. But the misfortune must have begun earlier, perhaps on the way, when the two met their brother Erp and slew him in a dispute; but the killing itself was probably not their only crime. Whence had Earmanric the happy idea of seeking help from stones? Odin, the saga men would naturally say, having recognised once and for all that the god is wont to come and go where men are fighting; the original story would have said something else, as for instance that the two brothers had themselves challenged stones to enmity; before reaching the king's hall, they must in some way or other have offended the stone hamingja, which the mother had probably won over to their side at the time when she made their mail proof. But wherein the infatuation lay, whether the spilling of Erp's blood upon a stone, or some act we do not know of — this must remain a mystery till the end of time.

Then too, where men assembled for purposes of friendly contest, in hunting or fishing, they invoked luck and placed themselves under its sole dominion. Quarrelling on the fishing grounds rendered all their trouble vain, we are told, and we may know that the will to avoid failure found other expressions than a mere pious attitude of mind. Therefore the crew of a ship was holy, and the ship itself a spiritual counterpart of the house — we find here the same deep connection in the thoughts of the poet when he calls a house the ship of the hearth. The ornaments at the stem of a ship carried the power of a high seat; the ship's side rendered the words of one making oath whole and full just as did spear and shield; sojourning on or by a ship gave a man the value of home frith.

In times of great strength and renewal in the life of the clan, holiness would thicken in the house and embrace all with its whole force. Home frith grew into feast frith, and the inviolability was intensified into sacrosanctity. In the case of a killing taking place at time of sacrifice, at a wedding, or funeral ale, the offender found no place of repentance, but became a niding for ever, “a wolf in the holy place”. Holiness then was so close [130] that it could even penetrate into the thralls and communicate to them life of human life, as is shown in the Swedish laws by the edict calling for full fine for the killing of a slave at one of the great festivals. Here, the word holy reaches its richest, but also its sternest ring, as when the Swedish laws speaking with venerable weight, call the bridal pair holy, and the seats they fill holy.

With the frith of the feast, the perfection of home holiness, we are introduced into the stillness that reigned in the holiest of houses, where no weapon might be carried over the threshold. As far as to the point where the temple door opens, luck is explained in itself, but there is something more, and to reach it, we must step from the temporal into the religious. But in reality, the step exists only for us; to the Germanic mind, the transition from human life to the divine was an unbroken continuation. If we begin in the religious sacredness, men's preparedness in face of the gods, we are driven ere we are aware up into the teaching

of men's social settlements with one another at the law-thing, their dealings and their bargains. And though we keep strictly to the worldly side of buying and selling and bartering, we shall yet discover, one fine day, that there are other traces there than those of men alone. There falls a gleam of the divine over all the legal artfulness we have been toiling through.

In holiness, men meet with the gods. The holy place was the place where “the powers” dwelt.

## CHAPTER VIII TEMPLE

We have in the North a historical instance of a people having to tear up its existence out of the earth and move it over to another laud — not gradually planting it out, and thus gaining new ground for the ancient culture, but stowing it away in the hold and setting out with it across the great sea. From the stories of Thoroif and Thorhadd we know what was the emigrants' last thought in the old country, their first in the new —and we know then at the same time what was their innermost thought as they went about at home in the undisturbed routine of everyday. It was no light matter to wrench up the pillars of the high seat and scrape together mould from the holy place. It could never be a place like other places, and there were doubtless profound reasons for the Icelanders, as soon as they grew up, to turn their faces toward the land of their fathers. The accounts of Icelanders' pilgrimages to Norway date from Christian times; and in them, we cannot expect to find anything about the attraction of the ancient holy places. There is, however, one little trace, weighty with meaning, which has slipped into the Landnáma; Lopt made a 'voyage to Norway every third summer, on his own account and that of his mother's brother Flosi, to sacrifice at the temple which Thorbjorn, Flosi's mother's father, had tended at Gaular.

There was undoubtedly in the minds of many a fear of rendering themselves and their ancestors homeless in this world, in sailing away to a land they did not know, and where no place knew them. If then, as it seems, their determination [132] altogether swallowed up their fears, it must have been because they could safely trust, nay, knew, that if they acted as they should, their gods would go with them, and they could then raise up a new Bethel; the sanctuary was centred in the things, and one could let it make choice itself of a new spot — often enough, no doubt, it would be on similar in situation and appearance to the old abiding place of the clan — and the holiness could then be led in and made fast there.

The heathen worshipped trees and waterfalls and stone, say the Norwegians of their unenlightened forefathers, when they have themselves forgotten, or wish to have forgotten, that these same trees and waterfalls were no less human in their holiness than they were divine; no man shall sacrifice to false gods, or put faith in grove and stone — thus Swedish law-men threaten their benighted contemporaries. The Law of Gothland defines all religiousness in one weighty paragraph: “None may invoke holt or hill or heathen deities, neither *vé* nor fence,” and their saga translates the imperative to the historie by saying: “Men believed in holt and hill and heathen gods.”

In the South, there are practically no remains of human holiness attaching to locality; the better, then, did men remember the more impressive fact that the gods dwelt in the holy place. Unfortunately, many of these alien accounts are so conventional that they might apply to the majority of people on the earth, and the commonness is often due to the fact that the narrator does not feel called upon to honour the individual facts with a description, but merely uses old catch-words to comprise the heathendom he sees before him, in the same condemnation as all other heathen abominations. When the writer gives a heathen this simple character; he trusted in sticks and stones, neither he nor his hero can properly fit into a monograph on the subject of our forefathers' religions; for this deep, but somewhat general truth naturally applies to all the heathen of scripture history down to our own times. Moreover, the worthy fathers copies one another's epistles and adjurations and synodic resolutions, with a zeal almost suggesting they were purposely [133] striving to husband their

own originality as much as possible; and forms of anathema suited to the spiritual needs of Greek and Italian had to serve as best they might farther north, the borrowers not even troubling to lay on a touch of local colour. The cleric did not pretend to enter into any heathen's mode of thought; there was a general belief in the power of a common medicine to find out sickness by itself; but that the sickness largely consisted of a tendency to run about among stones and trees, is the incontestable presumption for these shepherds' care of souls.

Thus much is plain, from the various indications, that the nature of a locality was not in itself decisive. The Northmen looked to the single stone or rock as well as to the great mountain, to the waterfall as well as to the spring or the brook. And it was the same in the South. Agathias informs the educated world, which in his day, the sixth century, had personal reasons for interest in the red-haired peril, that the Alamanni worshipped certain trees, rivers, hills and ravines. Judging from the sacred biographies, the missionary in Germany had first of all to contest with trees; an axe was an indispensable part of his equipment when setting out for the dark places, and conversion falls into two parts; one prior to the fall of the holy tree, when the fear of the people was manifest, and one after, when the people wondered, and realised their error. In the Life of Boniface, we recognise at once, in many traits the regular course of procedure which was so necessary to the writing of legendary history; but the wonderfully powerful Jupiter oak, which he so dramatically felled in the land of the Hessians has at any rate typical reality. Partly with reason, but a great deal more without, the forest has assumed a dominant place in the idea of early Germanic worship. The cult which has in our days grown up about this Gothic natural church is a thing for which Tacitus is to a great extent responsible. It is he who made the Germans appear as mystics, by his profound observations anent the "invisible, viewed in the spirit". Not content with telling what might be plainly told, that they assembled in a grove sacred to Hercules, that their god Ner- [134] thus dwelt in a consecrated grove, or, in general, that they regarded grove and copse as holy – he attempts to tell his readers something about the nature of holiness, and, like the late romantic that he is, he replaces the description given by his authorities into sentimental lyricism of his own.

The peoples dwelling among plains and hills venerated the grove – a section of the nature that surrounded them – in the same way that rock and fall and mountain would be the most frequent – thought not the holy – dwelling place of luck for mountain races. The Swedes went as a rule to the holt – the woody hillock or hurst. But the holy place was not the spirit or idea of the grove, the shadowing, wind-breathing – it was the spot; the soil as well as the stem, the spring bubbling up out of the turf as well as the leaves; even though the grove spread out wide on every hand, its nature did not differ from that of the little spot that bore a stone, a rock, or a solitary tree.

Round about the place ran the fence of staves, the sacred enclosure, which in itself embraced as great holiness and "atmosphere" as the most mysterious spot in the darkness within. The Law of Gothland has to note the fence expressively, bracketed in honour after the *vé*, or consecrated spot, itself. "If there be *frith-geard* – fence of frith or peace – on any man's land about a stone or tree or a spring or suchlike ungodly foolishness . . ." thus thunders an English edict, and it is no use wasting ingenuity on the question whether the denunciation primarily aims at the paling or at the space which is hedged off; for the two are identical, and equally inspired with holiness.

The place was not pure nature, it was marked as belonging to the world of man, and the mark seems generally to have consisted of a heap of stones; when Aud's prayer-hill was promoted to the rank of family temple, her wooden cross was replaced by a pile of stones, or *horg*. The laws particularly note the horg together with the hill: "We shall not sacrifice to heathen gods or heathen demons, neither to hill nor horg."

To the holy place is added the holy house. Again and again we read in the Landnáma of this or that distinguished settler, [135] that he build a great *hof*, or temple. And in the saga of the Breidafjord settlers we find a detailed description of the building which Thorolf set up at his homestead, Hofstad, when he consecrated Thorsnes with Helgafell. The temple was a great house with a door in the side wall towards one end of the house. On entering by the

door, one saw, over against the side wall opposite, the high seat, with its pillars on either side, and beset with nails for token of power. Farthest inside was a small apartment, goes on the Eyrbyggja, like the choir in a Christian church, and there stood a *stallr* – a stone or block – in the middle of the floor as a high altar. The temple, then, consisted, if we may build upon the antiquarian knowledge of the saga, of a small god's house and a banqueting hall, or place of assembly. The excavations of ancient Icelandic hof sites have confirmed this description. The remains of the foundations indicated a large space, up to a hundred feet in length, oblong in shape, and at one end a separate chamber with a door of its own opening to the outer air, but apparently separated from the long hall by an extra thick, unbroken wall. The great hall in the hof, the feasting hall, differed in no way from the ordinary gathering place of the family; it was in fact a duplicate of their parlour. Here the participants in the sacrifice met on the great festivals, but in smaller homesteads, the gathering took place with the same solemnity and with the same effect, about the everyday hearth. The common room of the homestead was the original temple hall, and remained so in many homes throughout the whole of the heathen period. Egil came one day, we are told, to a farm where a sacrifice was going on, and was allotted quarters in an outhouse, as the sacrificial feast was taking place in the house proper.

When a special feasting hall was built, it was connected with the sacrificial chamber, *af hús* or side apartment, as the Eyrbyggja calls it with an expression derived from comparison with the Christian churches. Generally, the homestead would have its little temple, a place of sacrifice, the seat of the gods, or rather, of divinity. In the story of the night visit of the sons of Ingimund to Hrolleif and his mother, Ljot, we are given [136] an outline of the localities; on entering the courtyard they first of all perceived a small hut outside the entrance, separated off from the house door by a little space, and Thorstein said at once that this must be the good people's *blot-house*, or sacrificial hut. And this is by no means the only occasion on which we hear of such blot-houses set close to the dwellings of men. On the night when the sons of Droplaug lost their way in the storm, they discovered their whereabouts by fumbling about round a building which suddenly appeared before them; on coming to the door, they knew it for Spakbessi's blot-house. When Hord's saga lets Thorstein go off to his blot-house and offer up a sort of morning prayer before a stone, the narrator's thoughts move as his own religious customs suggest to him, but has undoubtedly an ancient tradition in mind, which recalls the former arrangement of the place. In the erection of churches, men probably followed for the most part, or often at least, the same old rules. The description of the drinking hall and the church at Jorfjara, in the Orkneys, is strikingly suggestive of Ljot's homestead; there, the drinking hall had a door in the eastern end wall, at the south end of the building, and the church lay before the door to the hall, so that as the place was built on a slope, one would walk down from the hall to the church.

The blot-house represented the holy place; according to old ideas, they were identical, but this does not necessarily imply a literal identity of site. The blot-house is in its being the same as the horg, and has also a right to the name, when hof and horg form a permanent connection to denote the entire temple – sacrificial hut and banqueting hall together. The curious investigator who subjects such sacred terms as horg and vé to a comparative linguistic examination in order to use etymology for the purpose of charting the Germanic holy land, will arrive at a miserable result for horg, which in the Nordic is the cairn of stones and the house marking the holy place, is among the southerners the grove itself. The secrets of structure are not to be drawn from the words, but for him who wishes to know what there is, and not what he thinks there ought to [137] be, they are full of information. What the hill and the grove, the horg and the blot-house actually are, is vé, the holy, the holy place, the well-spring of power, and the reference to a definite form, such as house or heap, as fenced enclosure or fence forms but a shell about the great kernel of meaning; there the name glides imperceptibly from the one thing over to the other, and therefore the word can apparently take on the vague application which leaves us ignorant as to the picture intended at the moment by the text. On Aud's prayer hill there rose a horg to replace a cross, and perhaps too the horg was covered by a house; we have seen that Thord Gellir was consecrated chief of the

house by being led “up in the hill”, and these words might probably apply to the blot-house. The Norse Law threatens with dire penalties the man convicted of having erected a mound or a house and calling it horg, and is here undoubtedly aiming at the various forms of belief in holy places.

The blot-house doubtless stood on the site of the holy place itself when the latter, as it might do, immediately adjoined the dwelling house. On the other hand, the horg at Aud's old place, Hvamm, seems rather to have lain somewhat apart. Earl Hakon's blot-house was reached, according to the information furnished by a saga writer, by going out from the courtyard into the wood, first along a broad road, then branching off by a little foot-path. The path ended at a clearing, in the midst of which stood a house surrounded by a fence of staves. Inside this enclosure there was, according to our authority, a house with so many glass windows as to leave no shadow anywhere. The room was filled with a host of gods, and in their midst throned a goddess with a ring on her arm. The Earl threw himself headlong on the ground before her, heaped a multitude of silver before her feet and thus obtained that the goddess slowly relented so far as to open her hand and permit the Earl to draw the precious ring off her arm. This description of the interior smacks of mediæval book learning and of clerical imagination, but the monk evidently weaves his fancies about a body of fact, *viz.* that the Earl led his friend Sigmund to

[138] his blot-house to procure blessing for him before sending him out on a dangerous expedition, and that the blessing was contained in a ring resting in the sanctuary. Genuine too, that is in the true spirit of ancient life, are the words: “The Earl said that Sigmund was never to part with this ring, and Sigmund gave his promise.” In almost all the Norse recollections from the age of Olaf and Hakon, we can trace the mediæval display of miscellaneous reading and the indomitable tendency of the scholars to apply what they have learned. Nevertheless the clerical imagination has in most places a traditional foundation to build upon, and hardly anywhere do we see more clearly where reality ends and imagination begins than in this description of how Sigmund was “led to the horg” by Earl Hakon.

We know but little as to the other Germanic temples, and this little fits without effort into the traditional picture. The only instance we have in history of an English temple is given as of a horg with an enclosure, and the horg is a place roofed over, a sacrificial hut. Bede shows us the converted heathen “bishop,” when in his first eagerness he charges upon the old gods. “Who is to be first in throwing down the altars and the horg with the fence about them” is the question, and the “bishop” answers: “I.” And then he broke through fear and veneration by casting his spear into the horg, and his fellows completed the work by tearing it down and burning it with the surrounding fence. – The Roman indications are scattered here and there; now a casual observation as to the site of a temple, now an equally casual note as to the fact that a temple could be razed to the ground – so that the isolated details cannot be pieced together into a coherent picture. The temples we hear about lay in groves, *i.e.* immediately on the holy place; there were no buildings to prison the divinity within, says Tacitus, and we must doubtless suppose that he had some authority for this remark, even though we may not let ourselves be dazzled by this generalisation. Certainly the horg often stood in the open, this we can surely read between the lines in the description of the Roman soldiers' meeting with Varus' lost legions; the bleached bones of the warriors lay [139] on the field side by side with fragments of weapons and dead horses, severed heads hung in the trees, and in the grove close by were altars where Roman officers had been sacrificed. Since, on the other hand, we are told of sacrificial feasts in the grove, and of temples levelled to the ground, we may doubtless conclude that houses of some sort or another were erected in the vicinity of the horg; naturally all holy places worthy of being mentioned in a highly official history must be centres of great communities, and consequently of a more elaborate character than the humbler sanctuaries of the clans.

Inside the blot-house stood a stone, says Hord's saga, and this boulder is a good evidence that the narrator wove his descriptions of Thorstein at his morning devotions about a real tradition, for without such a rein to hold him in check, he might equally well have given the worshipper an "idol". Through the medium of this stone, the future was revealed to Thorstein in a verse on his approaching death, and on his way back across the open space, vengeance fell upon him. This block, too, being the seat of the gods, is one in essence with the horg and with the stone that was the dwelling place of the holy power of the house of Hvamm, the homsestead of Thord Gellir.

Such a block was called a *stallr*, and it is again and again compared with the alien altar. One could tread upon it, in order to enter into connections with the power and set them in motion. On it lay the holy things, the chief treasures of the warden of the temple, first of all the holy arm ring, which on all important occasions represented the gods and great holiness. On this ring great oaths were sworn, and it was worn by the chief when the warrior host marched out in holy battle array. Fortunately – for us – the temple ring once saved the master of Helgafell, Snorri Godi, when Steinthor's blow after the fight at Kársstad struck his arm; for it is this ineffective stroke we have to thank for being now in happy possession of an historical fact in place of a necessary assumption. We knew that the priest wore the ring at the law meetings in token of his authority; now, we know that it went with him wherever he drew upon his great luck. And then we understand at [140] once why warrior and ring go so inseparably together. The Anglo-Saxon chronicle tells of some wicked Danes whom Alfred and brought to reason; they vowed peace upon the sacred ring, an honour which they had never before conceded to any people. Tacitus had heard, regarding the self-consecration of the Chatti to a warrior's life, that they took the ring and wore it as a sign of their right to front rank in the battle, and of their indifference to peaceable occupation, in other words, the ring was a token that they belonged to a holy host set apart from the ordinary round of life.

This treasure was as far beyond ordinary possessions as the great holiness was beyond the ordinary blessing of everyday, and from it all other valuables derived their power; the sacred object was the fountain head of the riches belonging to the family, as is expressed mythically in the legend of Draupnir, Odin's ring, that is said to drip eight rings every nine nights. The religious character of the temple treasure shows through the monk's account of the ring which Earl Hakon took from the arm of Thorgard Holgabrud and gave his friend to have and to hold. Sigmund had to promise the Earl never to give it away, and he kept his promise, even when sorely tempted. After Hakon's death, when Sigmund had become Olaf's man and God's, it chanced that the king caught sight of the heavy gold ring. He looked at it closely, and said: "Will you give that to me, Sigmund?" But Sigmund answered frankly that he knew the giver's luck and friendship were too good for him to give away the treasure. "It may be that you think well both of the ring and of the giver," said the king, "but that luck will not avail you, for the ring shall be your death." And so it came about. Olaf was right, one cannot bear God's strength in one's limbs and Hakon's sacrificial ring on one's arm.

Of like importance with the Norse accounts of the ring on the *stallr* is Tacitus' description of the holy "signs" in the form of animals which were taken out from the grove in time of war and borne among the people. The Northmen also knew such treasures of chieftains, "banners" or more properly *vé's*, which could both show the way to an army in battle and turn [141] luck as they pleased. Harald Hardrada had a banner called "Land-waster", and this impressive winner of battle had surely had many forerunners resting in blot-houses at the homes of the great warrior chiefs. The unity of the banner with the holy places is implied in the name *vé*, which is used indiscriminately to denote the banner and the secret enclosure.

That it was particularly the rich and powerful who built themselves special temple halls is due to something more than the fact that they possessed the means of doing something out of the common. Luck made the clan great, augmented its wealth, and gave rise to the need of a spacious place of assembly for all kinsmen when they gathered from far and near to strengthen their common life. When a branch of the family detached itself to lead an independent life, it would probably fetch holiness from the ancestral horg and plant a



daughter sanctuary in its own midst, but the feeling of community was not sundered with the dissolution of the narrower unity in common memories and common aims. At the great festivals, all assembled in the holy place from whose strength the new centres of luck had been formed. And on the spot where the clan was wont to meet from old time a great hof was raised, large enough to admit all who confessed to the same hamingja – and with them other clans who had sought shelter under the gods of the mighty. Such hofs were those which Thorhadd and Thorolf took with them on board; for from the context it is plain that their temples were of importance to others beside the little party that set out on the long voyage; Thorolf and Thorhadd had in strength of their luck been chieftains in their ancient homes, and as soon as the pillars of their high seats were set up in the new country, the power of the temple to attract people made itself apparent. The petty kings of the mother land became leaders among the settlers, and their sacrifices were attended to by all who acknowledged their supremacy.

But the hof was not a necessary condition for the worshipping of the gods, and we have no right to draw a line placing on the one side great men with a hof, and on the other smaller folk with but a blot-house. The growth of a clan did not necessarily disturb the old relation between the sacrificial hut and the feasting hall; and even when the number of clansmen led to the erection of a special house of assembly, the extension would not inevitably mean building a temple of the Icelandic hof type. Possibly the Icelandic device of combining the hut with the hall was suggested to the settlers by their acquaintance with the Christian houses of worship which a number of them had seen during their stay in the British Islands; an innovation of this kind might easily occur to a population which had to begin life afresh in a new country. The relations of the dealings that the reforming kings of Norway had with their stubborn subjects in matters of religion do not contain a hint of church-like buildings. When Olaf remonstrated with the idolators of Drontheim for their old-fashioned practices, they could – according to the saga – pose innocently as no more than good comrades who liked to meet occasionally at a friendly feast. “We had Yule banquets and convivial drinking all about the district, and the yeomen are not so niggardly in preparation for their Christmas but something is left to make merry with afterwards. And as to Mæri (the ancient place of sacrifice) it is a big place with plenty of room, and the neighbourhood is largely peopled, and men think that drinking in company adds to the mirth,” – thus the yeomen blandly met the king's accusations.

In the Laxdoela, we read of an Icelandic chieftain, Olaf the Peacock, who had by his personal qualities raised himself above his father's social position; after a while, his tents grew too small for him, and he therefore built a banqueting hall at his homestead, the splendid decorations of which are praised in Ulf Uggason's poem, the Drapa of the House. People who had seen the wood carvings of Thor's fight with the Serpent of Middle-garth, and Balder's burning, maintained that the hall was more beautiful in its bare state than covered with hangings as was customary at great festivals. This house is clearly not a hof, and the saga is probably quite right in describing Olaf's great deed as a purely worldly undertaking; but naturally such a feasting hall is the place for sacrificial assem- [143] blies, and the building at Hjarðarholt may have been typical of a certain sort of larger homestead.

A century after the first settlement in Iceland, all sacrifices ceased, but they did not leave a blank behind. The wealthy men continued long after to call their friends and kin together to a feast at harvest time. And in the festival hall, the old pillars of the high seat would here and there remain as a link between the present and the past.

## CHAPTER IX

### ROUND THE ALE-BOWL

Twice, three times a year, perhaps more, men gathered in the main room of the house, or in the temple hall, to hold a sacrificial feast, a *blot*.

The period of the sacrificial feast stood out among the other times of life as something lofty, holy and stern, happy and perilous. It comprised both wild rejoicing and determined earnest. And that which at these times gave men's souls their spaciousness and tension was the presence of the highest. Then the gods, or the powers, as the Northmen put it, took entire possession of the home, uniting men and women under the responsibility of supreme holiness. The holy place spread out over all the land.

We would fain have known a little about the ceremonies wherewith men carried the holiness of the sanctuary into the house, and placed the room under the unrestricted dominion of the horg, -- but all memories are buried, and the mediæval dislike of paganism and its works lies like a stone above the grave. We have our suspicions, as to the participants treading the way to the holy place, or the blot-house, taking up the divinity in limbs and garments. We read also, in one place, of a private blot -- that held by Ljot, when the witch tried to make her son invulnerable against the enmity of the sons of Ingimund -- and here, it seems that the young man concerned in the act of sacrifice was led between the homestead and the blot-house in a special dress of red. In this little family festival there are several irregularities, which make us hesitate [145] to call the promising youth and his enterprising mother as evidence for the procedure of honest folk in the feasting halls. The saga writer looks askance at the proceedings in the small house that stood a little way off by the gate, as witch-practice of a suspicious character, and he has more than Christian right to his opinion, for secret blot is more than half witchcraft. But it is doubtless equally undeniable that the blot was formally kept within the traditional forms. The way Thord Gellir went at the commencement of his manhood's work must have been trodden many a time, and in all probability at the very time of the great feasts.

Fortunately, there was much of the heathen doings that could be rendered harmless, nay, even sacred to the Lord, and from the moment the party is assembled in the room, the old blot lies open to us.

We can safely say that the feast opened with a solemn consecration, declaring peace upon the participants. A feast and a law meeting were related in their innermost being, in their dependence upon the highest frith, and from all we can gather, they were allied in form. In Iceland, the priest "consecrated" the law-thing, and the effect was at once apparent in the thing-men's augmented holiness, which made any injury done to them twice as costly an affair as misdemeanour at other times. In the spirit of the law-thing, we find in the Grettir saga, Hafr consecrating the games held at Hegrans, where the outlawed robber comes in disguise to seek admittance, and there is still, in Hafr's words, something of that rush wherewith the spirit of holiness swept down upon the people, bringing all to utter silence: "Here I set peace (*grid*) between all men, all chieftains and brave yeomen, all the common host of men able to bear arms and fight . . . for pleasure and sport, for all delight as for their seat here and their going home . . . I set peace for us and our kin, friends and allies, women as well as men, thrall and wench, serving men and masters alike."

Even though nothing of what is offered us in these lines can be directly applied to the sacrificial feast, the formula gives a breath of that spirit in which a meeting of men opened. [146]

While the words of the declaration filled the ears of those present, their eyes were undoubtedly full of the reality of the blot; it stood a little way apart in the filled vessels. Beasts were slain for the feast, animals great and small, huge cauldrons of meat were set on to boil, and we know from the experience of Hakon Æthelstansfostri that the eating of the sacrificial meat was a necessary condition for participation in the blessing. But there was

something else, and something more than this to occupy eyes and mind. In the dwelling place of the gods, Sæhrimnir, the boar that never grew less for all the slices cut off from his fat sides, formed, as we know, a costly centre; but in all his fat splendour he lacks the majesty which shows in the fact of having a history. There may indeed have been myths about his past, but at any rate the origin of the meat did not move the curiosity of after-times to the same degree as did the refreshing drink that rejoiced the minds in the hall of the gods. In the intentness wherewith the myth dwells on the rich past of the mead, those people have indirectly shown that despite all their joy in the flesh that simmered in the kettles, they looked forward to something happier and stronger. It is about the filled horns that the holiest part of the feast is centered.

That it is the ale bowls which dominate in all thought of feasting together shows through the mere names of the banquets. A homecoming was celebrated by a welcoming ale, and when the guest left he was sped on his way with a parting ale, life commenced with a christening ale, and passed by way of betrothing ale and bride ale, drinking ones' wedding, to the arvel or burial ale – a series of “ales” to fit each particular occasion. It is with good reason that the frith which embraces the parties at a feast is called ale-frith, and the feast day *mungátstiðir*, i.e. ale days.

The North-European brotherhoods, or guilds, plainly show their Germanic origin in their dependence upon the banquet, the sharing of food, as the uniting, solidarity-inducing element, and despite all the wise care of the Middle Ages to have something solid on the table, it is soon evident from the formulæ and symbols of these boon companions that drink is a more [147] important item in their spiritual economy than food. The drinking party really provides the formal setting for their entire organisation. The meeting is called “the drinking”, to hold a meeting is always called “to drink a feast”, even where the object of the assembly is something more practical. “The feast was celebrated and drunk with force” is a regular form of entry in the minutes after an eventful general meeting. The brother present is denoted, in contrast to an absentee, as one who “drinks the feast”, and the time reckoned by the “first time the feast is drunk” or “before second feast-drinking”; a matter is postponed “to next feast”. The new brother is placed before the head of the guild and drinks his mug of entry to whole and true brotherhood. We understand then, that drawers, butlers and tasters occupy a prominent place in the organisation; their dignity lies not in the fact that they act as useful brethren, taking care that the body as indispensable companion of the spirit, is encouraged in its service; in reality, they are the corporeal expression of the idea of brotherhood.

Answering to these formal memories we have our direct communications anent the prominent place of drinking at the old cult festivals. In the traditional picture of the feast at Hladi, it is Earl Sigurd's imposing figure, sacrificial horn in hand, which forms the centre-piece; and when the new regime grumbles at the heathen assemblies, the illwill circles plainly enough about this “ale” consecrated to the gods' the arch enemy of Christ resided in the cup. A promise in need referred to goods and ale. When an Icelandic party lay weather-bound off the coast of Norway and for good reasons feared the visit of the king on board they vowed great drinking feasts to the gods; Frey was to have the ale if the wind blew towards Sweden, Thor or Odin if it were easterly, we read. And when the word *blot* passed out of the current vocabulary on account of its strong associations of heathenism, *samburðaröl* (club-ale: a feast to which each of those partaking constituted a share) shoots up in its place as the technical term for the Yule feasts, both in the heathen form and in the Christian continuation of the old solemnities. For in Norse Christendom, drink was [148] recognised as the essence of worship. The church organised the old need of blot in order thus to rule over it and make it subject to the church itself; and with that wisdom which seems to follow the Catholic Church during the earlier centuries of the Middle Ages, the spiritual lawgivers understood not only how to respect the inevitable, they had the higher insight which told them that one annexes souls by annexing the needs of the souls as one's own commands. The formula wherein the taking over is declared stands, as a document of culture, far above all the accounts of antiquarians, because the fall of the words shows the sureness with which it strikes exactly upon the essential. Three peasants at least – runs the command – shall bring together their

festival ale, one measure of ale for husband and one for the wife on each homestead, and hold a feast upon the holy eve to the honour of Christ and of Saint Mary, and if a man live so far away on an island or in the mountains, that he cannot get to his neighbours, then he shall himself make an ale the size of three. Neglect is first to be paid for with a fine, and then be made good by a drinking party *post festum*; but if a sinner continue in his dryness three long years in succession, then king and bishop are masters of his house, and he must find himself a country outside Norway, where the godless may thrive.

It was not only the Northmen who gathered about the ale vessels when they felt themselves impelled by the gods to hold a sacrifice. So also did the Franks. A man of high standing, Hocin, invited Chlotachar the First and his courtiers, with the holy Vedastus, to a feast. The festival ale stood set out in the middle of the house, but out of regard to the mixed character of the company it was divided into two camps, one part comprising the ordinary brew for Christians, and thereto some "consecrated in heathen wise" for those who held by the old mode of life. Fortunately for us, the spirit moved the holy man to attend that feast, or the brew would never had entered into the account of the saint's life and good deeds; for when he saw the pagan drink he made the sign of the cross upon it, so that the vessels burst and the heathen were converted. [149] In the life of the missionary Columbanus, there is mention of another vessel, instinct with the same explosive force. This time, it was among the Suevi that a holy man found the assembly holding a feast; they sat about a great vessel "which in their tongue is called *cupa*, containing about 26 measures, and it was filled with ale, which they would consecrate to their god Odin." The saint blew the vessel to pieces, making manifest to all present that the devil was in the cask, lying in wait for Suevic souls. Whatever the people really said, and the saint did, the pious biographer must be right about these ale-vessels and their central position at the feasts, for such an abnormal form of worship the clerical chroniclers could certainly not have imported from any source but that of reality.

Unfortunately, the Christianity which conquered our southern kinsmen seems to have lacked the proper eye for the power of ale bowls to further piety, or at any rate, it saw its way to make good Christians without them; but even so, the descendants of the Alamanni and the Suevi never quite forgot to assemble for edification around the *cupa*. Here and there the Germans give us to understand that they knew well the longing for St. Gertrud's minni, when the mind was restless and needed company, or sighed for comfort on departure, for reconciliation, for blessing generally. Johannesminni, Johannessegen, is the name of another good drink, the effects of which have been preserved by cleverly adding a touch of the Christian bouquet; when there is a wedding, men let the priest consecrate *amorem Sancti Johannis* in the church to the bridal pair, and he willingly makes a little speech anent the blood of Christ and the wedding feast at Cana; he cannot, however, entirely transform the ale to wine, since the Johannesminni must be drunk from pure wordly [sic] vessels. Elsewhere, the Johannesstrunk has preserved its social character as a power to unite men in circles of frith, when the neighbours seat themselves in a host about the board in the open air and drink to good neighbourliness. There is no Germanic heathendom to be found in the blessing of the Johannesminni – the Christian faith of the Lord's Supper and the ancient custom of offering libation [150] have permeated the drink; but we may still doubtless assume that the actual manner in which the blessing is here obtained has its roots in ancient home custom.

The combined testimony of joyous brethren and stern saints will not prove to us that the drinking blot was ever at any time the only Germanic form for worship; it merely indicates that the drink, throughout the whole Germanic region was, right down to the last age of heathendom, at the centre of the old cut, and there it probably stood ever since the gods revealed to our forefathers the powerful secret of ale. It was evidently natural for the contemporaries of Tacitus to assemble for a drinking about in the sacred grove, and we are thus hardly going too far in concluding that the mighty drinkers which the Germans were had practised the art under the auspices of the gods themselves.

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When Vedastus stepped in as a guest among the Franks, his eye was at once caught by the great vessel. It stood in the midst of the circle; and a similar prominent place must have been occupied by the Norwegian *skapker*, from which the sacred drink was served out. The power which evinced itself in such uncanny wise to the man of God made itself also distinctly remarked in the North, for beside this *skapker* stood the shoe into which a person adopted had to tread on admission to the clan. The vessel was sacred, and its place was sacred and powerful. But the feast also called for pure drinking cups in the hand, horns which in point of holiness answered to the blessing they were to bear around among the company. Beyond all doubt, the everyday bowls, like all new-fangled inventions, were excluded from the high days of festival. The feast had to be drunk in the venerable cattle-horn – something of this indeed, is indicated in the antiquarian observation as to Olaf Kyrri's breach with the past; prior to his reformation of the court ceremonial according to modern ideas, we are told, it was the custom of kings to drink from the horns of animals;

[151] but after his day, the king and his distinguished guests were served in beakers. When the house had been consecrated and adorned for the feast, the finest drinking vessels of the household were brought forth; and we may glean some idea of the reverence shown to these horns, and what men thought of them, when we note the position they occupy in the legends, right down to our own times. They formed part of the family treasure as pledges of life and luck, they revealed hidden thoughts and plans; they had a personality which called for a proper name; and their handing down by inheritance through the clans was watched over with jealous care. Olaf Tryggvason had two pair of such horns, the Grims and the Hyrnings, the former of which he had once obtained in marvellous wise from Jotunheim. One evening at the time of the Yule feast, two men came to the king's court, both calling themselves Grim, and brought with them a pair of splendid gold-decked horns with a greeting from Gudmund of Glasisvellir. Gudmund was an individual whom Christians were loth to have greet them, and the heathen manner of the strangers also made itself plainly apparent when a drink, consecrated in Christian wise, was offered them; they vanished with a clap of thunder,; and when the lights were lit again, three of Olaf's men lay dead in the hall. The king, however, kept the horns. In this story – and adaptation of old legend – the admiration of the myth for the treasure and for its supernatural origin appears in conflict with the Christian inclination to tread the devil underfoot, and the legend has only half subdued the stubborn material. It shows, indeed, after all, as a glorification of the horn, declaring that wherever its deftly wrought ornaments gaped across the bench, men felt divinity issuing forth toward them.

At the commencement of the banquet, a row of small low tables stood in front of the benches, the food was served out on plates, and the guests helped themselves as long as they were minded. When all had satisfied their lust for solid food, the tables were removed, and then the drink began its round. So also in the feast above all feasts; at the moment when the horn came forth, the sacrificial feast was at its highest. A strict [152] ritual regulated every single movement with the drinking horn. It was first carried to the highest in rank, the man who occupied the high seat, and when he had consecrated it, he drank to the next in rank, and so the horn went steadily on from man to man. On receiving it, one rose – Harthaenut was struck by apoplexy as he stood at his drink, and fell down dead with the vessel in his hand; throughout the Middle Ages, men held firmly by the good custom of showing reverence for the drink by standing. With a word expressive of wish and promise the horn was emptied, and on passing on to the next man, was again filled, that he might do his duty and pass it on. From man to man it has to pass, going round with the sun, none of those present being suffered to show preference for any particular companion at table; any attempt at passing by one's neighbour and drinking forward beyond him, amounted to an affront to the one so passed, and was a serious breach of the sacred law. And the link between them was not a table, but hand reaching out to hand; “the horn goes in the hands of men” is the true expression for a drinking party, and to set down the cup instead of handing it on to one's

neighbour was a great offence. "If a man put the cup down instead of handing it to his neighbour where people are drinking, he is to pay according to ancient law one shilling to the master of the house, six shillings to the offended man and twelve shillings to the king" according to the Anglo-Saxon law of Hlotære and Eadric. This means, reduced to an older form, that the offender has sinned not only against his partner and the host, but also against divine authority.

Priscos has given a description of the rule for feasting at Attila's court, and a comparison of the Byzantine' account with northern sources shows plainly, not only that the great Hun ruler based his court etiquette upon Germanic models, but also that the ceremonial observed in connection with drinking was the same north and south of the Baltic. Priscos was invited, together with the other members of the mission, to a banquet given in their honour, and the first man they met was naturally the cup-bearer, who handed them a goblet which [153] they were to drink off with a good wish, before sitting down. When the meal commenced, a servant appeared before Attila with a bowl of wine, he took it, and greeted his neighbour; every man so accosted over the cup rose, and was not allowed to sit down again until he had take a mouthful, or emptied the cup and handed it back to the cup-bearer. Thus Attila paid due honour to each man in turn, by taking the cup and drinking to him with a wish for luck and good fortune. When at last the entire company had been thus favoured, the first dish was brought in . But after each course of meat, the same ceremony was repeated from one end of the hall to the other, and each time, the party had to empty the bowl standing, one by one.

Amid the festive spirit of the occasion several particularly marked cups were drunk – "minnis" as they are called in mediæval term. In these, the sacrifice is concentrated, and the anticipation of the banquet is at its utmost tension. The account of the famous feast of succession, which Swein Forkbeard held after the death of his father, suggests that in the old days, there were at least three main toasts at such a blot. True, the *Fagrskinna* only says that on the first evening when men were assembled at a funeral feast, they had to fill many cups "in the same way as with minnis nowadays", and these cups were dedicated to the mightiest of one's kin, in heathen time, to Thor or others among the gods. At last the *bragarfull* – promise cup – was poured out, and on drinking this, the giver of the feast was expected to make a vow – and with him all those present – and having done so, sit down in the high seat of the departed. Snorri, on the other hand, gives a detailed and more precise account; he states, that on the first day of the feast, before King Swein stepped into his father's high seat, he drank his minni-cup and vowed that ere three winters were past, he would go to England and slay King Æthelred or drive him from the country. This cup all present had to drink. But thereupon, all had to drink Christ's minni. The third was Michael's minni, and this was drunk by all. After these, Earl Sigvaldi drank his father's minni and made his vow that ere [154] three winters were past he would go to Norway and slay Earl Hakon or drive him from the country. After him, Thorkel, his brother, vowed to accompany Sigvaldi to Norway and never flee as long as his brother was fighting. Then Bui vowed to go to Norway in their company and stand up in fight without flinching against Earl Hakon, and thus one followed another in due succession.

Swein's arvel has shared the fate of so many good stories which history, out of due regard to chronology and textual criticism, has had to turn out of the house, or at any rate receive only as proxy for some unknown and more sober fact; but how much or how little these cups and vows are to be reckoned by writers of political history – they were doubtless a salient point in the imagination of the Middle Ages and earlier times. And even though the various authors may have lacked all authentic report of what took place at the court in that unforgettable year, they found no difficulty in giving a trustworthy picture of what might have taken place, for they had themselves taken part in funeral feasts to the memory of friends and kin. The discrepancy between the two versions is due to the difference of method. The description in the *Fagrskinna* is intended as a piece of antiquarian information regarding drinking customs of our forefathers; the saga writer has a delicate conscience in the matter of culture history, and endeavours to prevent his listeners from thoughtlessly applying their

own ideas to ancient times. Snorri, on the other hand, describes the scene as a stylist and an artist, chiefly concerned with the dramatic element, and to him, Christ and Michael are as good as gods and kin. He writes more directly from his own premises, and therefore, we find embedded in his version a fragment of culture history, to wit, the mediæval adoption and adaptation of the ancient sacrificial rites. But this does not necessarily imply that the author of the *Fagrskinna* ousts Snorri as a witness to the past. The triple form so markedly emphasised in the *Heimskingla* was not created out of regard to style or dramatic effect; the guild statutes, which contain the result of the drinking cup's conversion to Christian custom, continued the sacred rite of ancient times in regard to table, and here again we find the triple chord, in such a manner as to produce a distinct impression of a convention rooted in ancient observance. In the Gothland Karin's guild, three "minnis" had to be observed: "Our Lord and brother's minni, Our sister and Lady's, and St. Catherine's minni." The Danish Eric's guild had for its patron saints St. Eric, Our Saviour and Our Lady, while the Swedish Eric's guild mentions only St. Eric's minni, which is declared at the stroke of six, and All Saints' minni, on the stroke of nine. The Swedish St. Görans' Brotherhood succumbed to the mediæval temptation to enrol as many saints as possible in their heavenly guard; not content with Our Lord, Our Lady and St. Göran, they enlisted St. Eric and St. Olaf, as well as the Holy Rood, and all the saints together, besides St. Gertrud and St. Bengt especially. All nine are remembered in the cups, but three and three together, so that the minnis after all fall into a triad. These guild customs give the *Heimskringla* a certain weight, when, in connection with Earl Sigurd's blot feast at Hlada, it makes the feast centre about the cup to Odin for victory and power to the king, that the Njord and Frey for harvest and peace, and the Bragi cup with the minni for powerful kinsmen; even though we, on seeing *bragarfull* falsely interpreted Bragi's cup parallel to that of the other gods, may have some slight suspicion with regard to this highly departmental sense of order.

On the other hand, the Norwegian guild statutes are apparently unanimous in restricting the number of cups to two: The Onarheim's guild drinks Mary's minni and Olaf's minni, while the Olaf's guild, strangely enough, only mentions Christ and Mary, disregarding its own patron saint. And the form for Christian festival drinking in Norway which was granted the highest sanction of the church is also based on Christ and Mary as the object of the solemnity. As these forms are not designed to initiate proselytes into the mysteries of the cult, they do not need to tell everything, and we have not far to look before we find lacunæ where something or other may perhaps be understood which is not stated; even allowing for all possibilities, however, we cannot lose sight of the fact that two of the minnis are singled out for particular mention.

But to get their proper weight, these isolated toasts must be viewed against the background of the sacrificial feast, where minni follows minni in unbroken succession. Odin's and Frey's cups are the great minnis, being more important than all others, for the cup special, or toast, was not an exception in the ordinary course of drinking, but constituted the actual standard of form for all the drinking that took place. The horn on its round was the focus of the feast, each individual ceremony lasted until it has passed the whole way round, and the feast itself consisted in a repetition of the circular movement. "Many horns went round," we are told, on that last evening at the court of the Gjukings, before Gunnar and Hogni set off on their fateful journey to Atli; and having learned this, all know that the feast of those bold men was a great feast, and lasted long. Therefore, Egil's saga could not have characterised the mighty blot at Atley more correctly than when it says: "Many a minni went round, and a horn should be emptied at every one."

Wherever the mediæval records mention a feast, it is this very chain of minnis that is implied in the word, and so the amount of drinking allowed can be regulated by fixing the number of toasts. In the Middle Ages, kings and lawyers were busy arranging the lives of the citizens for them, prescribing what finery was proper to be worn, and how many days decent Christians were to carouse. The good Gothlanders were, at the time when their law was written down, under a taskmaster; there were rules for how much liquor was proper for a wedding, and what degree of dryness could be tolerated at minor feasts. On assembling at a

wedding, the drinking of Mary's minni was the end of all drinking, but before it was brought in, the host could call as many toasts as he wished. This of course is practical expression of the view that the party may drink as much as it pleases until the inevitable moment when, according to the rule of ceremony, Mary was honoured by a toast, and then the drinking had to cease, no [157] additional cups being allowed. By such principles, it is possible to regulate also the duration of a drinking bout, and its intensity, by providing that three minni cups, and no more, are to be drunk on bringing home the bride's portion.

Out from this stream of minni there rises again one particular cup as the cup beyond all others, the true core of the feast. Presumably, the "highest minni" of the Middle Ages goes back to the principal cup in the heathen drinking hall, either as a direct adaptation, or as a substitute for something customary. In the guilds it is the divinity, either the chief god, Christ, or the local god, the patron saint, that receives chief honour. The Brotherhood of St. Göran with its arrangement into a triple trinity, finds room for the god and the goddess and the patron saint in highest minni, and this was drunk "especially with torch and trumpet", *i.e.* in more festival fashion than the other toasts. At the banquets and Yule feasts held by the common people, men continued to drink the toast of God or the Holy Ghost, even after it had been found necessary to add a word of excuse to the Highest for offering him the honour due to him, and it might seem as if *the* toast before all others was just this one for Our Lord.

The feast did not terminate informally. It would be opposed to the character and purpose of the blot to let it flicker out like a dying candle. At the Swedish wedding feasts, the guests were handed a weapon-cup at the conclusion of the entertainment, the host at the same time handing them their weapons, which had been laid aside during the feast. The mediæval guilds kept to the old custom, and at times, the last of the three great minnis is made to serve as an amen. The statues of St. Göran put the matter as follows: "St. Bengt means leavetaking and good night." After the three main toasts had been drunk, one should not inconvenience those who served at the table – unless all the guests were agreed that they were too comfortable as they were to break up the party; as one passage thoughtfully adds. When legislation came to regard it as one of its many tasks to guide people in the conduct of their feasts, the minni was made a kind of police full-stop to

[158] gaiety. In Gothland, when Mary's minni had been drunk, anyone was at liberty to leave; it being understood that good people would be well advised to avail themselves of this ceremonial valediction.

As long as the feast was an act of worship, all those taking part in it were necessarily obliged to remain for the whole of the function, if they did not wish to harm themselves and all their fellows there; and before leaving, they assured themselves that everything right and needful had been done, so that the party could disperse without prejudice to the blessing. The individual guest drank himself into the dark, and in the great weapon-cup there lay a final assurance that all the guests took with them the blessing. The Swedish law still hints at its religious meaning, when it prescribes that it shall be drunk from the same vessel as the guests had used for the wedding drink.

While the townsmen utilised the final toast for police purposes, the peasants sometimes turned it to account for promoting hospitable cheer; it might for instance be called in as an aide to the ready will, when it was a question of smoothing out the last crease in the jerkin. At weddings in Ditmarsk, they feast concluded with the drinking of the toast of the Holy Spirit, and the joint was forced down with a warning cry of "the Holy Spirit is at the door"; when all had to avow their impotence, and only then, the cup the Holy Ghost's minni was poured out with the wish: "May this be a glad year for you with the Holy Ghost."

In the guild statutes, we see ancient tendencies and a new spirit working together, and the inner conflict between them has set its mark upon the words, so that enjoyment is often formulated as a duty, whereas in earlier times participation was at once an enjoyment and a necessity. The Middle Ages had need of the toast to create order, both as a means of



ascertaining that the brother fulfilled their obligation – this is the ancient feeling – and as a preventive against their doing too much beyond what was demanded of them. When culture had grown so far out of the old system that the centre of gravity [159] had come to lie decisively in the thought of Christianity, the moderating qualities of the toast would predominate; but the change in religious tone would at the same time dissolved the very power that had made the drink a means of restraining the exuberant hilarity of the brethren.

For him who would grasp the whole as a whole, and not squander his attention on mere details, the testimony of the guild statutes and the customs of the common people unite in a sufficiently complete picture of the blot-feast. The horn was the heart of the feast; the hours were held together and made a living whole by the horn passing slowly round from hand to hand. The life of the blot was concentrated in some great toasts in which holiness was strained to its highest pitch. These principal cups gathered the details of the blot into a festival rhythm, and it is possible that the mediæval tendency to find rest in a triple chord of minnis was rooted in an ancient respect for the triple as perfection, even though perhaps it might have been strengthened by Christian ideas. But the ceremonial suggested by these Northern authorities was not a pattern which must externally fit all times and places; rather it represents a system inwardly felt, which holds the ceremonial together. Within the framework of the principal toasts there must be room for a varied multiplicity of detail. All the solemn moments in the life of the clan, which we have learned in part to know from the social side, were sacrifices, blots, and the character and purpose of the meeting determined the relative weight of the various toasts. According to time and circumstances, this or that minni would be elevated to greater or less official importance. At the arvel, the promise-cup derived a particular significance from its emphasising the entering into authority of the successor; and his declaration of his life's programme threw its own light upon those who, having likewise made their vows, gathered about him and honoured him, either by making his cause their own, as did Bui with Sigvaldi, or by entering the lists against him, as did Sigvaldi with Swein. In the bridal house, the cup of contract would necessarily take [160] first place as a condition for good fortune in the alliance entered upon, as also for the safe relationship between the two houses thus united under one shield. A feast of faith and alliance would be nothing without the cup of agreement – and thus each feast day had its own care. In the feasts of worship proper, it was luck in its supreme generality which determined the course of the proceedings, but it lies in the character of the family hamingja that it was dependent upon the actual, the “fate” of the clan.

The toast gave the blot feast its character. Uniting as it did all those taking part, it gathered the spirit of the whole company into one. And the all-comprising holiness residing in the company as a whole did not loose it hold of the participants, until the last cup of the blot was drunk.

At ordinary drinking feasts, the company would at a certain point break up into groups; friend drew friend forth from the general brotherhood of the festive spirit and drank himself nearer to his fellow. We see him, in the Icelandic sagas, stepping down the floor with his horn, drinking *til móts* with the other; that is to say, drinking half, and handing the rest in the horn to his comrade. Or those sitting side by side would turn towards each other and form pairs; in the Nordic, this is called drinking *tvimening*, when men shared one horn together two and two, or now and then a man and woman together.

We may assume that the blot proper was carried out under stricter rules, and here, we can set certainty in place of mere assumption. In the period of the saga writing, it was still not forgotten that sacred feasts were denoted by the progress of the horn round the hall; the horn should be “borne around the fire,” we are told, that is to say, that only the sacred vessels were used, and these carried by the cup-bearer from man to man throughout the hall, then passing round the long fire and up along the opposite side of the hall.

At this point, woman contributed her holiness to the feast; the “ale-goddess” she is called in the scaldic poetry, and the name is rich in significance, being inspired by deep experiences. The immediate charm of a woman stepping the house-wife's [161] way through the ale-hall is but a faint reflection of the majesty which woman's holiness and the holiness of

an assembly shed on her in the eyes of those present. In reality, it is a description of a blot which lies in the verses of the Beowulf anent the queen handing her husband the first cup, and thence proceeding down the rank, from man to man, until she comes to the guest. "In man shall battle thrive, and deeds of arms, but the woman shall grow in favour among men; in the mead-hour of the house-earles greet firstly the prince, hand the horn to the king"; thus the custom of the king's courts is expressed in poetic conciseness, with the "shall" which denotes the normal course of life, and the lines may without exaggeration be called a part of the sacrificial ritual.

In the saga which tells of the homecoming of Olaf the Saint after his glorious expeditions abroad, it is noted a s proof of Sigurd Syr's magnificent hospitality towards his step-son, that he entertained him and his followers every alternate day with festive cheer, meat and ale, and let the horn go round in the manner of a great banquet, whether it were a holy-day or not. He made the day a feast. The more festive ceremonial included the richer fare, for when drinking minni, each man had the horn filled for his own mouth as often as it came to him.

But the feast demanded also co-operation of all those present every time one of them drank. As long as the blot was in progress, no one could let the cup life and go through a personal experience for a moment, whether in his own thoughts or in his own drink. The current of minnis must not be checked, and whether the cup were one for the whole company, or in honour of a single individual, whether it were bride-cup or parting cup, it was passed along a row of standing and blessing drink-fellows, the company attending in rapt anticipation. We know for certain at what time the Norwegian court was grown so modern that it superseded the slow and heavy older fashion and gave itself up freely to the pleasure of drinking. Before the time of Olaf Kyrrri, it was the custom for the horn to pass round the fire in the hall, from the king to the next in rank and so on; but Olaf let loose personal feeling, and introduced a new mode, [162] whereby each man might follow the dictates of his own conscience, and drink as he pleased. Among the common people this emancipation was long delayed, and when, for instance, a bride's guardian in Ditmarsk in the 16th century drank the bride to her betrothed in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, all present did their duty by the action in drinking off a toast from the same vessel.

What was expected of a man in connection with the parting cup none can tell better than Thorstein Boejarmagn, who had been a guest of Geirrodd, ruler of giants, in Jotunheim, and had there seen people drink from the horn Grim. It must indeed be difficult to express in sober everyday phrases what took place between such mighty personages as Geirrodd autocrat over all giants and sprites, and Gudmund of Glasisvellir; and we gain, from the author's endeavor to express the inexpressible, a lively impression that things generally were on a larger scale, more wonderful altogether, among the giants than in ordinary households of the North. When Grim is carried in, in its full breadth of majesty, the whole people of giants and goblins fall on their knees; they knew, of course, that their master needed but to bend his ear toward it in order to gain knowledge of the most secret of things. The horn first makes for Gudmund, as the highest in rank among the guests, the cup-bearer waits till he has emptied it, and then goes to the host. Before him, Grim is filled again, and Geirrodd turns the point upward, the contents pouring like a wave of the sea down his throat. While the hero drank, he fixed his glance upon Earl Agdi, and it was now his turn to take a fresh filling; the poor earl did all that duty demanded, but was forced to draw breath twice in the process. "Age and manhood do not go together," said Grim; for the horn had more than human understanding. The remainder of the company were not judged capable of such superhuman achievement, and were suffered to fulfil the law two and two. Our authority lets this parting drink embrace two other toasts besides both Thor's and Odin's cup, and the effect on us modern readers is not only that we come to regard Earl Agdi with a fellow-feeling that excuses much, but also [163] that we suspect the author of having, like so many of his compeers among the late compilers of romantic stories, reconstructed the past a trifle too much per intuition. In one thing, however, he has the advantage of us; he knew the customs of his own time, and even where his imagination runs most freely, he cannot go beyond its conceptions. He sees the

whole affair as a series of minnis; and he is awed by the divine power residing in the horn which makes it a vehicle of prophecy.

It was the presence of supreme holiness that necessitated a stricter ceremonial. The warrior host lived under the rule of the greater holiness, and would thus be for ever excluded from the more informal fashion of drinking; they were never allowed to drink in pairs (*tvimening*). The sacred men-at-arms must quaff their cups ritually whenever they assembled, or in other words, their meals were always sacrifices. "It was viking law to drink all together in company, even when they came to a feast," we are incidentally told. For the same reason, the war-sacred drinking feasts at the king's court were always held with ceremonial strictness of form; the king's retainers were vikings all the year round, and lived constantly before their gods. It is possible that the supreme holiness made itself externally apparent in the use of the divine goblets, so that free intercourse could not take place in the hall as long as they were to the fore and went in the hands of the drinkers.

## **Chapter X** **Prayer and Sacrifice**

Ale carried with it always a festive glow; it was not a part of the nourishing and thirst-quenching everyday fare, but constituted, in a higher degree than milk and whey, a spiritual refreshment, a holy strengthening. And naturally, the drink which honoured the high feasts with its blessing, must have a power of its own to unite gods and men.

Here again suppositions force themselves upon us, though we are unable to drag them into the light and give them all the reality they demand. When the feast-ale was brewed, was it then possible to treat the vats with the everyday minimum of religious care - for an act of such importance as the preparations of the nourishing luck of the house could never be altogether worldly in the modern sense - was not rather every little ingredient handled with the solemnity of ritual, did not one purify oneself and impose restraint upon the freedom of tongue and limb when proceeding to the serious task of making ready for the blot?

In the veneration with which feast-ale is regarded by the common people of Norway, there is doubtless a touch of earnest from the old-time brewing. It is told of the people of the Telemark in ancient times that they prepared their feast-day drink with great solemnity, fearing lest carelessness in the process might prevent the ale from becoming strong, a thing which was not merely a defect, but a positive misfortune. When the ale at the feast proved incapable of depositing the guests under the bench, the host went about in a state of misery that [165] could not have been greater had his homestead been burned down.

A woman's skill in brewing was something far more than housewifely capability; it was the test of her holiness and its force, of her strength in the gods and her power over luck. When King Alrek's two wives, Geirhild and Signy, disputed as to which should be queen, it was the ale - that ale they brewed to receive the king on his return from the wars - which finally decided the issue. Geirhild invoked Odin, and vowed him her unborn son; he gave her some of his spittle to ferment the drink, and the ale proved good.

Undoubtedly then, the blot had its starting point in the brew-house; from the first stretching out of the hand to the holiness has undisputed scope. The contents of the cauldron and vat, however, only attained their full sacrificial powers in the banqueting hall itself. The Sacrifice began with the filling of the horn, in reverent silence and with ceremonial movements. Then the man presiding at the feast "signed", consecrated the horn, the ancient word for the performance is *vigja*, derived from *vé*, and this linguistic connection gives us the essence of the act. *Vé* means holiness, the utmost strength, and everything holy: the sacred place, the sacred treasures, the banner that leads the way, calling for boldness or caution, and ensuring success by its presence in the midst of the army. *Vé* is the strong in the sacred sense, and in order to comprehend its scope, we must recall the comprehensiveness of primitive

ideas as to life and its manifestations. The verb then means to inspire, bring a divinity and a deity into the thing, make it a god.

The verbs used of the first dealing with the cup express in a different wise the inner transformation of the drink, but as to the form whereby the alteration is produced we have unfortunately no direct information. Possibly the consecration took place with solemn gestures. There were such things as signs made in the air, if we may believe the somewhat doubtful legend of Hakon Aethelstansfostri, who made the sign of the cross over the blot-meat before tasting it, and was excused by earl Sigurd, who declared it was the sign of Thor's hammer; [166] the remarkable fact that peasants should need any explanation of a good heathen gesture does not perhaps altogether exclude the possibility that the story may have had some slight warranty in reality. Apparently it receives reinforcement from the verb "sign", often used of consecration; for "sign" means, among other things, to make a sign. But it is equally possible that the alien word really denotes the use of holy means, of treasures, in other words. Knowing the power of possessions, we are easily tempted to take an assumption for certainty, and say that the valuables of the clan were brought fourth, the spear and neck ornament, the arrows and rings, and the drink allowed to suck its fill of what they contained; the most holy things might have been fetched from the blot-house, and the bowl saturated with this till it was on the point of bursting - as with that cupa, which burst as soon as the priest with his hostile words awoke the powers it contained to fury. In the myth, Thor makes his goats whole and living after they have been slaughtered and eaten, by waving his hammer over their skin and bones, and from this cult legend we can draw safe inference regarding the use of the hammer of similar ceremonial object in the consecration. Another hint is contained in the Eddic poem of Thrymskvida, describing how Thor regained his hammer by posing as a bride. While the god of the red beard slept, the giants had been astir, and had abstracted his godly weapon and carried it to Utgard. The thief would not hand out his spoils unless rewarded by the possession of the goddess Freyja. The gods were at a loss, until Heimdal suggested that Thor should don the bridal veil and go in state to gladden the giant. On the arrival of the bridal party, a feast was held, and the ogres were naturally astonished at the appetite of the fair one, but the shrewd bridesmaid, impersonated by Loki, explained to the satisfaction of all that Freyja had contracted a tremendous hunger by her sore longing for her husband. At last the aim of the comedy is attained when the hammer is brought in and placed in the bride's lap. The poem is a burlesque, modeled upon unmistakable reminiscences of marriage ritual, and the ceremonial foundation comes to light in the [167] words of the giant when he orders the hammer to be brought in: bring in the hammer to consecrate the bride, place Mjólnir in the woman's lap.

The sacred articles were present at the blot, and no one is likely to suppose that they hung or lay idle. The memories of the power of treasures provide the best commentary to the exuberant description in the Edda of the shy god with the red beard devouring ox after ox out of sheer impatience for the moment when he should see the hammer brought in to consecrate the lap of the bride. On the day when a temple feast was held at Olfusvatn, the housewife, Signy, sat on a chair with her treasures in her lap, and the day proved the beginning of unluck, for her little son, Hord, came stumbling towards her and grasped at the trinket, so that it broke. It is not inconceivable that this scene, from its importance to the saga of Hord and his sorry fate, holds in itself a memory of the old blot days, and shows us an interior from the blot hall itself.

When Olaf the Saint surprised the blot-men in the Drontheim country, he took a great amount of plunder both in vessels used for feasts and "valuables" - *gripir* - which the company had with them at the feast. They had come dressed in their best, as we should say, but this, rendered in the ancient speech, simply means that the sacred heirlooms of the clan were put on to inspire the sacrifice with holiness.

The ceremonial consecration no doubt demands action, but to take effect, the act needed an accompanying word. At the blot, the horn was "spoken for" by him who presided at the feast. This technical term - *maela fyrir* - has, like so many others, passed over into Christianity; a Norse guild statute refers to the introductory act at the principle feast of the

guild as "speaking for, or the blessing of the minni". What was said in heathen times we shall never directly learn, but we can form some idea of what would be said, and what thoughts lay hidden in the words. The effect of this ceremonial mode of speaking we know from the language of the law, where it is used of administering a legal formula, and also of demanding something in legally binding form; in everyday life, the word [167] combines two meanings: to congratulate, or wish one luck of, e.g. in connection with a gift, and to curse. At the root of the official and of the private usage lies the same thought: to utter something with weight and will to bind honour and luck, so as to produce by the words an alteration in the mind and whole state of another, either binding luck to him, or depriving him of his sense of luck and making him a niding. The corresponding substantives, *formáli* and *formaeli*, have an equally broad application: from blessing to curse, from the legally binding agreement and the legally binding formula to the soul-binding determination joined to the application of a thing, and which must be respected by the user if he would have luck in the use of what is entrusted to him. We can judge the weight of the word in the following sentence from the Volsungasaga: The Norns came at Helgi's birth, gave him *fórmali* and said that he should become most famous of kings.

There is an intimate coherence between the religious and the legal meanings of the word *formaeli*. The word was a necessary addition to every action, and it gave its seal of luck, so that the preparations had been made for the welfare of a dead man, the word stepped in and installed him in full enjoyment of the future; his grave was "spoken for", and he himself shown his place, whether in Valhal or another hall. And even nearer to the blot is the action of the settler when he thrusts his high seat pillars overboard and declares that he will build his house and dwell on the spot where they come ashore. he gave them, with the words, both will and power to put forth all their luck and holiness.

Just as the giving of a name was designed to lead a soul into the child, so the *formaeli* of the cult was calculated to give the power of the feast its true direction, and set limits and goal for its aim. The *formaeli* then, had to suit itself to the occasion of the feast. It sealed the effect of the cup, to fuse men together, to make a kinsman of a stranger on adoption, to confirm the promise of the bridal gift. "Your father shall be King Gjuki, and I your mother, your brothers Gunnar and Hogni..," [169] says Grimhild, when Sigurd takes the horn which leads him to look upon the Gjukungs in a new light. When drinking a wedding, the promise would consist, *inter alia*, of declaring the conditions for alliance between the clans, now to be drunk fast. In modern times, Norwegian men reckoned up that the bridegroom had a holding with so and so many horses, and that the bride's father would not send out his daughter as a beggar wench, but accompanied by "one thousand Norse specie dollars, a furnished bed, horse and saddle, five cows...now you know that," and this declamation is, as a *formaeli*, not very far from the old spirit. A Swedish formula intimates that the bridal ale is drunk "to honour and housewife and to half bed, to lock and keys...and to all right." The cup which confirmed the "bargain" was called *njótsminni*, and in this name the matter of the *formaeli* is indicated, viz. as rendering the receiver *njótr*, or enjoyer, of the soul and use of the thing. At a declaration of peace, the formula cannot have been very far from the famous peace formula: "Now all matters are agreed in suit and seat, about the ale-bowl and the meat-dish, at law-thing and in pastime...sharing knife and meat and all between us kinsmen and not as enemies...For self and heir, born and unborn, conceived and un-conceived, named and unnamed, each man takes promise and gives promise, brave promise, promise for good, and to be held forever while earth stands and men live;...as son toward father and father to son in all doings where they meet, on land or water, on ship or ski, on sea or on horseback, to share oars and dippers, thwart and deck...as a friend meets friend at sea, as brother meets brother on the road."

At the great feast, where the object was the welfare of the company in the future introduced by the blot, the *formaeli* of the principal minni would necessarily be of general character. And we are fortunate enough to be able still to see the main features in the sacred formula, partly from scattered indications in the sagas, partly through the Christian adaptation of the [170] Middle Ages. This "for harvest and peace" which unfailingly crops up wherever there is mention of the heathen blot, has become fixed as the motto for the

Christian adaptation of the harvest festival: the ale shall be blessed ("signed") in thanks to Christ and Mary. for harvest and peace. In a somewhat different fashion, we find the formula incorporated in the Norse guilds' constitution. The statutes of the Olaf's Guild begin thus: "Our guild feast to be held every summer in thanks to Holy Christ, our Lady Mary and Holy King Olaf, and to our health, for harvest and peace, and for all God's mercy here and hereafter..," and it ends with: "God and saint Olaf strengthen and aid to the good whoever keep this law, to harvest and peace and all well-being in this world, and in the world hereafter, to the entering into heaven without end." The feast was held for good harvest, fruitfulness in field and stall - *til árbótar*, harvest's betterment, as it might more expressly be said after a summer of disappointment, leading to distrust of the effect of previous blots. An account of the secret sacrifices of the people of Drontheim in despite of Olaf the Saint's prohibition, gives us the *formaeli*, according to which the blot was to be for betterment of harvest, for peace and good weather. In Sweden, the same formula is indicated in the opening passages of the Law of Gothland: "We shall believe in one God almighty, and pray to Him to grant us harvest and peace, victory and health." In this "harvest and peace" we may see the main stem, which reached from the luck-meetings of the clan circle up into the feasts of parish and district. The object of the blot was luck in the sense of well-being, and first of all frith, the inviolable sense of unity and solidarity as requisite for the progress of their work. In an Icelandic *formaeli* used on the occasion of Olaf's *minni*, we find the same note: "Saint Olaf's honourable *minni* is poured and carried in. Drink we this with joy and gladness and the favour of God the Lord. Have then no strife or quarreling with one another, for the high lord, King Olaf, is warden of the lands."

He who opened the feast by drinkning the first horn was the originator of the *formaeli*; it is therefore said of him in the

[171] narrower sense that he "spoke for". After him, each of those present repeated the sacred words, presumably without any alteration. What we still lack in our knowledge of the cult *formaeli* we may add from a comparison with the legal formula, the two were in one spirit, and with the inner community went the sharing of outward form. As this consisted of a definitely marked, permanently valued series of words, so also the other was repeated year after year and time after time with the same unaltering text, where inspiration had no more scope than the regard for actuality might demand. And with this permanent form there went a particular manner of dictation, which always accompanied the solemn rhymed speech, whether the words were legal *formaeli* or laudatory verses or strong charms. The man who stood with the horn in his hand would recite - *kveda* - in a tone which is technically unknown to us, since it is invariably described only by its effect upon the hearers, but which is after all noted in the short, striking verses with the strongly marked alliteration. In the mediaeval guilds, and among the Norwegian courtiers, the *minni* was chanted. All the brethren stand up and chant, after the pouring out of the highest *minni*, or, as the Danes express it, the brethren receive the cups sitting, and having received them rise up as one man and join in the *minne*. We may probably regard this liturgising of the toast as an attempt to mould the ancient custom into church form, and in some districts this singing of the *minni* established itself as the festive form of conviviality, and remained so as long as the custom was held in observance at all; men drank to one another "with the verse of a song", and the *minni* actually ended, among the peasants, in echoes of folk-songs or rhymes from Scripture history. In Scandinavia, the word *kvaedi* persists right down to our own day as the technical term for toast ritual, , and even after the *formaeli* had degenerated into a free oratorical contribution, men still held by the custom of calling it rhyme or *kvaedi*. The *formaeli* has a double aspect. Firstly it confirms to consecration act which has taken place: now the ale is divine; and secondly it determines whither the god and his strength go. [172] And the two sides are from the nature of the case one, because the force residing in the words and in the acts of the sacrificer is divinity bent upon creation of future luck. The *formaeli*, then, covers all that words can add to an act, from the great consecration of the drink and initiation to a definite purpose, to the friendly greetings and blessings of one companion for his neighbour

at table. Its power to bind is one with its life-giving quality. A promise such as that regarding the bridal pact, or the bride's morning gift must, by co-operation with the horn, be made a positive luck if it were to be of any value for the receiver, and it must also be hardened to honour in the party promising in order to bind his will. The Swedish Östgötaglag knew what was required, and states it in words which are of religious significance as well as of social importance. How shall one marry? is asked, and the answer runs: "they shall hold two law-drinkings, at the one bringing forward the request for the maiden, and promising the morning gift; and when the request has been made, then they shall drink the second, and with this the giver in marriage (the guardian) shall give away his kinswoman in marriage. They shall then have the weapon cup, and that from the same vessel they drank from before." This is the manner of procedure when a man's words are to be made holy, and consequently binding.

It comes naturally to call the formæli the prayer at a feast, and the comparison is furnished by history itself, for the Christians used the same word, *mæla fyrir*, of offering up prayer. But the old formæli is as far removed from the Christian prayer for God's blessing and God's mercy, as from all chaffering with an invisible over the acceptance of a sacrifice in return for favour shown. When the formæli was to serve the new god, it had first of all to be deprived of half of its content. The in-vocation remained, but the ancient boldness and confidence, which forced its way in violently and wrested out the fulfilment for itself, had to be cast aside. In the solemn: "*mæl heill*" — translated: "be this said by you in the power of luck — a cry that came as an exclamation of joy on hearing welcome news, or on the occasion of great vows, declarations, or warnings, we [173] have the old, strong prayer, and as a prayer it might also be regarded alter the introduction of the new religion, but when the Christian ekes out the words with: "And may God let it succeed," he reveals what separated the heathen from the Christian; the former calmly waited for the effects of his words to appear, the latter could only hope and trust the wilful god would accede to his wish.

It is no easy matter for us on the spur of the moment to give this form of religious invocation its due place in the world of prayer; but in order to understand its effect, it is enough to know luck and its nature. If the formæli has nothing to do with a creature poor in soul kneeling in the dust before a Lord who gives to whom he thinks fit and refuses whom he pleases, it is no less far removed from the magician angling in a lake of darkness with his wizard's hook. The formæli is a hamingja. Where the Jew strives with his god in prayer, the heathen uses the prayer as a fighting weapon and flings it right into the lace of his opponent. And like every other weapon, it calls for skill and strength on the part of him who wields it, and to use it with effect he must be in contact with its innermost being; the weapon must be soul of his soul, so that it does not merely lie in his hand, but forms a prolongation of his arm, and derives its force from his very heart.

When Egil fell out with King Eric, he raised a cursing pole and flung out his formæli against his enemy: "Here I raise a cursing pole, and aim this curse — *nið* — at King Eric and Queen Gunhild, aim this curse at the gods that dwell in this land," in order that the words may effect what they express: to render all gods dwelling in that land lost upon their ways, so that they may never find the road to their refuge until they have driven Eric and Gunhild from the kingdom; and if he who uttered the curse did not know that the words would go forth and grasp the gods, confusing their minds and making the luck of the land as a troubled sea under the king, he would not utter them at all, rather would he shun the words in a secret fear of exposing himself to some fateful influence. For a man only utters that which he feels himself lucky enough to make [174] good; it is the community with the powers and the consciousness of being upborne by their strength that lets the formæli glide smoothly from the tongue, and gives it power to drive a future before it towards whatever goal its master may please.

The alteration which took place in the formæli under the influence of Christianity is very closely connected with the fact that the word was deprived of its position as an adjunct to action — or that it was at any rate forced into the possibility of standing alone. To the modern

mind, the prayer is confined to the words, for the heathen, its essence was rather that it was an accessory to a ceremonial act. When it did carry with it its own fulfilment as a matter of course, it was because the words implied accomplishment through action. The speaker has the horn in front of him, or even in his hand, he speaks over the drink, and does his duty by the horn before passing it on down the ranks. The formæli and the drinking are more than of equal weight in the modern sense, they are one, as are name-giving and name-confirmation, agreement and completion of the bargain, promise and fulfilment of the promise, because the one is all, its counterpart included, and without its counterpart is less than nothing, to wit, unluck and offence. The duality which invades so many of the ancient customs as soon as they are expressed in our tongue, disappears when the old pictures of men acting are put before us in their totality. “Wes hale (*wassail*),” says he who drinks first, “drink hale,” answers he who is waiting for the horn. Here we have the old prayer as well as the old sacrifice.

The most scathing affront would be to offer a cup with a curse, thus proposing to the receiver to sign his own doom. In the legend of the unhappy lovers Hagbard and Signe, the hero is literally invited to drink the cup of bitterness. When Hagbard stands under the gallows the queen avenges her two Sons slain by the doomed man, by offering him a cup and speaking for it in these words: “Drink the cup of death, and when you have quaffed the liquor descend into the realm of death.” Hate can go no further than inviting a man to drink to his own damnation. [175]

An alien has often to go the opposite way to that of the native, and understand the rule from the exception. It requires some intimacy to estimate the value of respect for the power of the word, when fear and self-defence find outlet in accepted forms, when for instance a summons served in legal language forces a man to defend himself at law; but in such extraordinary cases as when Æthelfrid charges down upon the priests at their prayers, it makes itself palpable. In the same way, the application of sacrificial form under conditions lacking the everyday natural background can suddenly reveal its forces with almost experimental distinctness. It was in reality the blot which helped the Greenland voyager Thorgils — Christian as he was, and Christianwise as he believed himself to be acting — through the last of his sore trials in the Arctic Sea. Starving and exhausted, his men toiled at the oars to work their way on to the mouth of a fiord without making headway, and all the while their strength diminished, and their thirst grew worse. At last one of them said: “I know that men aforetime, when in greatest peril at sea have mixed their own water with sea water, and saved their lives.” Thorgils dared neither say yes nor no to the proposal, and looked in silence, while they filled the dipper; but just as they were about to drink, he checked them with a word: “Give it to me, and I will speak for the cup (*mæla fyrir minni*): Troll of illwill now hindering our way, you shall not bring it about that I or any of us here should drink of our own uncleanness.” And at the same moment a bird like a guillemot flew screaming northward from the boat, and the men reached land and found a spring. To be sure, Thorgils did not complete the libation, indeed he intended by his act to frustrate the ungodly procedure, but his words had their effect, because they were uttered in sacrificial form.

From the extraordinary element in this happening we learn to understand the natural fulfilment of the blot, which does not burst forth so tangibly out of the moment, but with no less inevitable force is completed in what we call the natural order of things, that earth grows fruitful and the sun shines.



## CHAPTER XI FOR HARVEST AND PEACE

The assembling for sacrifice is the glorified form of the common board. The blessing of the blot lies in the fact that the bowl seethes with a special drink, similar to, yet essentially different from the ale brewed at all other feast place, a drink which is nothing other than the peculiar ancestral luck of which the clan itself exists.

When we use the old words – whether it be promise cup, peace cup, or the cup to Odin – there is always a certain unreality in the tone which wafts away what should be the main thing; the promise, the peace, or the god are set above or beside the drink in which they should reside. Such sentences as these: ale is peace, is welling thoughts and memories, is hamingja, soul and divinity, pass through an empty space before reaching us; and the effect of this refracting is a poetic effulgence which effaces the real meaning and replaces it with a suggestive vagueness. Among the Northmen, the usual term for the blot-cup seems to have been *full*, a word whose old-fashioned structure speaks of age and dignity, and the meaning of which serves equally well to cover fulness, the state of being filled, or abundance, and that which is full. Another sacred word is *veig*, which, whatever may have been its original meaning, comprises the thought of strength and honour. The southern peoples expressed the whole truth in their holy name, *minne*.

*Minne* has a peculiar history. The word belongs as a cult term to the southern branch of the Teutonic stock and bears among the Germans the same meaning as the Old Norse *full* [177] and *veig*. When the toast drinking had been converted into a Christian ceremony in the guilds, the word made its way to the north, carried forward by the guild statues, and out of the mediæval usage it was in historical accounts of heathen customs thrown back upon the blot-cup. The author of the *Fagrskinna* is still aware of the distinction, for in speaking of the ancient arvel, he says that the cups at a feast of succession were poured out “as nowadays is done with minnis”. In the northern languages, the word *minni* had acquired the sense of “remembrance”, and language in conjunction with Christian ideas led thought more and more directly to the calling to mind as the main object of drinking a toast in the name of God and the saint. In the common language of Germany, *minne* gravitates towards denoting love, and thus by a parallel evolution the *minne* cup becomes a loving cup; to drink to the love of the saints – *in amore sanctorum bibere* – is the Latinists rendering of the custom, but now and again the other phases of the word show forth, so that beside the *amor* we find a *salus*, luck and health. In its ultimate origin, *minne* is closely akin to the Nordic *munr*, mind, soul, hamingja; it finds its best interpretation in Sigdrifa's words anent the cup: “Ale I bring you, mixed with megin and mighty honour.” The *minne* cup was simply hamingja in all its aspects.

The effect of emptying the cup was first and foremost a community of feeling – for harvest and peace, runs the wish of blessing. Men drank together and drank themselves together, as the old saying goes, in the ancestral brew of power. The assembly was made one, and this unifying force of the drink is expressed in the ceremonial which requires that the horn shall pass from man to man round the hall; the chain must be unbroken, and close upon itself again – the assembly should be made one. He who refused to answer a toast or passed over his neighbour was guilty of a serious offence against the latter, treating him as a child of evil spirits; but in the person of the offended party, he injured the whole company, by destroying the blessing of the feast. The famous sacrificial feast at Hladi, where Earl Sigurd got Hakon Æthelstansfostri to celebrate [178] a blot, commenced by the earl, as chairman, drinking the first horn to the king, and thus drawing him into the circle of frith. The people of Drontheim watched closely to see that the king did his part, and it is no wonder that they broke out in tumult at his hesitation. If Hakon would not eat and drink of the holiness with them, then he was not of their frith, and who could then trust him to share and answer for their luck and honour? His refusal was a scornful challenge, because the refuser, by sitting there as a dead spot in the circle, broke its cohesive force, and placed the goodwill of the rest one towards another in the greatest peril.

The sacrificial feast was not an institution to mend and patch society, like those meetings of reconciliation where men proclaim eternal peace, comforting themselves in secret with the thought that there is no saying how ill it might go with the world if we did not again and again take the word "eternal" in vain. The feast made for peace, and effected its will unfaillingly; its fruit was the inviolability of the clan. The holiness of the feast is a result of the common change which took place in the kinsmen through their sharing the same divine drink and regenerating the hamingja in themselves.

The mediæval exhortations to the guild brothers, to be of one mind, not to come to their drinking with illwill against a brother, but be reconciled beforehand, and let all enmity rest in the holiness, these are juridical ideals based upon realities which did not stand in need of command. And that which the statutes so earnestly laid down as the fundamental principle of the true guild spirit was put in practice out in the country districts at the annual feasts of the common people. The Swedish thing registers know of no explanation – or of any need for such – in regard to the people's trust in the peace-making power of the cup. A case of homicide in Albo anno 1617 is thus reported: While the company were drinking, some dispute arose as to a candle which had gone out and was not renewed quickly enough, whereon Jöns of Ware in his simplicity spoke forth as one knowing a way out of a difficulty: "We will not have such words here. Fetch a can of ale, and let us drink [179] to the Lord." When the ale was brought, he drank the Lord's minni, spoke such formæli as he could, and drank to Jöns of Tubbemála; the latter accepted the cup, but with scornful words, saying indeed: "If God almighty will not help us, then may the other help us instead." And this he said three times. Jöns of Ware, good soul, declining to have "the other" as a drinking companion, knives were drawn, and the devil's Jöns was despatched to his due place. So fateful was it to interrupt the fellowship of the cup at a critical moment in Wärend in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

All through the Middle Ages and far down into the present age, men held by the good custom of making the annual festive gatherings a place of reconciliation, where old quarrels were buried and the soil improved to the end that might bear as few harsh fruits as possible in the coming year. An old priest speaks in praise of the blessings of the Yule cup for Småland: neighbours and friends go round on Christmas Eve to one another with their best drink in their hands, and drink the health of God in heaven, wishing one another and their families God's grace and blessing. Thus hands are laid together throughout the township; all must then be friends and keep the Yuletide peace; none dare break it on pain of being regarded as a monster and a niding before all men.

However much style and spirit may have changed from the blot the devotions centring about a hymnbook, from the clan to the family of a single household, we still find in the Norwegian Christmas Eve customs a few traits which fit into the old descriptions. Christmas Eve in Norway was used to prepare all minds for the coming year. At the solemn Christmas meal which was served at midnight, the father and mother sat down in the high seat with their sons on the one hand, and daughters on the other, the serving people at the lower end of the table; all drank toasts and a happy Christmas in a common silver cup, husband to wife and so round.

In the old days, the feast was a test of the individual. Woe to him if he did not feel the frith and the ale grip him! He who could not drink himself into spiritual fellowship with the rest [180] must indeed be a man forsaken of luck, a niding. When the gods departed from earth, ale degenerated into alcohol, and divine intoxication gave way to drunkenness pure and simple, and then it sounded strange that the tendency among the guests to shift from the bench to the floor should be a confirmation of the host's good conscience; but there are ancient earnest thoughts slumbering behind the faith of the common people in justification by drink and its effects. If the ale were not good, then the fault lay in the luck, which was slipping away from the house, and all feasting was then in vain. In the days of benighted heathendom, men would probably have fled from such a house of ill-luck; in later times, when milder manners had grown up under the fostering care of Christianity, considerate guests in Norway would sham drunk, and slither floorwards as naturally as their mimic

talent allowed, to save the host from anguish of soul. A good taskmaster in the cause of true humanity was of course the regard for one's own good name; for, as our authority further states, if any happened to sit as a sober exception among those otherwise affected, it was held that the curse of God was upon him. "God help the man on whom God's gifts have no effect," was hissed around him.

The religious flare-up of the fire on the hearth of the clan was brought about not only by the embers being gathered together in a great blaze; a new ignition was looked for, and an augmentation of the fire. It is indeed inherent in the character of frith that the effect of the power of sacrifice was not restricted to community of kin, the intense concentration of fellowship was identical with a re-inforcement of the entire hamingja. By drinking from the horn, the friends grew luckier, stronger to beget and to fight; their memory and the words on their tongue, luck in harvest and luck in spinning, hands of healing and victory, as Sigdrifa puts it, watchful sternness in feud, and inviolable peace among themselves, all were strengthened and enhanced. It was the soul itself which was renewed, it was the human feeling which was saved from slipping away into the dissolution of nidinghood. Without the great renewal of frith which lay in the blot, existence would come to a standstill; [181] men would forget who they were, and their dead would die the second death. The terrible fate which fell upon Hjorleif, who died a double death at the hands of slaves, was – according to tradition – foreordained in consequence of his refusal to take part in the customary sacrifice. Ingolf, his fosterbrother, worshipped with his kin, and had his joy of life.

When Christian worship superseded the ancient blot, the departed were left out in the cold, or surrendered to the mercy of the church. The dying man's life was no longer insured in a clan, and he had to take measures accordingly. His care for the future then breaks out in orders for feasts to be held "to his memory" with drinking parties, and in the bequest of funds for the constant continuation of the memorial feast – or we may safely say, the blot.

For all the pretences of the church, it was in the blot-hall that the question of eternal life and eternal death was decided. And in this respect, the mediæval guilds show themselves most distinctly as the legatees of the ancient sacrificial fellowship. The brethren had surrendered themselves to the tutelage of the church, and the church had its inassailable view as to the manner in which the care of the living might best serve the welfare of the souls in blessedness; and the kinsmen in the world beyond easily agreed to accept the honour in new vessels, as long as they were assured of having what was their due. They always found faithful helpers on this side the grave, who were not only industrious at mass, but also endeavoured to put into it by stealth as much of the old forms as possible. The guilds are punctiliously careful as to their members' loyalty to the past under new forms. The departed shall be given mass for their souls with full attendance of the brethren; their names shall be read out during the drinking at the feasts, to the end that those who have gone before may be present in the thought of solemnity, they are remembered with a prayer in the minni, if they cannot have a minni to themselves.

Not only would the luck resident in man lose its brilliance if the blot were neglected; the swords would rust, horses and cattle fall dead, fields cease to bear fruit. The people of Dront-[182] heim had dire experience, when Olaf the Saint banned the old blots and threatened his subjects with fire and sword if then ventured to seek for luck and fertility by the means of their fathers. But what were the good men to do? The king might thunder with his god and devil, but all his thunder did not prevent the crops from rotting in the soil; the peasants were looking at their corn and hearing, moreover, that the frost farther north had gained the mastery over all the men of Halogaland since they had ceased the blot. They still remembered, too, how the earth and the sea rejoiced in luck when Earl Hakon came in and made the holy places true vé's, as the poet sings, true places of holiness for the people. No wonder that the sturdy yeomen resolved to set the king's edict at naught and re-open the ancient sources of blessing.

On account of the exclusive character of Christianity, conversion meant secession from spiritual intercourse with the clan, and the deserter brought tragedy into the life of the clan itself. A single man who broke away from the blot-fellowship was not merely cutting himself

off from luck; his nidinghood became the ruin of his clan. He “declared himself out” of the clan, dishonoured his kinsmen, and the latter’s judgement is concentrated in the solemn word *frændaskömm* – kin-shame – or, as it may be even more poignantly put, *æallarspillir* – the ruin of his clan. Treachery to the innermost bond in frith is expressed by the word “god-niding”, or apostate, and this with the more justification since he had not merely offended against this or that god, but had affronted “the gods” and rendered them useless to his kinsmen. It is a duty on the part of the relatives to assert themselves by cauterising the wound; this duty was by the Icelandic Al-thing of 997 entrusted to those of kinship more remote than half cousins and less remote than the half cousins’ half cousins, a compromising provision which affords a good insight into the feeling of the time for the sacredness of kinship. The story of Radbod, the Frisian king whose soul Wulfram did his best to save, who refused to enter heaven single-handed and stepped out of the font on hearing that his kinsmen sat on the benches of Hell, cannot be re-told

[183] in modern language; the true pathos of loyalty is caricatured in our rendering, because we can never be made to feel the anguish and barrenness of spiritual solitude in the ancient heroes. There was but one means of maintaining luck and frith: for the other kinsmen to move over likewise into the new system, and all who were not blinded availed themselves of that means when the inevitable was upon them. The wholesale conversion, which has provoked so many witticisms and so much pious moaning among protestants, was for these men the only possible form of regeneration of heart.

Prior to the commencement of all serious undertakings a blot feast was held where strength was gathered for the coming trial and where the participants put on their supreme holiness. We know from the life of the peasant, how the year is dotted with new beginnings; moving ale, with a cup drunk for *tomtebolycka*, or luck to the new site, covering-in ale, when the roof of a new house was raised, and all the rest. This is a true picture of life in the old days. While the ships lay ready to put forth on a viking expedition the men drank their parting ale at home, “and there was much drinking with great words,” meaning vows of deeds to be accomplished. It is with the drinking party in the hall that Beowulf’s great undertaking against the monster begins: “Sit down at the ale, launch strong deeds among the men, as thy heart prompted thee,” says Hrothgar, and the stout-hearted warriors take their seats in the beer-hall. A thane bears the festive ale-stoups down through the hall and pours out the clear liquor, the singer’s voice is heard aloud in Heorot, there is rejoicing among the warriors on the benches, culminating when Beowulf utters his vow. The Queen moves down the hall offering drink, first to the king, then to those sitting next him, one after another, till she comes to Beowulf, greets him with thanks for his coming, and calls forth from him the crowning exclamation, that he will either walk between the giant and his head, or himself let the doom come upon him in the hall. And higher still rises the rejoicing of the battle-heroes, filled now with bliss, until the king breaks up the party, to seek his [184] rest for the night, and Beowulf, alone with his men, lies down to await the coming of the monster.

The feast took place under the shadow of terror. The poet cannot but call to mind how, many times before, great vows had been uttered anent that same Grendel, he cannot refrain from mentioning that every time the end was the same: at break of day the royal hall was filled with blood and gore. But the apparent contradiction between the sad experiences of past endeavours, making it doubtful whether any man could ever deliver the survivors from the doom of death, and the wild rejoicing at the feast, has its explanation in the very fact that discouragement was to be swallowed up in the growth of the clamour. The feast was, to those who partook of it, a re-inforcement in luck, an encouragement in their god. Victory passed through the hall the moment the warriors drank to their setting out, and it was necessary to grasp it forcefully if one would have it. If it did not come into the men so that the triumph burst forth from them, then the feast has been in vain, and they had better creep away to shelter without delay.

Every beginning calls for a blot which can inspire the new future with the reality of luck. If a man were to be adopted into another clan, the ox or the ram must stand ready for slaughter beside the leader of the ceremony, and the shoe be placed beside the ale vat. The wedding guests had to know that they had “drunk that ale” and therefore could answer for the reality of the marriage alliance. But it is at the arvel that we see most distinctly how the blot makes new, how one goes back to the source, and commences life afresh, when the old one suddenly dries up. It has astonished Christendom to mark the gaiety of the heathen, or heathen-hearted, Germanic people in honour of the departed, and despite frequent interference, both personal and official, the habit lasted long enough for the astonishment to unfold all its possibilities; the indignant have objected, the scandalised have entered a protest, and finally, aesthetic logic has made merry over the contrast between the sad occasion of the feast and the untimely exuberance of the guests. The English priest in the 10<sup>th</sup> century receives the [185] exhortation: “You shall not take part in the cries of rejoicing over the dead; when invited to a funeral feast, forbid the heathen songs and the loud-voiced peals of laughter, in which folk take delight.” And about a thousand years later, we are able to enjoy a sympathetic smile at the peasant who resignedly looks forward to the time when “the parish will have a merry day over him.”

The funeral toast was not a melancholy occasion where friends and kin assembled to a common contemplation of their loss with the thought of ploughing through sorrow with their united strength so as to set out again, encouraged by cup and dish, to meet the exigencies of life. But the funeral feast was a serious business, because the hamingja had been imperilled by the inroads of death upon the clan; therefore it was necessary to yoke up joy and let it put forth all its power. It was a question of dragging life safely over a critical point, luck had come to a standstill, the high seat stood empty as a visible sign of the breach in the fence, the kinsmen were too uncertain of themselves to venture to attend any gathering of men. It was only at the funeral feast that firmness was restored by creating the new form for the existence of the clan. For this reason, it would not do to leave it too late, not beyond the end of the year of death, if we are to believe the story in the Fagrskinna, which on this point bears the most engaging lack of resemblance to other accounts of King Harald's arvel, where the celebration is postponed from year to year in order to heighten the dramatic tension of the story.

Step by step, the occasional feasts lead up to the annual cult feasts, which constituted fixed points in existence, where life was regularly renewed and made into a future. In them, men sacrificed to “welcome” the winter, or the summer, as the Northmen put it, and the verb used for welcome – *fagna* – includes gladness, indicative of the joy that was needed to mark the true beginning.

If the blot had been successful and had accomplished its aim, it gave the sacrificers peace of mind and a delicious sense [186] of security, because it had created a future and started a chain of coming events such as would gladden the hearts of the clansmen. When the sons of Ingimund set out to avenge their father on his slayer, Hrolleif, their chief anxiety was that his mother, the old hag, should get time to prepare a blot for her son. They travelled hot-foot in order to arrive at the homestead before the sacrifice had been brought to a close. “His mother will without doubt blote as is her custom, and if she has her way we shall not have power to accomplish our vengeance,” said Thorstein.

Having succeeded in their enterprises, men sacrifice to make fast the happy events for the future. For the ceremonial duel, a bull or a neat was required, to be cut down by the victor; with this he held blot, and confirmed his victory and the superiority he gained thereby as a permanent state of things for the future. It is incidentally told of a pugnacious Icelandic, Vigastyr, that after having successfully disposed of a couple of difficult disputes with his neighbours, he attempted to bar the opposite party's way to restitution by striking down two bulls, so that no vengeance might be taken for the killing. The meaning is that he established his superiority firmly, and forced the future to shape itself according to the pattern he desired; of Styr as the hero who has taken the others' honour and kept it.

Whether the blot had been successful and accomplished its aim or not, could be detected by sure signs. Men went *to fréttar*, i.e. asked for an answer to questions put. How

the asking was done, and in what manner the answers were received, is not revealed to us. What we learn is only this, that the blot-twig was shaken and the blot-chips allowed to fall, and these expressions are not elucidated by Tacitus' description of the priest who "looked up at the sky" and read what was written on the stave he took up from the heap. Whatever we may think of Tacitus, one thing is certain, that the will of the gods was consulted before the invention of runes. The dropping of the twig thus also suggests an observation of the chip in its fall, its position after it had come to rest, and its relation [187] to the motion of the sun, or whatever was reckoned significant. At any rate, whether the lot spoke through runes or through movements, it had its voice from the fact that it had been bloted. It is the luck of the blot that speaks through it, and the same luck spoke through the joy of the guests, in the clearing of the horns, in the unhampered eloquence of the leader of the banquet; in short, through everything that happened after the power of the blot had taken up its seat in the sacrificers. The best commentary is given in such stories as that of Earl Hakon, who put in to land and held a great blot, and learned from the cries of the ravens that victory would declare for him in case of a fight. The carrion birds appeared as an unmistakable sign that the battlefield was ready for him. The sacrificers did not look to the gods to catch a hint of their being pleased by the blot and willing to grant the request of their worshippers; men spied after the reality which was on the point of being accomplished, to see if luck and fate had been brought to birth, as Hakon truly perceived by the ravens' appearing to greet his army.

There were warning signs which set a "not yet" to the eagerness of the questioner; if he were wise, he would wait until luck had made ready. But the Germanic enquirer setting out to ask a god for his yes or no would appear as a comical figure, and he who went to the blot in the expectation of getting either a good or an evil omen, fell quite outside the sphere of comedy down into sheer madness. The ancients sacrificed in order to create a good omen by creating a reality wherefrom the omens sprang, they demanded a powerful strengthening affirmative, which could warm luck through and through. If the formæli failed them, then it was firstly a piece of ill-luck, and also an evil omen; it meant that life had not squeezed through the hour of birth, and the sacrifice was wasted.

Earl Hakon is said to have had a prophetic balance, on which he weighed fate. The scales of two weights, in the form of human figures, one of silver, one of gold. And in cases of important matters to be decided, he laid the weights in the scales and declared what each of them should mean; and always, [188] when it turned out as he wished the weight rumbled in the scale, says one tradition. But there is another which shows a far better understanding of what it meant when a man of luck held formæli; it says straightforwardly: "and it always fell out as the earl wished, and the weight rumbled in the scale." For Hakon was an earl with luck in him, and was called with honour Hakon the Blot-earl.

The answer to the question how to blote can be given in the story of Floki or in the story of the settler in Iceland who took leave of the old country in a blot. He held the sacrifice to learn what was to be his fate; the answer pointed to Iceland, and he carried out his plan in confidence. How not to blote is indicated in the story of Vebjorn, the chieftain of Sogn. He and his kinsmen quarrelled with Earl Hakon and had to leave Norway. They sacrificed in order to find a new dwelling place, and the result showed them that the Earl was sacrificing in the opposite interest; in their eagerness to get away they disregarded the blot, put out to sea – and were wrecked. The limitation of the sacrifice was that the man sacrificing might perhaps not be sufficiently strong in luck to carry out its purpose altogether, and force up life to the pitch he desired. Halfdan the Old sacrificed in order to live 300 years in his kingdom, runs the story in an ancient Norse clan; the answer was, that he should not live more than a generation, but in his family there should never for 300 years be born a man without chieftain's luck and never a woman.

The two sides are combined in expressions indicating the object of the sacrifice; men went to "fetch heill." No art of translation can render this manner of speech, because it expresses a thing that has now become two, we are compelled to cut up the word in our dictionaries into one meaning of luck and another of omen. A man set out with ill heill when his journey led to a bad result, and here it is no use considering whether to translate the

words by bad luck or by bad omen, for heill includes both meanings. For his own heill the settler sent his pillars overboard, to show him the way and point out a good place for a home.

## CHAPTER XII PLAY AND VOW

A feast where men strengthen themselves in their god calls for something more than sacrifice. After the meal, the people rise up to play. When men have set their comrade in his resting place in the barrow, shown him to the spot where he will thrive, and given him due provision for the road, then they may hold races and singing contests. And whether the desire for play be ascribed to consideration for the god, or the dead man, or the living, the explanation works out into the fact that the sport is of the same power and the same effect as the feast in the house — it is a part of the sacrifice.

We know that all kinds of sport were customary at gatherings of men in the ancient days. Playing ball, horse fights, wrestling often occur in the saga accounts of feasts, for the very good reason that the Icelanders' blood often came to such a heat that the effect was visible in the settlement long after. We have good technical information as to the Icelandic horsebaitings; we are told how the stallions were led forward against each other by the respective owners, how they rose on their hind-legs and bit, while the leader with his horse-stave supported his beast in its upright position, urging it at the same time to its wildest onslaught. These fights served as trials of honour, the owner was spiritually present in his fighting horse, so that its victory meant his growth, its defeat the wreck of his honour, and not infrequently, the decision of the stallions would be followed by a more than accidental meeting between the men with their weapons.

We do not, however, find any [190] reference to connection with worship of the gods: apparently, the contest had passed over into a popular amusement.

The Norwegian form for horse contests retains distinct recollections of its original association with the cult festivals. These *skei*, as they were called, took place every year, in Sætersdale on a Saturday in August, in the Telemark on St. Bartholomew's day, and were evidently, to begin with, part of an ancient religious local festival. The stallions were led out two by two, excited by the presence of a mare, and after the fights, there followed wild rides on bare-backed horses. And it was known that "when the horses bite well it means a good harvest." In this double play between the interpretation of the action as a test of manhood and an assurance of luck, there is very likely a glimmering of old sacrificial ideas.

From the point of view of culture history, it is an important trait that the word *leikr*, Anglo-Saxon *lác* (play), in the Germanic languages may denote sacrifice, and on the other hand it is equally characteristic of the culture that the word also serves as a paraphrase for fight. "Hild's play" is not the whimsical imagery of the poet, the expression has a deeper necessity. Men played a great deal in those days, and always gripped hard, but the hardness was not entirely due to the horny hands. The note in the word which now has decisive significance, the abstraction from reality, is nothing less than a denial of that which was the soul of play in the old days. It had to be earnest, or it had no justification, and would be dullness itself instead of a pastime. The more fiercely the parties went for one another, the greater pleasure had they and the onlookers in the meeting. "Now they have amused us; let us now amuse the others," said the Icelander, when "they" — two of the company — had manhandled each other to such effect that one of them was left dead on the ground. Grettir found himself once, in the days of his outlawry, surrounded by a grateful people. It was the time when he had stolen in disguised to a village, where men were assembled for games, and by his strength, rendered the contests more than usually heavy-handed. When he left the party, hearty thanks were expressed for his having [191] contributed so highly to their amusement, and there is nothing forced in this expression of thanks, as among people who put on an expression of appreciation in order to make a show of manhood. The einheries of

Valhal, who enjoy the good fortune of waking up every day with the prospect of killing one another completely were, like everything perfect in this world, created in days when men could no longer master life as a whole or get the prose and the poetry of life to march together with even steps, and needs must create something called the ideal. The men of the viking age were an æsthetic race who left out the struggle for daily bread, and refined life into straining after undiluted honour. For all their glamour, the einheries are of the silver age. There is something einherie-like too about the Norwegian and Swedish peasants of later times, who celebrated their feasts with knives and axes; they drove in triumph to a feast and whetted their knives well beforehand; their women were careful to take winding sheets with them to the meeting, that they might sit at ease without the disquieting thought that they might at any moment have to get up and hurry away to get their husbands home before they were turned quite stiff and cold. They ask after the number of killed, before judging of the success of the feast. We marvel at the calm of mind wherewith the peasant went to his sowing, when his prospects of bringing the harvest home depended on whether his neighbour married in the interval; uncertainty is the first thing we see, but for them, it was the tension and the trial of strength which dominated all thoughts of gatherings for amusement.

The peasant culture is another silver age, but it is a silver age of stunted growth, a decadence long drawn out. The ancient ideals and mode of living held their own, but the harmony is broken, because the lower culture is cut off by civilization and official religion from exercising all its functions, and must adapt itself to a fraction of life, and however small the change in outward appearance, life is warped into a caricature of its former self. But if the einheries are of the silver age, it is because they yearn for something that came naturally to the golden [192] age, and therein lies indeed a valuable testimony to the culture whence they proceeded. They cannot conjure up the ancient feast before our eyes, but they hammer in the festival anticipation.

The feast was to be an event, that was the requirement of the ancient time. Something had to happen. Therefore men gathered about the story-teller and the singer, who let happenings past take place over again. To experience heroic deeds, experience battles and victories, that was the joy of the listeners, that was the delight of a feast.

As the feast above all feasts, the great blot must be permeated throughout by the light which glorified life. The mighty honour side in the soul must find its counterpart. It was not enough to feel the presence of luck, the comrades had to see It act. It had to be practised and shown forth. The sword was brought out and shown to the party seated at their drinking; its owner praised it and spoke of its peculiar luck, and let it once more go on its way in boldness for battle, as the Anglo-Saxon has described. Treasures had to produce evidence of their power — whether in a weapon dance, at horse-races and horse fights, or in other festive wise, we must guess for ourselves. And an exhibition is nothing if it be not therewith a test and a proof, a straining of the hamingja to its uttermost limit.

The great, properly festive form for achievement is called vow. It appears in its most impressive form at the feast held for the departed.

To gain its end the arvel must needs contain a creative deed. That the feast was to be a restitution, is emphasised by the law which considers the arvel as the legal demonstration of the successor's right to his place; consequently, the ancient word for inheriting — *erfa* — means at once to drink the funeral ale and to take up the inheritance. From the manner in which the arvels, famous in history and legend, of King Swein and of King Ingjald are described we see too that the feast of restitution concentrates upon the cup drunk to the memory [193]

of the departed. At the moment the bragar-cup is borne forward and the vow is uttered over it, comes the decisive turning point whereby the clan gains a head, and life begins to flow anew. At the commencement of the feast, the heir sat on the step before the high seat, but as soon as he had uttered his vow and drunk the cup, he was led into the place his father had held. "Then he had right to inheritance" after him, "then he should be come into inheritance and honour after the deceased, but not before," say the authorities, and we may



venture to look closely at the words, for the expression does not proceed from a tradition, which replaces as best it may what it has lost on the road, but is chosen by men in whom that which was to be indicated was still living.

That one pace, from the step to the seat, presupposes a revolution in the innermost nature of things; nothing could lift up the son from a place among the ashes on the floor to the seat between the inspired pillars if the actor had not there himself put in a stake which brought forth the dignity in him. Indeed, the aim which the promiser had to fulfil, and which he did fulfil, is marked both in the name *bragarfull* and in the Anglo-Saxon *gilp*; the former means simply manhood's cup or deed-cup, the latter refers both to the promise and to the honour and renown produced by the deed.

Undoubtedly there were empty promises and true ones —the latter were distinguished in particular by having their warrant in the vower's past, including of course his ancestors. The moment a youth promised not to be "less of a man than his fathers" he had taken up his ancestral luck and entered himself as one of the clan. But we have by no means exhausted the fulness of the moment, if we merely think of the conditions requisite to give birth to the deed. A man uttering such promise drank off a cup into which his forefathers had brewed their fate; he tasted their hamingja of holding great feasts, of gaining victory on the battlefield, of sailing boldly and skilfully on the sea, favourable winds always standing full into their sails; and in so doing, he had made all feasts and all victories his own. He was now the incarnation of the clan, he counted as [194] the one who had achieved the past. Without any boasting he could now, like Thorkel Hak, let the fight with the monster be inscribed upon his high seat pillars, and say: "I was there."

Our forefathers were not inclined to accept a loud crowing as equivalent to the doing of the deed. These men who, in disputes at law as in friendship, demanded the clearest proofs of their neighbour's intentions before they would lift a little finger, held also here in the blot-hall as anxiously as any sceptic by the principle that the result is the beginning of faith. No promise could dull their watchfulness in the slightest, it only served to direct it toward the point where the decision would fall; they saw to it that the heir drank, and that the emptied his cup. "Drink well," cried those present, adjuring him with the same meaning as with a "fulfil well". Thereupon they took a share in the deed themselves, as blot-fellows, by emptying the same cup. "This cup all present at the feast must drink" in order to make it good. If the kinsmen did not make themselves one with the heir, the arvel would have no power of restoring the clan to its former health, and the effect of the feast and the promise would thus be void.

Thus the vow is sealed in the gods, and thus it becomes a future, a fate. The story of Hedin Hjorvardson is based upon the experience that a vow made over the bragar-cup makes itself the will of him who utters it, and holds him fast from within. Blinded by some devilish inspiration, Hedin had boasted on the ale-bench that he would win his brother Helgi's betrothed, and it is in vain that he treads wild paths to find his brother and bemoan what he has done. Helgi knows but one thing: "Ale-words come true, Hedin." This power over the future is the principle of the vow's worth as an act of worship, it can create that joy which is the answer to the blot. The son who vowed to bring home a harvest of honour, made the feast great, prepared for a good year, just as did the rider who rode most valiantly, or the stallion that bit most powerfully. "Launch strong deeds among the men," as Hrothgar says to Beowulf — this is the true greeting to one when he goes forth to take [195] his promise seat by the ale, and the proper answer to the wish is the "shouting of the victorious host".

Without doubt the uttering of a vow plays a special part at the arvel owing to the critical character of the feast; but the emptying of the promise cup is not peculiar to the heir succeeding. It was a regular thing at the leave-taking of vikings setting out from home, as well as at such a feast of preparation as that in Heorot. Swein's vow of conquest has its counterparts in the assurances the retainers gave with their ale at their lips when they cried that they would avenge their king and never flee as long as he remained standing; from east and west we hear of battlefields where words were made good which had been uttered at a time when the men lay stretched at their east upon the benches. In poetry and history we

naturally hear only of vow that were large enough to fill out the blots of kings and conquerors; but we are not left wholly without evidence of the bragging in the yeoman's homestead where the sacrificial vow conformed to the local ambitions of the peasants. An Icelandic saga describes the train of events that were set going at a wedding held at Grund, a farm in Svarfadardale. When the son of the house felt his spirit moved by the ale, he called to mind his dispute with a neighbouring chieftain, Ljotolf Godi, and promised to set a coward's mark upon him before three years were past. A younger kinsman followed his lead and boasted that he would gain Yngvild Faircheek for his mistress without asking leave of her brother Olaf or her intimate friend, Ljotolf Godi. The bridegroom pledged himself to sail whither he pleased and land in any harbour he might choose regardless of wind; these words, too, were a malicious lunge at the high and mighty godi and his retainers, hinting as they did that Ljotolf in his enterprises and dealings with men had repeatedly been reduced to taking and putting into chance havens. – From this little piece of daily life, embedded in a late and rather confused saga, we realise that the promise cup was liable to cause a stir in the life of the village, and might give rise to great events. According to the ancient tradition, indeed, the colonisation of Iceland

[196] is itself to be the indirect result of a drinking party where vows were many. The foster-brothers Ingolf and Hjorleif were driven out upon the waters through their enmity with the clan of the earls of Moeri, and that enmity was started at a feast where one of Earl Atli's sons swore to marry Hjorleif's sister Helga. Leif could not but regard such a presumptuous vow as equivalent to the actual carrying off of the girl herself, and on the next occasion when they met, their parting was such that Norway was no safe abiding-place for Ingold and Hjorleif any longer.

Finally we also know that the promise of manhood was a necessary part of the regular blot-feasts of the clan. The Yule vow of the hero has become a standing theme in Norse poetry, in later narratives degenerating into a device used to introduce any big event. Angantyr celebrated the eve of the holyday by vowing to win the daughter of the Upsala king Yngvi, or die; on the first Yule evening we find, in Hord's saga, the heroes stepping "on stock," and vowing to break open the barrow of the viking Soti and seek out the barrow-dweller in his fearful majesty; and it is at Yule that Hedin's infatuated vow to steal his brother's promised bride is uttered. The conventionalism of these examples is fairly obvious, but nevertheless the artificial motif is rooted in reality. The pious saga writer is thus on firm ground when he chooses a Yuletide evening as the background for this cry from a seeker after truth: "This evening many vows are uttered in places where men are no better off than here, and therefore I vow to serve the king who is highest, and him alone," – better ground, indeed, than in the longing for Christianity with which he credits the speaker.

Beside the promise cup, there is another form for the test of luck: *mannjafnad*, or matching of heroes. This consisted of a spiritual duel, where deeds done – or perhaps contemplated – took the place of blows; a man compared himself with his opponent, or his own hero with the other's. This form of contest might easily arise where two bands of warriors came [197] together on the bench, each jealous of its own honour, but it certainly had its very good place as a feast game, in the cult sense, to the honour of the gods; the game must then have been played in such a manner that stroke and parry were made real by draughts of the godly drink. An allusion to this sort of game is found in an Anglo-Saxon poem in which a God-fearing man has set down what good Christians ought to think of the manners of the hall. Often proud fighters, glib of tongue, sit over their cups, uttering weighty words and trying to find out how skilful are the men of the house in wielding ashen spears, and the house is filled with uproar and bawling; thus he complains, and warns his hearers that such ungodly boasting and arrogance cannot fail to land a man in the deepest part of hell where the worms gnaw their hardest.

In the late Orvarodd's saga, there is a sensational scene in which the mannjafnad is put to use for effect. The old hero comes staggering in, unnamed to a homestead inhabited by the most supercilious people possible, of course, and suffers himself to be led to a seat at the lower end, in the draught from the doorway. He is ostentatiously humble when the talk runs on accomplishments and pastimes: in such company, where doubtless all present would be masters with the bow and arrow he dare hardly pretend to ever having aimed at anything, and he is naturally loath to show himself off to their derision, but if they insist upon having their fun he may as well amuse them by tugging at the instrument. Speaking of swimming, he cannot call to mind that he had ever so much as put his big toe in the water, but after some considerable time he is persuaded to try what it is like to swim. And his feats are, needless to say, rather astounding, to put it mildly. The present saga belongs to a group of literature in which ancient legends are recomposed and melodramatized for peaceful citizens who want strong romance for their leisure hours after dull toil; the hero must shed his modesty layer by layer, for he is acting before a public which delights to see virtue and vice in disrobing scene. But strangely enough, after all, the decisive trial of strength in which he rises to his full height, is a duel [198] with words and ale, a mannjafnad where the strokes are driven with a hornful. Across the floor two flying heroes stride, horn in hand, and stop in front of Odd, singing their own praises and derision of the guest. And Odd empties the horn, then strides up before their place, reveals his magnificence in verse, and drinks to them. And thus Odd wanders up and down, the others down and up, till the stranger sits victorious in the seat chanting the end, while the others lie downcast in the straw, neither chanting, hearing, nor drinking.

In the saga literature, the mannjafnad, like the Yule vow, is reduced to the humble office of starting events; its religious colour is paled, but something remains which determined the cult value: the test is a judgement of the man. This little reminiscence of Odd, faint and washed out though it be, serves to paint the background for the vikings' parting ale: when the ships lay ready, the warriors, as we have seen, indulged in a great feast, rehearsing their coming deeds at the ale cups through mannjafnad and great vows.

In modern civilization, founded principally on the experience of the trader and the artisan, life has split up into two parts, the physical and the spiritual, on one side sheer animality, on the other side pure, refined soul; and consequently, the very possibility of giving the training of the body, or games and playing, an organic place in culture is gone for ever. In face of the religious earnestness of Greek and primitive games, modern men have only a helpless politeness; and they will never be able to understand the deep pathos of the story telling how Eindridi was converted by the dazzling accomplishments of King Olaf. The king had tried several sports with the aspiring youth, and though the boy had not been able to hold his own, he was not convinced; but on seeing the king walk on the oars of a rowing ship juggling with swords, he found full assurance of the new faith. The young chieftain-to-be looked at the king, when, after the feat, he stepped up on deck; looked at him and was silent; he was feeling right down in the depths of his soul for the confession that in his faith [199] there was no god nor any angel that could support a man in the air.

But when man is a whole, and no boundary has been set up between the physical and spiritual culture, the love of strength and skill can never prejudice the value of poetry; on the contrary, the poet is a source of strength where his modern compeer is only a jester or a comforter. The literature of the Icelanders originates, like that of the Greeks, in festival exhibition; in the feast holiness was laid the foundation of their mastery in the telling of legend and saga, in the ceremonial praise of the chieftain and his hamingja, the poetry of the north was born and shaped into the heavily ornate form which proved its death.

The forms of life are reproduced with ideal convention in the Beowulf, where the victory over the monster drives the people to a festive tumult. In the midst of the praises of this hero beyond other heroes the horsemen dash off racing over the field, and a king's man who knows a store of ancient songs and legends begins to weave the poem of praise, briskly word for word telling of the wanderings of Sigmund the Volsung, which only he and Sinfjotli, the

two firm companions, knew, in battles with men, in battles with giants, gaining deathless fame by slaying the dragon and carrying off its gold in the rock.

Unfortunately, we lack all means of transforming these ideal pictures of what feast ought to be into realistic descriptions of precedence and proportion; the last blot-feast had been celebrated before there was anyone to immortalise it. The history of the clan and all that was important to remember was, at the feast, brought forth into the light, and we need have no doubt as to the reason, when we know what it meant. That which the kinsmen had at heart must force its way, because the things of the past did not come as something called forth from the half-dark of respect and remembrance, but was the soul itself, needing life. There was honour in hearing oneself or one's own people sung of, and one's saga renewed, and that honour was of the same consistency as all restitution; it went into the soul, and made the man healthier. Egil was [200] able to chant new courage into himself after the death of his son; as he recited his "Sonatorrek", the "Lament for Sons", his vital force rose, and when he had ended, his determination to die was forgotten, and he stepped into his high seat. Men gained comfort in earnest for the loss of kinsmen, on hearing the praises of the dead declared. Volustein's son Egil once came to Gest Olleifson, a distinguished man of wisdom, and asked if he could not find some way of easing the gnawing sorrow that oppressed his father since the death of his son Ogmund. Gest undertook the task, and composed at once the beginning of the Ogmund drápa.

The dead come to the poet and the story-teller with their thanks for life, as Vatnar of Vatnar's hill came to a merchant sailing by, who had told his comrades tales of the dweller in that barrow they could see on the shore. "You have told my saga; I will reward you," said the dead man, "dig in my barrow, and you shall find reward for your trouble." The old Vatnar felt life grow in him when that which had been was renewed, and from this we know what it was the blot brought to the departed as well as to those present, who lived the life of their ancestors over again. Vatnar is raised up, and so also every past had to be reborn if it were to be saved from perishing. Part of the attention due to the dead was the making of an *erfidrápa*, or song of succession, which was presumably delivered at the arvel; in this song, the foundation of posthumous fame was laid, when the poem was made the formæli at the drinking, and inspired with reality by being enveloped in the blot.

The Beowulf poem ends at the grave. When the old hero king had met his fate, the Swedes raised a mound on the ness, visible far out over the sea. Round the hill rode the battle-bold, bewailing their king, weaving the speech of verse about the dead man. They exalted his chieftainship, cried aloud his deeds of strength, as is fitting for men to honour their leader and king when he steps forth from the body. Of all the kings in the world he was gentlest, open-handed, most beloved and greediest of fame.

Thus the old time rings out beyond the North Sea.

### Chapter XIII Sacrifice

The word to *blote* (Anglo-Saxon *blótan*), that word which in the Nordic is the principal term for men's active relation to the gods, contains the full potency of the religious act. It expresses man's power to transform an object of ordinary holiness so that it becomes filled with the power of divinity, and passes on strength into the human world. When Floki was about to set out for Iceland, he held a great sacrifice and bloted three ravens which were to show him the way. Then he built a cairn on the spot where the blot had taken place, and put to sea. As far as the Shetlands and Faroes he knew the route to be followed, but as soon as the last known reefs vanished from sight, he put up his ravens. And they found the way by roads his luck had never known before. No other instance

among the Germanic people shows us more clearly the mighty human power of uniting it's soul with a soul outside, employing it not as a slave, but as part of oneself; man draws the peculiar qualities of the alien hamingja into himself and uses them, he lays himself into the other and makes it's will his own - and the raven-man flies with sure instinct over the seas.

To the same category as Floki's ravens belong also the blot-cattle which the people worshipped in secret when the storm of conversion raised by the Olafs raged at its worst over the land. In the propaganda writings of the Olaf sagas, the blot-cattle have an honourable place among the instruments of hell, and often enough the work of conversion had to make [202] a detour via the cattle-sheds in order to get at the master in the house. There is a piece of missionary history concentrated in the furious great ox which Harek of Reina had to confess to at one of Olaf Tryggvason's visits; The man would not admit the charge of worshipping the beast, but tried to convince the king that it was merely the remarkable affection of the animal for himself which awakened his love in return. But Olaf had himself been heathen enough to know what such love meant, and did his best to make Harek transfer his affection to a higher sphere.

There is a story of King Ogvald of Ogvaldsnes, which gives us a glimpse of those souls wherein the whole past stood poised behind the thin wall Christianity had built between past and present. The promontory of Ogvaldsnes was called after Ogvald, we are told, a king who put his trust in a cow. For topographical reasons one would be inclined to think that Ogvald might have trusted in all sorts of other things, but when we read the story as a whole, we realise that the cow was actually the principal personage. One easter, when Olaf was visiting at Karmt, it happened one evening that Odin came wandering in, quite innocently, as one of those queer vagabonds who tramp about the country with no earthly possessions beyond a ready tongue. The strange guest knows such a host of stories of the olden times, and tells them in such a lively fashion that every mother's son near enough to listen pricks up his ears. The king forgets the time and his sleep, even forgets to mark the displeasure of the court bishop. After much question and answer, the talk turns on the spot where they are staying and it's history: this too the guest knows. The place is named after King Ogvald, he can tell, who put his faith in a cow, to such a degree that he took it with him wherever he went, on land or sea, and thence arose the proverb, which the king might have heard many a time, that carle and cow shall go together; at last Ogvald was laid to rest in a barrow in the promontory, and the cow in another. The art of narrations achieved by the ancients never better achieved sly humour, and the reader feels that this making fun proceeds from a mind which, albeit with some [203] yearnings for the past, yet contents itself fully with things as they are; it is the expression of a resignation which is not melancholy, but a frank acceptance of the fact that by-gones are by-gones. Men evade old vital thoughts when they are dead, they stamp furiously on them when they still show a slight trace of life remaining in them, but when they are securely bound, one is inclined to exhibit their strength with a jest - as in this story. In face of such champions of faith as these Olafs were, Odin and his fellows would have to humble themselves, and be glad if they could now and then find an opportunity to gain a little jesting triumph over the Christian god. The wisdom of the old god is become the wisdom of the dwarf; and sure of it's aim, it bores it's way in at the very point where the most stubborn thoughts of the past lay bound.

For the blot-beast is man's way of raising himself up beyond his limitations. To blote is to increase his qualities to the extraordinary, nay to the divine. We know that there were degrees of holiness among cattle. Noble beasts such as Brand's Faxi stand high above the common herd of milch-cows and beasts of burden, and above the noble one's again stand the holiest of all, the bloted animal. In Christian times, the participle "bloted", used as a living or non-living being, comes to mean bewitched, enchanted: quite naturally, the bearer of a superior power of heathen origin is degraded to the instrument of the powers of evil under heaven. It was a condition for the selection that the animal should be by nature distinguished by it's size and beauty, but it followed from the consecration that it's power expanded into

outward magnitude. Harek's blot-ox struck all with astonishment, at its enormous limbs. From the firm ground of reality, fancy shoots up into the wild extravagances such as that of the boar which the people of Spain bloted and invoked as a patron saint at the time of Olaf the Ssaint's exploits in that part of the world. The king encountered the savage beast out in the forest, and himself saw how it's bristles swept the topmost branches of the trees. And as the size increased, so also did all power; the blot-cattle loomed higher and higher in the imagination of the epigons. A king [204] such as Eystein of Upsala, where the blot was more impressive than any known elsewhere in the northern lands, could keep a cow so bloted that none could endure hear it roar. As soon as the Swedes saw a hostile army approaching, they loosed the beast before the array; ordinary mortals fled when they heard it's course utterance, and what it's victorious voice spared fell before it's horns.

In the same way as the consecrated beast was lifted up over the everyday existence of a domestic animal simply, so also the blot-man was from his childhood set apart and made a holy man of God. Thorolf gave his son Stein to Thor and called him Thorstein. This Thorstein had a son who, on being baptised with water, was called Grim; the father gave him to Thor, decided that he should be a priest of the temple (hof-gothi) and called him Thorgrim. Another of Thorolf's sons likewise bloted his boy and gave him to Thor - and thus men had done from the earliest times. The bloted man was pure untroubled luck; it was true of him that he had an eye which could see through everything and foresee everything - "nothing came upon him unawares." He had the corresponding power of body and spirit, and could avert the inadvertible and manage the inevitable; he bore a spiritual armour, impenetrable to all hostile luck.

The blotting of sons belong to such great chieftains families as that of Thorulf Mostrarkegg, who owned the important holy seat of Mostr; generation after generation consecrated itself in one of it's members, naturally in the man who promised to be the luckiest of the kinsmen - the chieftain of the clan, as he may be called. The consecration implied an assumption on the part of the clan; in its holy chieftain it proclaimed to the world the exceptionally strong character of its hamingja, and at the same time the act contained an explanation of the family's right to occupy a leading position in the social and religious life of the district. In glimpses here and there we find the relics of these prominent families, which were distinguished by their gods and their pious power, clans which boasted of being great blot-men [205] - that is to say, holy, divinely strong men. Harald Hilditonn's invulnerability and great war luck is due to the fact that he was 'signed' - or charmed, as it is called in the Christian rendering; and this clan mark is so permanently attached to him and his that the Hyndlyjod in its reckoning up of Ottar's kinship can emphasize that branch of the family which extends up to Harald, as god-signed man.

The consecration made itself apparent in the names. These Thorsteins and Thorgrims and Thorolfs in the Mostrarskegg family are of more importance than all the Thor-combinations which flooded the North in the following centuries, when the meaning had grown faint. A bold man of Sogn, a blot-man by name of Geir, was proud of his vé, and his entire flock of children bore it in their names: Vebjorn, vestein, Vedis, Vegest, Vemund. The position of this clan in the district lies indicated in the cognomen borne by the eldest son: he was called "the trust of the people of Sogn".

It is the solemnity of the consecration which gives the story of Eyvind Kinnrifa it's lofty tone. Eyvind was specially consecrated from his mother's womb, and therefore excluded from the going over to Christianity. The pious chroniclers of King Olaf revel in the description of this heathen's end, and at every new version of Eyvind's story, he comes to resemble more and more these caricatures of "poor benighted heathen souls" which now gladden the hearts of the contributors to Christian missions. We recognise the psychological enormities peculiar to stories from the missionary field, when we read that Eyvind is the fruit of witchcraft wrought by "Finns", or Lappish wizards, and that these Finns had demanded that he should always serve Thor and Odin. But Eyvind's great confession has never-the less not been carried so far away from reality that we cannot discern what it was that bound him, making him not only defy the kings "gentle words", his "stately gifts" and "great grants of land", but

also the great dish of glowing coals which was laid on his belly and burst it. "Take away the dish a little while," he prayed at last as the end drew near, "and let me say a little thing before I die." And then he revealed his secret [206] to the king. His parents had long been childless, until at last they sought counsel in rites and incantations (*fjölkyngi*). After that a son was born to them, and they gave him to the gods. And as soon as he himself was come to years of discretion, he had repeated the consecration in manifold wise, so that he had now no longer human nature, but was bound with his whole hamingja to the old religion.

This is Eyvind's "Here I stand, I can do no otherwise," and on the strength of it he should be suffered to live the life of his fame after his death.

The blot-man was not of divine strength for his own dear sake alone; his power was to the good of the whole clan, and more than that; the people put their trust in him. And it goes with the faith of the clan in it's dead that men did not turn their backs upon the blot-man because he was gathered to his people. The dead could be bloted as well as the living. It is related of Halfdan the Black that his luck in harvest and his popularity made him an object of strife after death. The men of Westfold, and those of Vingulmork and those from Raumariki all wished to have their chieftain among them, and the upshot was that they divided the body and set up a barrow in each district, "to trust and blot for the people". And it was not only great kings who enjoyed the honour of being contested for after their death, there was a settler in Iceland whose grandfather had been so beloved that after the end of his blessed life he was bloted. No one, however, was bloted because he was dead. In a Vebjorn, Vegeir's son, Vestein's brother, as in a Thorolf, father of hof-godis, the blessing lies assured in the clan-luck to which the barrow-dweller belonged, that which he personified in its most splendid form. There was no gulf between the departed and the living, and thus no specific difference in the blot-relation to the two; the dead man was not ranked higher because he was dead, on the contrary, his dignity probably would not last beyond the time when a living representative appeared who could be raised to the same pitch of the hamingja. [207]

Such supreme holiness could not be borne as a hidden life, acting unperceived; with the highest luck went also greater separation from the rest. The specially holy station or ox had to observe certain considerations, imposing on itself greater self-denial and demanding greater attention from it's surroundings than ordinary beats. Hrafinkel, the godi of Adalbol, had consecrated himself and all that was his to Frey, and had in particular marked out a stallion, Freyfaxi, which was consecrated to serve as the bearer of divinity. It went among the mares, but suffered no man on it's back; when once the herdsman at a pinch had laid hold on it with a view to going in search of some strayed cattle, it ran home at full speed, and by unmistakable gestures informed its master that something terrible had happened. "It touches my honour, this thing that has been done to you; it is well that you were able to tell me yourself, and vengeance shall be taken," said Hrafinkel consolingly. Whereupon Freyfaxi went back to it's grazing and it's mares.

Undoubtably also, the greater gift of grace in the chieftain-priest carried with it special obligations, in the way of refraining from various everyday occupations and holding by certain ritual observances, which ordinary men only occasionally had to do with; in a word, the blot-man had to behave all his life as if the whole year from end to end were one long festival.

The sacredness of the elected chief may encroach upon reality and turn to priestly segregation. From the highest pinnacle of the human there is but a short step to the inhuman, and it needs but a tiny shifting of the weight within a culture for the highest service to be transformed into something dangerous. When the epoch of work is on the decline, there comes a generation which has not shoulders strong enough to bear the great responsibility, or, expressed in a different fashion, culture comes to the point where it is not fully occupied with serving as the motive for action. When it no longer acts as a compact mass of impulse, the separate sides of it grow out of proportion, until the harmony is broken. Then, the highest is set under protecting isolation. The chieftain is thrust out from his high seat and over into the stillness of the temple,

[208] his weapons slip for ever from his hands, the acts which should for safety's sake be avoided increase in number, until he, if the culture be given time to run its course, sits like an incarnate captive, preserved in holiness. The Northmen never got so far as this; their kings were and ever remained holy warrior princes, who went on ahead, drawing events in their train. The Anglo-Saxons were a good way down along the road, as we see; they had priests who might never ride a stallion or wield a spear. Regarding the southern nations, our information is too meager to allow any generalisations.

In another sense, though of course proceeding from the same idea of consecration, men are bloted to the gods and killed. Prisoners of war, that is, incarnations of a hamingja conquered or to be conquered, are given to the gods to insure that the enemy is broken in his innermost luck and bound hand and foot under the will of the conquerers. The spoils are consecrated to the gods. We know from Tacitus, how Arminius crushed the legions of Varus, not only on the battlefield but also later at the holy place, by hanging the prisoners and dedicating the Roman eagles and weapons to the deities and suspending them in the sacred grove. In this case, the dedication combines, according to our ideas, making holy and rendering abominable, but within the ancient experience such a mode of cursing and placing under a ban means really consecration, in that the spoils of war were set apart from use and given over to the gods that the hamingja therein contained might be swallowed up in their power. In special cases of guilt, when the injury involved extraordinary danger to the community, the culprit was put to death that the source of weakness might be entirely removed, and the peril of contagion broken. But the killing of a man who belonged to a community of frith, even if he be carefully severed from the stem, and all the bonds connecting him with his fellows of kin and law be cut off, must always remain a matter of careful handling. In order to ward off any unhappy consequences, the execution had to be carried out by unanimous consent and in a state of holiness: the sinner was in reality killed by the gods. [209]

From the same stratum of thought proceeds the manner of suicide recorded in the north: hanging oneself in the temple or in the holy place; in this manner the individual who took his own life presumably insured himself by giving his life up to the gods and thus guarding himself against the possibility of being severed from the hamingja of the clan.

One step farther into the sanctuary, and we stand face to face with the gods. To blote the gods or in the grove and the rock are expressions altogether parallel to the consecration of men and cattle.

In the religion of the Teutons, such terms as worship and adore, atone and propitiate in the Jewish and Christian sense are empty words, they slip powerlessly aside; the discrepancy between the fundamental need of religion and their meaning makes them empty and superficial. The worshipper went to his grove and to his gods in search of strength, and he would not have to go in vain; but it was no use his constantly presenting himself as receptive, and quietly waiting to be filled with all good gifts. It was his business to make the gods human, in the old, profound sense of the word, where the emphasis lies on an identification and consequent conjunction of soul with soul. Without mingling mind there was no possibility of union here in Middle-garth, he who could not inspire his neighbor with himself never became his friend, and no will could reach from the one to the other. The gods themselves could do nothing then, nay willed nothing before those who invoked them had rendered them living, as Floki bloted the ravens. It was men who rendered the gods gracious, not by awakening their sympathy, but by inspiring them with frith of their frith. This active co-operation is the origin of those epithets "gentle", "mild", "good to the people" which we find in the Nordic as used of the gods, praises which are therefore at root different from the thoughts which ascend towards our gods borne by these words. But even more was expected of a man when he bloted, - he made the gods great and strong. It called for more than [210] manly courage, and more than common siegcraft to assail a city known to be a "great blotstead" or a place where powerful blots were commonly held. The gods who were much



bloted were - according to Christina authors - worse to deal with than ordinary supernatural beings.

With regard to the ceremonial acts which brought about the fusion of the human and divine, we have but scanty information. Gods and men no doubt shared their meat-offering; the greater part of the sacrificial meat found its way to the table at the feast, and a portion, we may suppose, went to the blot-house. When the legends show Thor standing in the hof with the hammer in his fist, and with the imperturbability of the graven idol consuming his daily ration of four loaves of bread with meat, we can easily recognise the authorities; the good saga writers had not studied church history in vain. Possibly an unsophisticated heathen would not have understood that he was the object of their laughter when the churchmen cracked their time honoured jokes about mumbling sculptures, but all the same, he used, no doubt, to share the common board with the gods.

The centre of gravity in the sacrifice lies in the character of the animal being slaughtered. If this had not had in it something more than mere animal nature, the sacrifice would fall to the ground, and the stronger its hamingja or divinity, the mightier frith was brought about between gods and men. There was choosing from among the herd at feast time. The boar which figures in the legends as the traditional sacrifice was, as the name sonargoltr implies, the leader of the herd - *qui omnis alius verres in grege battit and vincit* - which according to the Lombardic edict was sacred against theft or robbery by being valued at a triple fine. In extraordinary cases, where there was need of a mighty increase of the strength of the feast, even the most lordly representatives of the livestock on the place might come to honour the feast with their meat.

The blood of the victim was a means of communicating the power of holiness. It was poured over the stone of heap of stones - stallr or horg - in the sacred place. The chief- [211] tain's ring which reposed in the sanctuary was reddened on solemn occasions, and we learn in one place about two Icelandic claimants to the rank of priestly chieftain (godi), that they procured themselves to the holy power by reddening their hands in the blood of a ram. The omen-twigs, like the ring on the stallr, were dipped in the sacrificial blood, and thus bloted to do their business among the people. When the Swedes drove out the Christian king, Ingi, from the gathering of men, and set up Blot-Swein in his stead, the change, according to Hervor's saga, was confirmed by a sacrifice; and there is no ground for doubting that the saga is right in particulars when it says that a horse was led in to the law-thing and hacked to pieces, its flesh being divided up for eating, and its blood used for reddening the "blot-tree".

In the poets images, we may find reality spontaneously revealing itself. A legend told of the Swedish king Egil that he met his death from his own blot-ox. "It happened in Sweden," runs the literary form, "that an ox which had been marked out for blot, was old, and fed so eagerly that it became fierce; and when men attempted to capture it, it broke away to the woods and caused great damage among men and cattle." Once Egil met it while out hunting, and before the king could defend himself, it had gored both horse and rider. This, in the verses by Thjodolf on the Ynglings, is put as follows: "The ox which had long borne the projecting horg of its forehead about in the eastland, reddened the spear of its head upon the king." The bloted ox, the horg and the reddening were not three disparate ideas shaken loosely together in a couple of metrical lines; the metaphores evidently were suggested by a picture which stood before the poets eyes.

In the course of the blot, too, gods and men may have become united in the same holy juice, if we may believe the Heimskringla, which offers a detailed description of the use made of the blot-house at the sacrificial feast: "All the blood from the beasts of sacrifice was gathered in bowls, and in these stood twigs made like brooms: with these the stallr was to be reddened, and the walls of the temple inside and out, and the [212] people also sprinkled." The description is evidently warped, because the author consciously shapes his picture in the likeness of Christian sprinkling with holy water, and his evidence must be discounted accordingly.

In the word blot, then, are contained all actions designed to call forth the uttermost strength of the hamingja pregnant with life. Men blote the gods with sacrificial beasts, with

food and drink, or by consecrating men or animals or things. "Men blote heathen powers when they sign their cattle to others than God and his holy men," runs the definition of the Christian Gragas of the Icelanders, denouncing heathen abominations.

Men blote with words; in the post-heathen speech, and in Swedish popular language even now, the word blota is a strong expression for abusing and cursing, that is etymologically speaking, to assert something about someone, and by the words force a quality into them. By the blot, a full and complete unity was established between men and gods, and the object bloted served as a link and a medium of using the powers of holiness. Without any considerable change of meaning, the verb to blote may be replaced by give. When a son or a treasure is given to the gods, the giving renders the gift useful in the highest degree, because giving means strengthening the intimacy of the parties, and the gift assumes the megin of the possessor. To understand the abysmal difference which separates the religious meaning of gift from our ideas, we must bear in mind the character of the ancient soul and its experience: communion implies unity from the innermost recesses of thought and intertwining of luck to external responsive acting.

The condition requisite for making a consecration effective was that it could be made whole or real by an ale, and the force of the ale depends on the gathering of men into unity. He who wished to live for ever did not fool himself by merely ensuring his enjoyment for food and drink after death; he demanded that there should be held drinking parties of men to his memory. The secret of the blot is that frith which was the first condition of life. The unanimous act of all kinsmen is what gives all the other parts of the lot their value. While [213] *vigja* denotes the making holy, as it might perhaps also be accomplished by an individual, the word *blóta* carries with it that irrevocable change which is brought about by the consecration's taking place in supreme holiness, by a man who has purified himself, at a place filled with divinity, and with the strengthening assistance of a holy festive gathering, which acted - not symbolically but in the literal sense of the words - of one heart and of one soul.

To breathe freely and happily, the individual must take part in the blot; the individual could not do without the company, but on the other hand, the company was equally unable to do without the individual. Thus far, it is true duty to every kinsman to attend the annual feast, but he needed no command to remind him. From the centripetal force, or perhaps rather from the habits which it had worked into the soul, descend the standing commands in the guild statutes to attend at the feasts, and the strong condemnation of brethren who idly or obstinately keep away, or even spitefully leave town at feast time.

On the other hand, the door of the festival was barred to all strangers. these assemblies, where men poured out from the source of strength with full bowls, were only for the members of the clan, the true kinsmen or true companions. The festival aloofness caused not a little inconvenience to the scald Sigvat, on the mission which he undertook early in the winter for Olaf the saint to earl Rognvald in Gautland. He and his followers sought shelter one evening at a homestead, but the door was locked, and the people inside said that the house was holy. At the next place they came to, the mother stood in the door-way and bade them stay outside, for an *alfablót* (sacrifice to the elves) was in progress. On the following evening he tried four homesteads, at the forth of which, moreover, lived the best man in the country (i.e. the most hospitable, according to the Nordic meaning of good), but none would let them in. It was an unpleasant experience in winter time in somewhat desolate and inhospitable regions; the cold nights which Sigvat [214] and his fellows spent out in the woods stamped certain sides of the *alfablót* deeply into their memory: not one of these children of the devil but was given to deeds of darkness each in their respective homes, and none dared let honest folks see what they were about, - such were the reflections of the poet outside the barred doors of these heathen foreigners.

We can see that Egil told his circle something similar from his experiences in Norway when he described his dealings with Bard of Atley, though the point has been lost in the composition of the saga writer and replaced by some rather poor psychology of his own making. One evening, Egil came to the king's farm at Atley and was received by Bard, who

showed the travellers to an outhouse and regaled them with sour milk. The host much regretted the poor fare he had to offer, but ale was not to be had -- the rascal, he was expecting his master, King Eric, on a visit, and had the house full of the loveliest brew. Later on, Egil and his comrades were, at the special command of the king, invited to a seat in the room, and found excellent opportunity of rinsing the taste of milk from their mouths, but Egil was never one to let his own politeness make up for others lack of it, and the end of his visit was an incurable hole in the body of poor Bard, together with much ado in quest of the turbulent traveller who had rendered King Eric poorer by the loss of a good steward. The author of the saga knows that the feast held in the house was a blot, and that the horn passed "round the fire" in festive wise: he knows too, that the host blessed the horn before passing it to Egil, and he may be right in that it was not the sweetest of tempers wherewith Bard seasoned the drink, but he knows no better than to make it a case of poisoning. So far he keeps to tradition, because the incidents were needed in order to make events move on; as to the cause of the host's inhospitality towards Egil, however, he is at a loss and tries to make sense by painting Bard in very black colours as a stingy fellow, but indirectly he happens to give evidence of the fact that a blot was not an occasion on which casual strangers were admitted.

The feasts lasted as long as the ale held out. Not until the [215] holy drink had been drained off and the last remains perhaps disposed of on the fire of the blot-stead, could men put off their holiness, open the doors, and begin the new year which had been "welcomed", or prepared for, at the feast. At least no remainder could be kept for use at the daily board, thus much we may surmise on analogy, and such a guess is corroborated by a tradition purporting to go back to the earliest times of Norwegian mission. It is related of Hakon Aethelstansfostri, when he was endeavouring to edge in his Christianity upon the men of Norway, that he first had the Yule feast moved forward to the time of the Christian holyday, and "then everyman should feast with one measure of ale, and keep holy as long as the ale lasted." Whoever may have credit of this proposal, the reformer was a wise man and a master builder. By utilising the prevalent religious feelings, he could make sure the holy Yuletide should be kept and Christ be honoured to the full, for all people immediately understood that everyday matters should rest and feasting rule as long as ale was in the house.

## **CHAPTER XIV**

### **THE CREATIVE FESTIVAL**

The longer we gaze at the blot, the larger it looms before the sight. A circle of men are seated about their ale-bowl, and gods are born; men fall to wrestling, or tell true stories, and the gods feel the blood flowing more powerfully through their veins. The sacrificial feast embraces heaven and earth.

No wonder that mighty events proceed from men's gathering in the blot hall, for the blot is life itself, concentrated in the festive moment as a ball of strength. The concentration is felt in the all-pervading holiness, which is at once great power and extreme risk. We know that the soul is a homogeneous whole, and the fate of the hamingja is at any time bound up with all its manifestations, so that a single word or a single act may involve fatal consequences; if a ring breaks or a beast falls dead, if a kinsman dies, or taunting words are levelled against the kin, it is a sign that luck has been broken, and more mishap will follow if the unluck is not checked. The unity of man's soul is so absolute that there is no distinction possible between misfortune and sin. We may express the fact of decay from within, and say that weakness and ill hap are guilt caused by the hamingja being vitiated; or we may look at matters from without, and say that sin is a breach opening to the centre of the soul and showing that the hamingja had a flaw which was sure to manifest itself sooner or later. In sin and suffering the unhealthiness of a man reveals itself; the unluck lurking within his constitution "comes forth", as the old saying goes.

Therefore a man shapes his future by all he does, but his [217] actions increase immensely in importance at the great moments of the feast, when man is filled with more soul than ordinarily and the whole hamingja acts immediately with all its might through all he says and does. He is immensely strong, and must therefore be proportionately careful not to compromise his strength. If he be tainted with sin when in the state of holiness, the effects will be dangerous, perhaps fatal, because the act immediately involves the whole hamingja; if he be touched by anything unheore, such as witchery or putrefaction, the consequences will spread to the core of life at once.

In the festival, men are raised to the highest pitch of life; through the blot, all the hamingja is called forth and made to fill the participants and their surroundings. The blot creates gods. When Floki bloted the ravens he did something more than uniting the ravens with men; he made them his gods. The requisite condition was that he should be able to concentrate his whole personality and that of all those belonging to him in the animals. Behind the simple words: "he held a great blot," lies the fulness of life; a party with festive shouting, with the renewal of the past, with ale and vows. "There where the blot had been, they built a cairn" as a sign for those who should later come to the spot to tread cautiously, for it was holy; a hamingja had come down into the spot and made it a god's house.

In one sense, it may be said with some truth that man creates his gods in the festival; viewing the matter from another aspect, we may with equal truth aver that the gods create man in the blot — neither proposition, however, contains the whole truth. The character of the feast lies in the fact that individual men are completely set aside or disappear, and their place is taken up for the time by that which is supreme, ever-felt reality: the clan or its hamingja, its past and present and future ages in one.

In primitive experience, life is always divided into two strata. Behind the living circle of men and behind their daily occupations lies a fund of strength on which they are constantly drawing. The happenings and events of everyday [218] routine constitute but a small section of life, so that the life of actual men and their doings extend backwards into a great depth of existence. This principle does not depend on speculation, as is apparent from its finding a natural vent in practical action and religious customs; it is simply experience working in accordance with all other experiences. To us man is a single individual, shut in by the bounds of birth and death and circumscribed as against his neighbours by the limits of physical personality; and personality, in the sense of character, means, according to the conditions of our existence, the sum of experience which man is able to store up in his isolated brain in a short span of years. But in primitive culture where experience is gathered on the broad base of community instead of being piled up in a slender obelisk on the individual, man is an eternal personality, living through uncounted or undefined ages of time, changing in outward manifestation, but none the less continuous and unbroken for the generations replacing one another. His personality is not confined to his body, or to the thoughts and feelings shut up within his solitary frame; his soul is in accordance with the working of his mind extended to ideas, emotions, ideals, traditions, belongings which exist independently of his private being or not being. In point of psychological fact, the centre of his personality lies outside his body, in the ideas and things that persist from one generation to another, while the individual existence dissolves and revives. In the perseverance of the family, in its heirlooms, its land, even in its herds of cattle, primitive men naturally see stronger manifestations of their life than in themselves, just as, from identical mental experiences, the monk's life is swallowed up in the cloister and the church. We experience our being isolated, in fact cannot help feeling the limits of our person as the decisive gaps in existence, because the individual represents our arrangement of the facts of existence, the ground on which our life is built up, the base on which our forms and institutions are founded, the reality on which our joy and sorrow must feed. In the same way, primitive man lives and experiences his own eternity, arranging the facts of existence from another [219] end, practically and theoretically. The actual man has his existence through derivation from the great man of his community, and even all the men of the clan, taken collectively at any given moment, form outwardly but a small part of the whole hamingja. In the festival, the source is opened, and the entire man

enters into possession, acting through all, not only the bodies and minds of living clansmen, but through their belongings and surroundings. The house is filled; the benches and the pillars, the fire and the atmosphere become living. There are no men, neither are there strictly speaking gods, but only god or divinity.

This is the reason why all words and acts are fraught with infinite consequence; the space is filled with creation, and every act gives birth to events to come. When men assemble for war or sacrifice, enveloped in the power of holiness, the future is born of their actions. It was a custom from early times to commence a battle by a duel between two selected champions. The two who stepped forward in front of the warriors' line to fight out their own battle really decided the will of the day; and if the fate of the whole had been laid in their hands there was nothing for the rest to do but to await the outcome, and then either set up a shout of victory and demand tribute, or carry off the dead man and bow to necessity, for victory had declared itself. We are taken nearer the blot hall by the description in Tacitus of the preparations for war; the Germans took a captive of the enemy people, and set him to fight with his own weapons against one of their own men, and the result of the duel showed them whether their luck was in the ascendant or on the decline. Possibly the tales of combats in front of the army are in the main reflexes of such ritual preliminaries for going to war. But we miss the real excitement of the scene if we merely view the ceremony as an attempt to discern the will of the higher powers; in the individual, a fate is striving to gain the mastery over its opponent fate. The champion could create victory and create defeat in the coming battle, because he stood as the corporate representative of a whole army's hamingja. Another rite was for the leader of the army [220] to fling his spear out over the enemy's ranks before the battle began, *til heilla*; this "for luck" means at once as a good omen and as the beginning of victory. About the beginning of our era the Hermundures were able to gain a decisive victory over the Chatti because they dedicated the hostile army to the gods and the whole of the spoil, horses, men and all else to destruction.

These scenes from the practice of war illustrate the comprehensive blot in which the whole future was created and took form according to the behaviour and movements of the sacrificial brethren. The test of manhood, in the game or at the vowing cup, was the pattern into which aftertime must accurately fall. When the Norse bridegroom struck his sword into the roof-beam and thereby created for himself a marriage luck precisely the depth of the scar, there is something of the old feast-fellow about him; in all modesty he may be named by side with Hakon who bloted and perfected the battle within his luck, so that the ravens came flying even before the enemy had appeared.

We can reach somewhat nearer the blot hall by listening to the Darrad Song, as it was sung at Katanes in the north of Scotland, on the day Sigurd, earl of the Orkneys, fell in Ireland. A man saw twelve women sitting in a house; they were weaving with entrails for a woof and an arrow for a shuttle, and as they wove, they sang the spear-song, the Darradsljóð:

"Spear shall ring, shields clash, axes smite upon iron.

Weave, weave Darrad's web; after we follow the prince. Where men's shields show bloody, valkyries guard the king.

Weave, weave Darrad's web, the king's it was aforetime; forth will we stride, storming to battle, where friends' weapons move.

They shall rule land who shivered on the shore; a king, a mighty one, I promise death; now is the earl felled by the steel.

Now is web woven, battlefield reddened, death-tidings fare over land."

And when they had woven their web of victory, they rushed away six to the northward, six to the south, on horseback. [221] The song slips from past to future, for there where these valkyries weave there is no such thing as time; the battle is really fought while the women are singing, and very soon their song of victory will "come forth" and appear on the battlefield. One of the verses reveals the connection between this poetic symbol and reality; the women say at last:

"Truly we sang of the young king songs of victory a many; let us sing with strength; and let him who hears mark the many spear-songs and tell them forth to men."

Who is this king over whom the songs of victory are sung we do not know, but one thing is certain, the valkyries here show that they have taken the words out of the blot-man's mouth. Not in the sense that the Darrad Song should be a cult poem, it is rather a fantasy, conceived in some mind where the mood of the blot-feast reigned. The formæli of the sacrificers, the song of women at the loom, battle-ruling valkyries and the timelessness of fate have crystallised into a poetic picture, such as could perhaps only be made when the poet was half emancipated from the ancient religion. But even though the poem strictly speaking does not contain one actual formula, the verses are built up over the formæli, and, in particular, it is the spirit of the formæli that inspires the flow of the words. It is the power of the blot which fills the women when they sing "with strength", for this translation is but a poor substitute of words meaning: with the force of fulfilling luck.

From the blot, good seasons and well-being are led out to bless the coming year, but the fertility is not created generally, as the European cannot help thinking from his abstract presuppositions when observing primitive cult. In the ritual man assumes the power of creating life, but he does not conceive life as a plastic possibility lying newly created like formless clay to be moulded later on at will into concrete events. The creating hamingja is individually marked by its contents and its aims, it is not luck, but clan luck and fate aldr. Fertility means that *our* fields grow and *our* cattle propagate according to their kind; and only when we call to mind primitive ideas of soul can we make the meaning of "our" sufficiently pregnant [222] and precise. Clan luck means birth of children, but they are children of our stamp in body and aspirations and traditions. Battle luck means victory over our particular enemies, power and supremacy in our actual disputes and ambitions, luck on the lines laid down by the owners' individual gifts, as we should say. Through the acts and words of the sacrificer, not only the contents of the future but also its form and the concatenation of its events are preordained. Thus the formæli and the consecration of the holy drink is seen to be in reality one, though it seems to our eyes twofold: making the ale divine and prescribing the aim for its power.

Not only the future needed creation, the past too had to be renewed in the blot to retain its reality. The eternity of life lay not in the fact that it had once begun, but solely in the fact that it was constantly being begun, so that the blot-man's sacrifice points back as well as forward. In order to do justice to the meaning of the blot, we must say that it not only condenses and renews the past, but in true earnest creates it over and over again.

This reiteration or renovation, as we should call it, is not a repetition of an act primarily and for all time created years or ages ago. The present re-acting is as primary, as original as the very first acting; and the participants are not witnesses to the deed of some hero or god, not reproducers who revive the deed, but simply and literally the original heroes who send fateful deeds into the world, whether it be battles long ago or the creation of Middle-garth. In the recitation of the legend, in the ceremonial act, the earth is prepared for the living of man, raised from the deep, made heore and fruitful; through the ritual procedure the people is born, the enemies are cast down, and honour is gained. Be the world created, be the battle gained ever so many times before: any subsequent creation and victory is as original as every one of its precedents.

Life and history start from the blot. Time is not experienced by primitive men in the way we feel it, as a stream running along from the origin of all things to the end of the universe.

[223] Time begins over and over again. The festival forms what we should call a stage above the flow of hours and years, a sort of condensed eternity, in which past and present and future are undifferentiated and felt as immediately actual through the tension and strain of the sacrificers. And from this very beginning, time, that is the subsequent year or six months, will flow out, made pregnant with the power and the events of blot hours. Thus it is also literally true that the real deeds are done in the blot hall, the battles and the harvestings of the outer world being but the external fulfilment of actions done during feast time, or the evolving of ritual acts. The field is actually ploughed when the priest or chieftain thrusts his ploughshare into the soil and lets the oxen draw some three ritual furrows with appropriate

formulæ and the recitation of the legend of the first ploughman, whatever the ceremonial may be. The battle is veritably fought and won in the war dance, or in the vow washed down with a hornful of ale, and the rest will follow as a matter of course, or will come forth, if the hamingja is able to fulfil what it proposed; and if the clansmen could not make good their endeavours when they acted in all their strength, they will not avail in the trial of material weapons.

Now we shall be able to look for the gods where they are really to be found. They are present as power in the events and as persons in the sacrificers. When the chairman acts and speaks, when his fellows follow his lead with horn and formæli, when the singer recites his verses, they are capable of making past events living before the eyes, because one and the other is the ancient hero, performs his acts and sweeps all his comrades into the flow of happenings as active performers, whether they gesticulate outwardly or not. The reciter and the ritual agent is no less the subject of the poem than the original hero himself, and no less responsible for the happy issue of his enterprise of conquering either the giants or mortal enemies. What the clan's past will be in the days to come, hangs on the victory or defeat in front of the sacrificial bowl.

This view suggests another type of history and another [224] kind of poetry than ours. In reality, ancient history cannot be translated into our terms because it is not a theory but an experience; by saying that it is the projection of the actual upon the screen of the past we do nothing but replace fact with a travesty, setting up our system as an exclusive pattern of history. History was ever changing, inasmuch as it was plastic, but it was no less constant because it had its foundation in the clan's sober sense of the reality of its ancestors, and in its sane conscience that deeds and ancestors cannot be faked into existence. In order to act the events of the past, it was first of all necessary to own a past containing such deeds; to live the ancestors over again one must have the right of doing so, and right is, as sufficiently shown, never a formal affair in primitive society — it is only made good by proving itself a fact. But achievements did not belong to individual men, only to the hamingja, the clan personality which acted through individuals, and thus the feat may pass, as we say, from one hero to another within the bounds of kinship.

What we call poetry and myth is nothing but history. But to read the meaning of the tradition as it was handed down in the festival it is not enough to understand the words spoken or sung; the ears must be assisted by the eyes. For the participants themselves, the story was made up of acts complemented by formælis and verses. This means that we shall not be able to gather the meaning either from the words only or from the action alone; both must be taken together to bring out the whole. It is this duality which gives rise to the apparent abruptness and incoherence of all ancient and primitive poetry as long as it has not severed its connection with the festival and entered upon an independent literary career. But even when taking action and word together we shall possibly be at a loss to understand the purport without further help, for the sacrificers did not act and speak to tell a story, but to experience a fact; the plot lived within all present as something self-evident, and the procedure in the blot hall served only to call forth the past and open a way for it into new life. To us, the scenes are nothing but a series of glimpses from a play going [225] on in the unseen and now and then breaking through the veil in moments of intense concentration.

On the other hand, we must not expect to find in the ceremonial acting a continuous tale, running on methodically from act to act, or from scene to scene. If we append the name of drama to the ritual narrative, we do so on the authority of historical development, insofar as comedy and tragedy have evolved from ritual acting on the decline of religion, but in applying our term of drama to the rites of religion we must give a new meaning to the word, because all the elements of the modern stage are lacking in the original performance. Our drama is a plot progressing within the dramatic whole; the dramatic pregnancy of a poetical subject shows its power by exploding in a sequence of serried events. In primitive drama, the theme pervades the whole performance as an ubiquitous spirit, exploding in every act and making each incident a concentrated drama in itself; though any rite may have a definite

value and import of its own in the evolution of the plot, it is nevertheless inspired with the total idea, so that the legend is evident in one single gest and formula to the men initiated.

The significance of the gests is not dependent on any histrionic attitude of the performer; though mimicry may enter into the performance, the act, intensely suggestive as it is to the onlooker, need not be marked off from other acts by any dramatical flourish, whether imitative or symbolical according to our acceptance of the words. In fact, primitive drama does not rest entirely on the human performers, or in other words, there is no definite boundary between actors and theatrical properties; the god may be equally represented by a living man and religious implement, shifting from one impersonation to another during his operation. The *dramatis personæ* being only the hamingja in its various manifestations, it acts indiscriminately through men and their treasures; the hammer of Thor, the skull of the victim and the victim itself during subsequent stages of life and death are as much real actors as are the men who put them into different positions. Speaking [226] dramaturgically, this means that the centre of gravity lies in the words and the acts, not in the actors and speakers.

Whereas the modern playgoer derives his pleasure from the opportunity of being initiated into alien scenes and passions, the tension, enjoyment and edification in one experienced in the sacrifice, resulted from the close familiarity with the action taking place; the scene lay within the worshipper, and whether he officiated directly or merely assisted at the rites, he was part of the drama, and not an irresponsible onlooker. The scenes enacted before his eyes made up the vital drama of life, and thus it becomes intelligible why every act was watched with jealous care and the least slip of hand or tongue drew forth an inadvertion and misgiving in all concerned. The horn that created past and future events became the judge of men and the test of their righteousness, for the flaw in the luck or character of a man would come out in the highest moment and make his tongue trip on the fatal words. Now we understand that it was a matter of moment to empty the horn, so that men of merit were compelled to resign from the court when their breath became too short to drink minni properly. Now we too perceive fully the ignominy of the defeat which Thor sustained in the hall of the giant, when he was obliged to give up the horn without finishing his drink; the triumph won by the ogres was but an illusory one, because they had only been able to overcome their dreaded foe by tricking him with a horn one end of which opened into the ocean, but at the moment when the god handed the vessel back after his third attempt he felt his luck and divinity staggering under the leers of the gloating trolls.

The legend or myth has a place of its own, apart from the ritual text. In the myth, the story inherent in the acts and in the words, or rather lying at the back of the drama, is paraphrased into an explanatory tale. The legends will not tell us what happened some year or other according to chronology; in our craving for a kernel of historical truth in the myths, we naively insinuate that the myth makers ought to think in a system unknown to them, for the benefit of our annalistic [227] studies. The myth reveals what happened when the deed was really done, *viz*, at the feast, where the battle was won and the earth made inhabitable; and thus the *sine qua non* for understanding its revelation is insight into the cult, its procedure and contents.

Apart from the central ceremony of the ale horn, the Teutonic ritual is lost, and we shall never be able to reconstruct the rites in their sequence; only the myths or rather some legends that struck the fancy of posterity are left to us, and through these tales we can only discern the ritual dimly as through a veil. The poems of the Edda and the stories retold by Snorri in his handbook for poets are far from being cult monuments and cannot even in all cases be called myths. The verses and the prose are deeply tinged by the new spirit of the viking age; and what with their love of story-telling and the ready receptivity that laid them open to the inspirations of the west, the men of the transition age created a brilliant literature out of the ancient material. But the mark of being born in the mead hall is still discernible in the style of the stories, and though the poets have woven the legends into tales, the abruptness or glimpse-like character of the ritual setting forth makes itself felt in the technique of the composer. In ritual, the scenes and verses and formulæ are episodes in which an underlying coherent theme flashes out for a moment and immediately closes upon



the glimpse; in the poems, the flashes are continued into a progressive revelation, but the original mode of representation shows through in the episodic character of the telling and in the abrupt introduction of dialogue.

As a work of art, the *Voluspá* is at once the most advanced and the most conservative of all the Eddic poems. The author is a radically original thinker, neither Christian nor heathen; he has a philosophy, one may perhaps say a religion, of his own, and in his poem he discloses his anguish and his hope under the guise of a cosmology and an eschatology, unfolding the history of the world from the time when nothing was to the end of days, when, after sin and guilt, struggle and death, [228] the new world and the new god rise above the horizon. It is a vision unparalleled in literature, beheld by a prophet who had been so deeply moved by the Christian apocalypse, that thoughts and musings of his own were raised out of his experiences. His anxiety at seeing the old ties of frith being dissolved by the ambitions of the crusading adventurers — brother fighting with brother each to further his own ambition, kingdoms founded on moments of conquest and kingdoms crumbling into naught by the fall of a solitary hero — springs under the fertilising heat of Christianity into a judgement of humanity; through his obscure verses he proclaims history as a progress from frith and honour into guilt, from guilt into dissolution, with every man battling against his kinsman, from dissolution through the last fight of gods and men, through universal death and destruction into a final state of peace and honour without blemish. But in constructing his picture, he makes use throughout of ancient matter, in fact of cult scenes, and by ranging the mythical scenes into a new constellation he changes their import from within and inspires them with a new meaning in regard to the whole, without materially altering the words. Thus we look through his descriptions into the blot hall as for instance in his picture of the new earth and its happiness. Then the god Hoenir can choose the omen-sticks — in these two lines is compressed the perfect state of humanity, that of the hamingja never failing to achieve its wishes and fate, always finding in the stick sure signs of its creation having succeeded; the point of the phrase lies in the verb, *kjósa*, which means outwardly to receive happy omens, but inwardly to have strength to create the event which breaks out into good signs. And the pregnancy of the verse intimates that this scene was the expression of victory in the ritual of the blot hall. Another picture is contained in the last verse, by the position in the poem converted into a prophecy that death shall be no more. “The gloomy drake comes flying, the glistening snake from the nether mountains, and he carries corpses in his plumes, the dead men's ravener Nidhogg; he flies past skimming the ground, now he will sink.” No doubt the wording of this verse owes [229] its grip to the imagination of the poet and the inspiration of western visions, but the scene itself, no doubt, goes back to the ritual of the sacrifice, where the blot-men have seen the snake brushing past, conjured up by some ceremonial gest and sinking to the sound of some compelling words.

In other poems we observe the ancient ritual underlying poetical composition, as the substratum on which the poets have moulded a literary form; when for instance the Eddic description of Sigurd's dragon-killing and wooing of the sleeping woman in armour culminates in a ritual toast where she tends a horn to her deliverer and precedes his drinking with a *formæli*, the succession of the scenes is probably governed by the procedure of the feast. Through the poetical device we look into the blot hall at the moment when the events of the past were celebrated and made real by the circulating horn; the affinity between the literary mould and its ceremonial prototype is closer than immediately appears, because the poet indirectly describes the deeds as they happened in the festival where the reciter and the drinkers acted as impersonations of the ancient heroes. The legend or myth is passing into epic, but the underlying type has not yet been broken.

Even though the absence of all direct description prevents us from reconstructing the temporal sequence of the rites, the ritual of the feast nevertheless glimmers through the myths and the poetical vocabulary in tolerably clear outlines. The first act of the sacrifice was played in the cattle fold when the divine slaughterers went out armed with a hallowed instrument to kill the victims singled out for the feast. The dramatic intensity of the slaughtering is expressed in the myth of Thor's voyage to the giant Geirrod, in which all the

incidents of the killing are translated into cosmogonic significance. Thor and his two followers force their way through many obstacles into the abode of the giant. The god has started from home without his hammer, and borrows on the road a staff from a friendly giantess, as the legend tells, thus indicating the peculiar character of the ceremonial implement used in the taking of the victim's life. Farther on, the gods are on the point of

[230] being overwhelmed by the swollen torrents rushing down from the mountains, and the dramatic character of these torrents is established by the language of the poet, who calls them the blood of the giant, or in other words the blood from the victim impersonating the foes of mankind. The god staunches the flood by some ritual action with his "staff", the character of which is unknown; possibly it had some relation to the sacred vessel into which the holy fluid was received. After having penetrated into the cave, the god is assailed by the daughters of the giant, and nearly crushed to death against the roof; this attack he also meets with the staff — according to the myth, he sets his weapon against the rafter, and putting all his weight upon it, forces his chair down, till a mighty roar announces that he has broken the backs of the giantesses who had concealed themselves underneath. What this incident means in tangible fact relating to the ritual treatment of the victim can only be vaguely guessed at, but the meaning is unambiguous: now the victim is finally disposed of, and through the animal the enemy has been vanquished.

The next scene takes place in the blot hall, or as the myth expresses the procedure: when Thor first arrived he was shown into the goat's house, but after the feats accomplished there the giant Geirrod invited the god into the hall to take part in the games, and there were large fires burning through the length of the house. Here the crowning victory was fought, and the powers unheore utterly overcome. Geirrod took up a redhot iron bolt with a pair of tongs and hurled it at his guest, but Thor caught it as it flew, with his iron grips or gloves and sent it back, transfixing the giant together with the pillar behind which he crouched. The poem describing the achievement of the god contains in its metaphors a lucid explanation of the dramatic form in which this fight was carried out; the scathing bolt was the heart of the victim taken steaming hot from the kettle and consumed or tasted by the human incarnations of the god. By this sacrament with the vital and most sacred part of the sacrificial victim, power was assumed, and the adversaries of life cast down for ever. [231]

The subsequent scenes clustered about the kettles in which the holy meat was boiled. The myths hint at games and beer joy: the preparation of the godly food was guarded and facilitated by a drink and a performance accompanied by sacred texts. Again and again the battle is renewed, at each point the aggression of the demons is warded off and the superiority of human luck confirmed. A legend relating to this part of the festival is reproduced in the story telling how three gods defeated the giant Thiazi. Once upon a time Odin and Hoenir and Loki went hungry during a journey and killed an ox to make a repast. They cut up the meat and made a cooking oven — evidently an archaic trait going back to an ancient mode of preparing meat by burying it in hot steam. When the gods opened the oven they were astonished at seeing that the meat was still raw, and looking round, they espied a giant watching them from a tree in the guise of an eagle. The hostile onlooker frankly admitted that he had caused the mishap and claimed admittance to the feast. But when the guest openly showed his greed by snatching up the best part of the ox, Loki in wrath struck him with a pole, the result being that one end of the pole stuck fast to the eagle and the hands of the god cleaved to the other end. Loki was trailed over stock and stone by the flying eagle, till he was mad with pain and readily complied with the giant's suggestion that he should entice the maid Ydun out from the precincts of Asgard and deliver her up to the enemy. Ydun was the goddess who guarded the youth-giving food, and at her disappearance the heads of the gods turned grey; very soon suspicion fastened upon Loki, and he was compelled to set out on a fresh expedition to steal back the maiden. The wily god changed into a falcon and succeeded in carrying away the goddess in his grip, but his flight roused the giant to pursue

him in the guise of an eagle; when, however, the foe came booming over the wall of Asgard he was suddenly surrounded by flames; the gods had been ready shaving chips from their spears, and at the critical moment they set light to the heap, so that the fire flared up and scorched the wings of the intruder. — In this myth we have the ritual of the lighting of the fire, which [232] is the means of forcing back the powers of destruction or infirmity that lurk behind all things in Middle-garth and thus keeping the creative kettleful for the maintenance of men and their luck.

In another legend it is Hrungrir, “the thief of Thrudr” (or power), the daughter of Thor, who 'is mightily vanquished. Still other cult myths explain how the would-be robber is frustrated in his designs on Freyja, the maiden with whom the light of the world is bound up. Whatever form the myths take, they indicate the background of the ceremonial battle, expressing what would happen if the holy work were not carried to a happy finish. It was this great, timeless creation during the blot, and the vanquishing of the powers of chaos thereby, that rendered gods and men lords of the world and held the giants lurking in impotent rage beyond the border. The rite confirmed the victory, and the legend celebrates the effective 'exertion.

In the struggle for world mastery, the victim impersonated the enemy, and the slaughtering represents the killing of the unheore fiends. But there is another side to the drama expressing the holiness and blessing residing in the sacrificial animal.

The myth of Thor giving his rams to be slaughtered for meat, and reviving them by a flourish of his hammer above the bones and skins, introduces us to a central scene in the killing of the victim. The animals slain were not heads of cattle picked out of the fold and killed off; they represented the holy herd that gave of its essence to the sacrificers as an inspiring and invigorating food, without incurring any loss of vitality; the life returned to its source, and gushed out in fresh abundance. Therefore it was necessary to pour out the blood of the victim in the holy place, and preserve certain parts of the bodies as the seat of the regenerative power. The fact that one of Thor's rams limped because one of the eaters had broken a bone to suck the marrow shows that the bones of the animal sacrificed were commonly held sacred and inviolable. The myth draws out the inner meaning — as is its wont — by [233] pointing out what would be the result if the ritual failed to achieve its aim or were made ineffective by neglect of some creative requisite. Slaughtering was, in fact, so far from being an infringement of the cattle's luck and persistence that it involved a new birth to the herd as well as to the men partaking of its meat; the herd was born through the ceremonial consecration of the victim by the hammer or some other object being waved above the carcass.

The myth obviously gives a realistic description of the scene: the bones were collected and laid out for blessing on the skins. We may draw the further inference that the skull was given a prominent place in the hall during the feast, and that it played a part in the dramatic proceedings. This conjecture is corroborated by some hints in ancient literature as to a mythical head which Odin consulted in hours of need, and it acquires still more force by some declamatory words of Gregory the Pope; the holy father is shocked by the unseemly behaviour of the Lombards who are said to run round the head of a ram, celebrating it with songs of abomination.

It is necessary to kill the animal, because the creation and upholding of men and their world is dependent on its life-nourishing flesh; but imperative though the measure may be, the assault on the vehicle of the sacred hamingja nevertheless involves not only a terrible risk but also an act of aggression bordering on outrage, nay it would be sheer sacrilege if it could not be justified and expiated through subsequent acts of blessing. The myth of Thiazi alludes to expiatory ceremonies whose character is unknown; after having told how the giant was killed, it proceeds to relate that his daughter Skadi armed herself and appeared among the gods in full panoply of war to demand weregild for her father. The gods accorded her full restitution by offering her a divine husband, and we are elsewhere told that Thrymheim, the seat of the old giant Thiazi, is now occupied by his daughter Skadi.

In a burlesque in which a zealous Christian has travestied a scene in the ritual, the Volsi story, we learn that sometimes at least the reproductory organ of a horse was used in a ceremony [234] implying impregnation; the scrappy and rather poor piece of satire is of considerable interest as giving us an inkling of the place poetic formulæ occupied in the blot. Everybody present, we are told, took the object in his hand and uttered a rhythmical formæli alluding to procreation, ending with the words: Moernir receive this blotting. The Volsi ritual is represented by the author as a rural worship invented by some benighted heathens in an outlying farmhouse; more probably it is a reminiscence of an act in the sacrifice representing the real begetting when the fertilising seed entered the wombs of women and beasts, thus making any subsequent impregnation fruitful.

The preparation of the beer cask, or in earlier times the mead vat, is only commemorated in a single legend that tells how Odin tricked the giant Suttung out of the mead, by boring his way into the cave where Suttung kept the precious fluid, and beguiling his daughter by protestations of affection. This story, handed down in two versions, one fragmentary and abrupt in Eddic verse, the other retold or rather recast by Snorri into a humorous tale, can do little more than hint at the existence of an elaborate ritual, but scarcely gives us any clue to its character.

But the ritual did not stop short at the battle with the giants. In the midst of the hall, the whole world was dramatically exposed, arching its heaven over broad expanses with far flowing rivers; the earth and all the waters of the earth were contained in the kettles and the fireplace, and over it waved the branches of the world tree Yggdrasil, shading with its wide arms the homes of gods and men and giants. The hall and the fireplace, as it appeared to the blot-fellows who saw the underlying reality before the external appearance, is described by Snorri on the authority of ancient verses. The boughs of the ash extend out over all the world and reach across the expanse of heaven; downwards it strikes three wide-spreading roots, one is among the gods, the second among the giants and the third ends in the realm of the dead. Under the roots are wells, one is the well of wisdom, another, the Urdarbrunn, is the well of life and fate. [235]

To understand what ancient eyes saw we must replace our geographically and spacially confined experience with the reality of primitive senses. The megin of the earth, its largeness and breadth, is contained in a handful of soil, heaped up on or around the fireplace, the stem and foliage of the tree is altogether present in the slightest branch; just as any part, such as for instance the skull, exhibits the whole living animal, its flanks quivering with the beats of life, its legs vibrating with unleapt bounds — nay exhibits the whole species of panting and leaping beasts. The scene describes at once the tutelary tree standing in front of the homestead with its deep well underneath, and the ritual counterpart of the tree and the well now transplanted into the cult hall, because the two are identical; both are holy, *i. e.* the prototypes or teeming wombs of the world, and through the power of the feast the entire hamingja is concentrated in the sacred spot, so that it becomes not only the protoplast of all things existing, but the world, excelling the mere space of earth and heaven in profound reality.

But the world is not laid out on the hearth as something simply existing. As the ritual proceeds, the earth rises and shapes itself into the happy abode of man, and the heavenly lights go forth and arrange themselves into their daily procession. As the victim is cut up and disposed into the kettles, the primeval giant Ymir is killed by the gods, who create the earth from his body, the waters from his blood, and heaven from his skull. Next the race of men, or rather our race, takes its rise by the process described in the Voluspá: three gods came to the house and found on the land Ask and Embla, powerless and without fate; Odin gave spirit, Hoenir wit, Lodur the sap of life and the flush of health, *lá ok lito góða*. How the latter part of creation was ritually carried out is suggested by the language of the scalds, in a poetical metaphor, coined in reference to the ritual, the contents of the horn being alluded to under the same appellation *lá* — which is used in the Voluspá to designate the sap of life. A further commentary is furnished by an Eddic verse in which Odin rejoices because he [236] has brought the mead from the realm of the giant and placed it on the “rim of the sanctuary of

men”, he exults in having tasted “luckily acquired colours”. The ritual significance of the phrases discloses itself in the recurrence of the term *litr* that is employed in the verse of the *Voluspá*.

The creation of the world through the cutting up of the victim was no doubt seconded by other pictorial incidents; the myths hint at white soil being used to “pour over the roots of *Yggdrasil*”, and in a catalogue poem it is said that the earth is called *aurr* by the great gods, which probably means that *aurr* is a ritual designation. We learn too that “megin of earth” goes to make the ale strong and health inspiring, and from this hint we learn that the earth must be represented in the ritual, if the blot were to be full and complete.

According to the creation legend, the world arose in the middle of *Ginnungagap*, the gaping void between the glowing half in the south and the icy northern part; the sparks from the heat collided with the venomous drops from the cold and the mist ascending from the glacial rivers, and the whole congealed into a mass of matter like the slag from a fire. The gods placed the body of the slain giant *Ymir* in the midst of *Ginnungagap* to build the inhabitable world, and the flying embers fixed themselves in the heavens and became stars and luminaries. This legend is the text of the creation drama that takes place on the hearth, in the play of the fire and the soot encircling the sacred kettles, with the creative victim placed in the middle.

Now the inner truth of the *Voluspá* shines forth. The abrupt pictures of its first part are glimpses of scenes from the blot hall, and from this profoundly suggestive material the poet constructs a progressive historical and eschatological drama. He opens with the time when nothing was, neither sand nor sea nor cool waves; there was no earth, no heaven on high, only *Ginnungagap* and never a blade of grass. It was in the times of yore when *Ymir* lived. Then *Bor's Sons* lifted up the earth and the gods who created Middle-garth; the sun shone from the south on the flags of the hall, then the ground

[237] was covered with green leeks. The sun knew not its place, the moon knew not its megin. The gods went to the seats of fate and gave night and morning, midday and evening their names. Thus the mighty cosmological drama opens. The verses open a view not into the chaos of nowhere and nothing, where later Christian poets beat the void with the wings of imagination, but into the clearly defined surroundings of the blot fellows. The new sun strikes the “flags of the hall” with its first beams; in the verses relating how the gods lifted up the land and went to the seats of commanding fate, the words have an exact and at the same time far-reaching dramatic import.

Possibly the myths have in their late forms been affected by the influence of Christian creation legends, but the modifications have not eaten into their core, and they still bear the unmistakable stamp of living ritual. Our analysis, however, is apt to be warped by our traditional ideas of creation, once for all, out of naught, which presuppose a period in chronological time when the world existed only as a future possibility. In primitive language, creation means a becoming like all former becomings, an ever-new and ever-repeated organisation which makes existence real and reliable. Our conclusion that before something came into being a nothing must have prevailed, has no place, because the premises that make this inference necessary to our chronologically progressive thought were lacking in primitive experience. To be of value, the answers men give to their problems must be latent in the question; to us the natural problem is: what was before the present world was made? primitive experience prompts the query: what would be if creation failed? This gap out of which the world rises by the mighty doings of the gods is, like the robbery by the giants, the dim possibility of chaos which is constantly warded off by the blot. Creation means victory over the formless destructive powers, it means making the world heore, and therefore the cosmological drama opens with the killing of the giant and with the destruction which the drowning torrents of his blood wreaks upon his kin. [238]

The ritual included an act which may be called the hallowing or fructifying of the treasures. Gold, whether a ring or some other precious object, was obviously placed on the hearth or dipped in the kettles, as is indicated by some stray lines as well as by the stock metaphors of the poets. Gold is conventionally called the flame of the deep or the fire of the river, meaning that it is born and made lucky by being laved in the prototype rivers flowing through the world from the kettles; this ritual incident is mentioned in a verse of the *Grimnismál*, saying that the rivers flow round the "hoard of the gods". What part this manipulation of the gold played in the cosmogonic drama we cannot say for sure, but knowing the profound significance of the treasures as vehicles of the hamingja, and bearing in mind the embracing width of the clan's luck, we may form some guesses as to the representative import of gold in the cosmological drama. It may have impersonated the riches of men rising from the primeval root of things implying all its manifestations from the fertility of the soil to the sun. The effect of the ritual is suggested by the myth of *Draupnir*, the ring of the gods, which was placed on the pyre of Balder and sent back from the underworld with the power of dripping fresh rings in the night.

As to the appearance or pageantry of the drama we have no indication beyond that contained in the terminology of the myths. The placing of earth on the hearth and the putting on of the kettles, manipulation with the treasures and skulls and passes with the "hammer of Thor" as well as the lifting of the horn, were actions fraught with meaning, but we can know nothing of the manner in which they were performed. And as to the words accompanying the acts, we can only guess that they ranged from short verses or measured formulæ to recitation of genealogies and chanting of legendary songs. We may perhaps conclude from the traditional form of the Eddic poems that the ritual partly proceeded in the form of responses. From the fact that the sequence of question and answer regularly crops up in the neighbourhood of ritual passages, we need not draw the inference that the blot was carried on [239] catechetically, but no doubt this mode of conveying mythological lore has established itself on the base of some time-honoured allocution; we know how the chairman "signed" the horn, and rendered the draught eventful by his *formæli*, and from this picture we may imagine a scene where the fellows watched their brethren handling the ritual objects and waiting for the formula which explained and completed the act.

The view we get through myth and language is rich in suggestions but no less blurred in outlines, and a representation must be modelled on the material; a description is the truer when it opens up the depth of pathos and significance contained in the blot without any arbitrary hardening of the contours.

Such are the main themes of the ritual, varying no doubt in details and pictures from one place to another, but identical in ideas and in general character. And into this ceremonial scheme entered the history of the clan. The voices of the ancestors were heard blending with the speaking of the gods; from the fight with the giants, the deeds of former generations dealing with mortal enemies sprang forth. All the acts of the ritual were probably instinct with a collateral historical meaning, clearly understood by the men in whom the past was a living plastic force, whether it only asserted itself in implications or shaped itself into direct allusions to familiar reminiscences or broke forth in recitation and poems of praise. In this form, the ancestral traditions of the Volsungs are handed down to posterity; the achievements that laid the foundation of the clan's fame and power are perpetuated in the legend of the ancestor's fight with the dragon *Fafnir* and his conquest of the fateful hoard of *Andvari*. The historical proportions of the tale are intimated by the incidents: Before *Fafnir* turned into a serpent and crept upon his gold, he had killed his father to get possession of the riches that had come from the gods, and *Sigurd*, the dragon slayer, is reared by *Regin*, the brother of *Fafnir*, to execute the revenge pined for and yet execrated by the clansman. When the deed has been accomplished by *Sigurd*, while *Regin* hides his head behind the bushes, the dark double dealing schemes of the instigator, who necessarily [240] resents the murder of his brother, are revealed to the hero by the birds twittering over his head, and he boldly completes his work by sending the plotter on the heels of his brother. Then he loads the treasures on his horse, leaps on its back and rides forth to adventures brave and new. The

marks of the family tradition are evident, but the historical events are disguised out of all recognition, because they are reproduced in the setting of the blot. The legend does not merely reflect the external facts, but retells the story as it unfolded itself through ritual words and deeds during the feast, when the feasts were made real in the presence and power of the gods. In the Nordic poem, Fafnir and Regin are called rime-cold giants, which means that their lives are taken in the killing of the giant through the slaughtering of the sacrificial victim. Further, Sigurd cuts out the heart and broils it over the fire, and he drinks the blood of the slain — a scene which reproduces the ritual tasting of the intestines and the sprinkling of the sacred blood that ensures complete casting down of the enemies of man, whether human or demoniacal. Though the poem as it now stands has become a mere story, it indicates in the form of its telling how the two sides, the one which we call historical, and the other which we style ritual, did coalesce in the drama of the blot hall: purely human outbursts of grief and defiance and triumph sprout organically forth from ceremonial manipulations with the flesh of the victim and the fluid of the beer cask.

In the history of the sacrificial hail, the individual warrior is sunk in the god, or, which is the same thing, in the ideal personification of the clan, the hero. This form of history causes endless confusion among later historians, when they try their best to rearrange the mythical traditions into chronological happenings and the deeds of the clan into annals and lists of kings, and the confusion grows to absurdity when rationalistic logicians strive by the light of sound sense to extricate the kernel of history from the husks of superstition. In a kingly figure like the famous Froda of the Heathobards, political deeds are inextricably mixed up with ritual incidents. On one side he is an [241] earthly king pure and simple, when he wars and intermarries with the neighbouring house of the Scyldings, on the other he is a personification of the peace ruling through feast time, when he is extolled as the ideal peace-maker. During his reign, we are told, the country was so safe that a ring would lie untouched for years on the high road, and no killing was heard of; even the avenger would suffer his brother's slayer to go unharmed. The giver of peace is nevertheless no other than the mighty warrior king; his reign is appraised through the terms derived from the festival. No clear line marks off the god from the prince, and the historian who starts from modern principles will be led on according to his point of view, either to interpret the human element as disguised myth or to force ritual to give up a symbolic history; and in both cases he will be landed in insoluble difficulties. This incongruity, caused by the fact that history is transcribed in ritual language, cleaves to the whole mass of ancient legends, and makes it a bone of contention between the profane historian and the student of the history of religion, as long as religion and history of life are considered as two separable constituents.

In primitive culture, religion stands in touch with everyday reality. In the feast, the whole of existence, with its working and fighting, fishing and hunting, eating and begetting, is lifted up and intensified without being spiritualised out of its matter-of-fact substantiality. There is a poetry of life lived through and not merely imagined and sung: poetry and art have a tangible form in the festival which includes tragedy and farce, entailing the fullest enjoyment because life and success depend on the play and the jests. This artistic principle allows of no differentiating between the poetic or imaginary world of fine feelings and the drab prose of daily existence; a purely æsthetic valuation of beauty and art, such as became necessary when religion was severed from life, is inconceivable among ancient and primitive peoples, where religion is the transfiguration of the totality of life and its needs. The words of poetry are beautiful and inspiring when they are real and react upon the innermost springs of existence and create luck; [242] the verses are powerful and useful when they move the hearts of men, steeling their courage and inspiring their hopes. The poetry of words is nothing but the language of life when it pulsates most strongly and fully, it is the language of the feast, and thus imbued with the spirit of the blot; its metaphors reproduce the suggestive pictures of the sacrificial hall, and therefore it becomes to us a repository of religious ideas and practices.

There is one department within the region of cult which has a character of its own, namely the ritual designed to form a connecting link between men and the yellow-haired

goddess of the glebe. The ritual of the Teutons, like that of their cousins, the Homeric Greeks and the Vedic people, centres in the cattle luck, and in many regions the herds remained the principal stock of wealth. Goats are frequently mentioned from various places of the Teuton territory as forming the substance of the sacrificial feast, and in myth and ritual the ram occupies a prominent place to the exclusion of the heifer; later on, the meadows of greater folk were filled with cows and even horses, but in poorer regions small cattle continued to be the main support of the population.

But the art of making the earth fruitful by tearing her body with the ploughshare and impregnating her with living seed had come in from the south in prehistorical times. And in primitive culture the introduction of new implements and methods involves spiritual expansion as well as material progress. The use of the plough and the knowledge of its religious content and ritual mode of handling are inseparable, for no man can obtain results by mere mechanical manipulation. Learning husbandry means being initiated into a ritual, and so the ceremonies of the corn spread through Germany and Scandinavia in very early times; agricultural rites were framed into the customary blot and vitally fused with the ancient acts and formulæ, stamping them more or less superficially according as husbandry became the predominant occupation or merely played an accessory part in the life of the people.

In the broad fields of southern Scandinavia and of central [243] Sweden, the influence of the rites on the fields was more extensive, and coloured the feasts more intensely than in Norway. We must bear in mind that agriculture was not introduced once for all; rather it filtered in, one invention after another, each carrying a fuller ritual along with it. This immigration of rites has continued for thousands of years, as we learn from the modern customs of the peasants, which make clear that the influence of Mediterranean religion was not exhausted by the victory of Christianity, but went on through the Middle Ages, forcing its way sometimes in spite of the clergy but more often perhaps helped on by the formal reception of pre-Christian rites into the routine of the church. In Sweden, the hereditary blot was so effectively coloured by agricultural additions of the alien element, that certain princely families called their god by the name of Lord, *Freyr*; in the pedigree of the Ynglings, who may in earlier times have resided in the south of Scandinavia but later at least founded a kingdom at Upsala, Frey is placed immediately above their ancestor, Yngvi.

The more elaborate ritual carried with it ceremonies strongly tinged with sexual passion and feverish emotion. In the traditions of the North, the rites at Upsala stand out as eminently dramatic and exuberant in character, filled with lascivious dances, obscene songs and the killing of human victims — according to late compilers of historical information, such as Saxo and Adam of Bremen.

The drift of the ritual is sufficiently apparent from these intimations to warrant close affinity with the customs well known on the shores of the Mediterranean; but our material does not enable us to reconstruct the actual procedure. From Tacitus we catch a glimpse of processions in which the goddess Nerthus rode on a wain through the district, greeted with ebullitions of joy wherever she went, and finally disappearing in the gloom of the grove, where mysterious rites of washing and killing took place. From Norway comes a most edifying tale of some amusing and at the same time improving adventures that befell a Norwegian youth in Sweden. The run-away falls in with a handsome priestess and is by her dressed up to imper- [244] sonate the god Frey in his progress round the country, after he has manfully punched the ancient devil of a malicious idol to atoms; the new god is very determined in his demands to have the victims commuted into offerings of gold and portable property, and gladdens the hearts of his worshippers by getting his bride with child. At last he escapes, and not only succeeds in removing the spoil, but ensures a happy enjoyment of his riches withal by being baptized. — The controversial character of the tale renders its value doubtful as evidence, beyond the fact that ritual journeys of the Nerthus type were common in some parts of Sweden and unfamiliar in Norway.

The legend of the war between the Ases and the Vanes bears upon a conflict between two clans or peoples differing in matters of ritual, the Vanes being a tribe of Njord-



worshippers or tillers of the soil par excellence. This people must have been materially and religiously prominent in some part of Scandinavia, since their name has passed into tradition as the appellation of the godly race connected with tillage and harvesting. Frey and Njord — closely akin to the Nerthus of Tacitus — and their kin are termed Vanes or Vane-gods in the mythology of the Middle Ages, their worshippers being lost in oblivion. The myths likewise couple these gods with the ideas of great wealth, thus perpetuating the memory of the prosperity and luxury of the peoples tilling broad fields, and especially of these unlocated Vanes who probably at some time or other had their home in Sweden, and combined husbandry with profitable expeditions at sea and merchandising on a rather large scale. The myth of the marriage between Skadi, an ancestral goddess of northern Norway, and Njord, substantiated by some hints in historical literature, imply that the part of Norway around Drontheim had some intimate intercourse with the Frey-worshipping folk in Sweden.

In the wake of the agriculture and fertilisation ritual followed naturally the swine, which is everywhere the household animal of the peasant. Just as Thor, the personification of the indigenous powers, is inseparable from the ram, so Frey is everywhere accompanied by the boar. In the circles of Frey-worshippers, [245] and wider still, the boar might replace small cattle at the sacrificial meal and take over the ancient rites of the sacrificial blot.

The ecstatic tension of the fertilising ceremonies, spanning over the extremes of sentimental longing and sensuous transport, such as we find it elsewhere among tillers of the soil, who go forth and weep bearing precious seed and bring in their sheaves with rejoicing, is reflected in the myths relating to Frey, which bear a character curiously out of harmony with the soberness of social life among the typical Teutons. In one of the Eddic poems, the *Skirnismál*, the fervour, at once languid and ardent, of the rites which golden-haired earth excited in her lovers is turned into a divine love poem unparalleled in Northern literature.

## CHAPTER XV THE GODS

Little need be added as to the nature of the gods.

In their nature, combining the neutral state of power with personality, they evince no particular divine gift, for this is the nature of life in all its manifestations. They reside in the holy place and in the holy treasures, but they may at any moment come forth and reveal themselves to their friends either in dreams or in the light of day. As power or luck the gods are in Old Norse called *ráð* and *regin*; *ráð* means rede: wisdom and will, the power of determining and powerful determinations; *regin* simply expresses luck and power. In their personal aspect, the gods are named ases, or in southern dialects anses, which name is elucidated by the observation of Jordanes to the effect that among the Goths the chieftains in whose luck the people conquered were called anses. In shape the gods are in some clans male, in other families and localities female; their manifestation as women is naturally founded in the fact that woman generally represented a higher form of holiness than average man. The question whether the gods did assume the shape of animals is scarcely to the point. True, the divine power of the hamingja walked the fields in the herd and prominently in the holy heads of cattle that were consecrated and qualified to be leaders of their flock or mediums of blessing; and in the sacrificial hall the godly strength filled the victim of the feast. The beast was god, but it was not the gods, nor have we any indication that the powers took animal shape when they appeared to their friends. [247]

Between man and god there exists no difference of kind, but there is a vital distinction of degree, the gods being the whole hamingja, whereas men are only part. The boundary between gods and men is permanent, but varying in place; it is shifted downwards when men go about on their daily round of business, and it may be pushed upwards when they assume their garment of holiness and sally out in a body to fight or to fish. Only in the blot is the boundary line obliterated, but then during feast time there are no men, because the hamingja

is all and in all. The divineness of men when in a state of holiness is revealed by the metaphors of poetry; when the warrior is called the god of the sword or the god of battle, the expression is nothing but matter-of-fact description. The same reality appears in the naming of woman as the goddess of trinkets, and still more significantly as the ale-goddess, referring to her holy office in the drink offering.

The only way of elucidating the nature of god is by saying that the divine element may manifest itself in various incarnations, stronger and weaker, more encompassing or more limited, as more god than man or conversely as more man than god.

A continuous line of ascending divinity runs from mortal men through woman and chieftain to the eternal powers issuing from the sanctuary. An intermediate link between men and gods is formed by the fylgia or tutelary genius who illustrates the plasticity of the hamingja. When the fylgia is spoken of as belonging to an individual it means, like the Roman genius, the man's own soul and something additional. In accordance with the special Roman experience and the strictly patriarchal construction of the Roman family, genius is the soul or hamingja of the *pater familias*, who is the representative of the clan, and during his lifetime gathers up the hamingja of the house in his person. Through his genius he merges into the timeless personality of the subsequent generations, in its strength he worships and governs; the pater honours his own genius because it is the family residing in him, and his dependants worship his genius because he is the link connecting them with the [248] hamingja of the house. So too, the fylgia is the soul of the man in close touch with the luck of the race, albeit with significant variations, characteristic of the Teutonic system, which was less rigidly patriarchal than the Roman family. The Teuton freeman in himself impersonates the clan, and is not dependent on a pater for his self-assertion, but at the same time the hamingja is stronger in the leader or chief of the friends, and consequently his fylgia is a fuller embodiment of the clan's luck and power. In a story like that of Vigfus' fylgia who passed over to his daughter's son Glum on the demise of the old man, fylgia approximates to the dignity of the Roman genius, carrying in fact the authority and responsibility together with the higher force residing in the chieftain of the family. The poet Hallfred died on a voyage from Norway to Iceland; when the end drew near, "they saw a woman stride after the ship, she was tall and was mail-clad; she trod the seas as if it were firm ground. Hallfred looked towards her and saw that she was his fylgia woman. He said: I renounce all connection with thee. She turned to his brother and said: Wilt thou welcome me, Thorvald? He refused. Then young Hallfred said: I will welcome thee. The woman disappeared. Hallfred said: I give you the sword King's nautr, my son, but the rest of my treasures are to be placed in my coffin, if I die on board." In Hallfred, the struggles between his love of the Christian king Olaf with his white Christ, and his hankering after the ancient powers had been severe and never ending, and his last words of renunciation were surely dictated by the fear that his fylgia should drag him along with her into regions uncanny for a baptized man, but nevertheless the old feelings and ideas reassert themselves in his dying commands: his treasured weapon is to go along with the fylgia to the man who has the will and the power to uphold the honour and luck of the clan. When the divine patron is spoken of as the fylgia of the clan, or in the plural as the fylgias of the clansmen, these powers "who accompany the friends" come very near to being identical with the gods; in fact they are the divine powers in their everyday aspect, guarding and leading the clansmen outside the holy time of [249] the blot, inspiring them with prudent thoughts and warning them in dreams. The fylgia might as well embody itself in the shape of the holy animals, and appear as an ox or a ram, or in other cases as a wolf and a bear when the clan's hamingja had a strain of wild nature in its blood. In regard to the numerous dream fylgias that run to and fro in Icelandic sagas we must, however, discount a good many of the descriptions as late pieces of wit and symbolism, when the hugr of a warrior is likened to a ravening wolf and that of a crafty man to a fox, so that dreaming of wolves means war, and dreaming of foxes is taken as a warning against foul play. Nevertheless this symbolism is illustrative of the nature of the hamingja, the imagination being inspired by a fundamental fact, *viz.* that there is a mingling of mind between the warrior and the beast of war, and that there is identity between the clan and its cattle.

The hamingja as it reveals itself in its human representatives is concentrated in the ancestor, who was present in the blot, acting the deeds of the past through his friends. He is god and he is not god, according to our nomenclature. Like the ring and other treasures which are at the same time earthly life wedging into the invisible and the invisible thrusting into the everyday, the ancestor may be regarded as the divine reaching into man or man extending into the divine. The ancestor bears a name indicative of the clan; he is Yngvi among the Ynglings, Scyld among the Scyldings; Geat in the Anglo-Saxon pedigrees and Gaut, which has fastened on to Odin as an epithet, is the Geat or Gautish man. He is the ideal owner of the family treasures as well as of the history and fate in which they manifested themselves. The family which later sprang into fame as the earls of Hladi descended from men residing at Halogaland, north of Drontheim; its ancestor was Holgi, the Halogaland man, and we are told that the spear which had belonged to Holgi was deposited in the blot-house of Earl Hakon. The ancestor in history took over the features of the father of the clan, *i.e.* the grandfather or perhaps great-grandfather according to circumstances, and might appear under a name celebrated in the family. We have met him in Ketil Hæing of the Hraf-[250] nista men, and in Olaf Geirstadaalf of the Ynglingatal; we see him in Halfdan the Black, the father of Harald Fairhair, who is historical in the old sense of the word, meaning that the individual experiences of a single man have been swallowed up in the history of the family.

In primitive religion, all question of monotheism or polytheism is idle, because there is no footing in the facts for the dilemma which is evolved from the contrast between Hellenism and Christianity. The divine power may manifest itself as one or as many according to circumstances. The hamingja or divine power of course carries personality in all its functions, and so we may presume that the various places in the house had their tutelary deities; our information on this head is very scanty, but as a suggestive instance may be cited Snorri's dogmatical proposition about the goddess Syn: she watches doors of the house and keeps it shut against unwelcome visitors. The act of promise in the feast which sealed the alliance between husband and wife appears in the goddess Vár, "troth". The phrase occurring in the most nuptials of the Thrymskvida: Place the hammer in the lap of the maid, consecrate our union with the hands of Vár – intimates that the person officiating represented the divine power of troth, or what is the same thing, that he was Troth in person, because the words became living in his person.

The divine power of human acts manifests itself wherever men have dealings with one another. Syn, or "warding off", is also entrusted with the task of acting on behalf of the defendant at court against unjustified charges, and she was surely not the only divinity present in the moot place. Forseti, "the chairman", has been translated by the mythologist into a heavenly abode, but his prototypes no doubt were working on the law hills, and tried their best to pacify the contending parties so that "all departed at peace with one another", to quote the mythological catechism of Snorri.

The continuity of the gods is not dependent on their living the lives of persistent personalities from one end of the year to another. In the intervals between their manifestations, they [251] repose in the stone or the hill, and every time they come forth they may well be said to be born anew. This mode of existing, common to all beings, may have been particularly marked in the case of the great gods of the community. History shows that the gods of the kingdom or earldom were generally those of the ruling family, and for the common mass of people they sprang into existence only on those occasions when the whole population assembled for blot or for war. But we are not entitled to say that the Teutonic state always implied dependence on the royal family, and the holiness of the common meeting or law-thing naturally had its powers, representing the frith which temporarily consolidated all the clans held together by community of law and legal proceedings. Ancient culture, in all its aspects, is rooted in facts spiritual: no proof being valid unless it represents an internal reality in the men who have bargained, no alliance taking effect as real unless it be founded in the mingling of hamingja. The law-thing and the community of which it is the social and religious centre exists only at those periods when people assemble to judge matters, or when the army is called out to united action; at other times it might be called into

existence by any member who declined to take revenge for an affront and instead bound himself and his antagonist to the mediation or the judgement of the thing fellows, by lodging a complaint in formal words against his opponent and summoning him to appear before the community. During the intervals between the law moots, the clans formed free unities, without any other interdependence than that created by alliance and intermarriage; and in their killing and making up they were not interfered with by an legal system, nor did they override any law, written or unwritten. The state slept in the meantime, but it was a living reality at the very moment a man sent round the arrow summoning the whole community to the law-thing; when peace was proclaimed, the men coalesced into one brotherhood, and a common hamingja sprang up, no less real than the soul which moulded all clansmen into a solid body. The peace of the thing or law assembly and of the army was no formal etiquette, but a living soul having [252] for its body all the member through whom it operated, and in its holiness strong gods necessarily lay hid. At the times when the law moot was in abeyance, these gods dissolved or ceased from their being – our vocabulary lacks a word for expressing this state of sub-existence – but they leapt into life the very moment the law-thing was summoned and the soul of the community was re-born. Their birth manifested itself in the *vé*-bands or holy ropes which were put up to fence off the thing place and mark it as sacred and fit for legal business, and from this manifestation is probably derived the name of bonds – *bönd* – by which the gods are sometimes designated in Scandinavian literature.

Generally the gods had no names, or more truly perhaps: they needed no names; they were simply the gods of the clan, our gods, and the women (*dísir*) of the clan, the dises who have accompanied our kinsmen. But they might any time be marked off by some reminiscence of the past or some particularity in the honour and luck of the clan; the Saxons for instance called their divine progenitor Saxneat, the wielder of the short sword, the sax.

The families who leapt into historical grandeur also lifted their gods into fame, and in the unruly times of raids and conquests the conqueror ases of the viking prince obscured the dignity of the homely power. Odin carried the world before him because he led the warrior hosts across the sea and raised petty kings from the high seat of their fathers into a royal throne to command over nations; the upheaval of this deity of the Franks proves how dear spiritual alliance with the mighty conquerors in the south was to the ambitious houses of the north. The uprooting of the viking adventurers from the native soil and the metamorphosis of the ancient honour into an insatiable thirst for glory inspired the poets to re-create heaven and earth in the likeness of the royal mead hall, and seat the god in its high seat after the manner of the usurpers who sat in alien lands and planned ever new undertakings by land and sea.

The predominance of the conqueror kings in the viking age, and overpowering influence that their courts exercised

[253] on the literature, have pushed Odin and the Valhal pantheon so far into the foreground of the posthumous mythologies that the divine family holding court like earthly kings have overshadowed the venerable powers of the chieftains and petty kings and sunk their names into oblivion. In some cases the local gods have been allowed to live, because they could be used as a foil for the brilliant new-comers, by being reduced to half-trolls or giants, and sometimes they are even completely transformed into some sort of demons, implying of course that their worshippers were nothing but wild tribes, as we should term them now. An illustrious case is that of the goddess Skadi who is made the daughter of a giant; her place and position among chieftains of northern Norway is sufficiently indicated by her characteristics as ski-runner and hunter, and further by the fact that she figures in the genealogies of such clans as the earls of Hladi. Another goddess has obstinately held her ground in the memory of men, *viz.* Thorgerd Holgabrud, though she was never brought into relation with the courtly pantheon. The reason of her isolated persistence is not far to seek: she is the tutelary deity of the earls of Hladi, and launched into history by its most distinguished son, Earl Hakon, who vied with throned kings and held all Norway for a length of time. But little is known beyond this fact and the indication hidden in her name, which

means simply: the woman of the men of Halogaland, or the woman of Holgi, the eponym of the district. As we have seen the Christian sagamen still knew that the spear “which had belonged to Holgi” rested in a temple dedicated to Thorgerd and owned by Earl Hakon. Thorgerd went to Iceland with the branch of the family that emigrated, as we learn incidentally from a saga; for Grimkel is said to have had the goddess in his temple, and we know that he descended from the famous clan of earls.

The handful of titles which can be culled from northern sources is swelled by the indications sometimes lying hidden in local names and still more by monuments and classical texts relating to the tribes bordering on the Roman empire and often taking service in the legions of Rome; but failing [254] all historical and mythological information, the names are to us but empty words. They may command interest insofar as they lend a faint tinge of colour to the picture we gather indirectly from popular literature of the clans and tribes worshipping, each within its own homestead and sanctuary, the powers of their fathers; and thus serve to dispel once and for all the chimera of a common Teutonic pantheon or a set of mythological tenets universal throughout the Teutonic territory.

A peculiar class in the world of gods is formed by the divine beings who are only impersonations of a phase in the ritual. During the blot, the whole is pervaded with god, and all actions or states may crystallise into a personal appearance of the divine power, or in other words every acting person is a personification of the divine act furthered through his interference. The gods Hoenir and Lodur, whom we have met in the creation legend, are pale shapes, as we say, because they have no existence beyond the ritual observance necessary to complete the sacrifice. The most interesting person among these cult shapes, because comparatively well known, is Heimdal. His character is sufficiently indicated by his cult epithets; he resides in the victim, for he is called the horny one and thus identified with the original and most common sacrificial animal, the ram. He is born by nine mothers whose names are preserved in mythological lists: among these are found the giantesses killed by Thor on his visit to Geirrod in the cattle fold, and it is a safe guess that all the nine sisters are impersonations of some incident or other during the blot. The myth of his birth then describes the literal truth that the god is called into being by the preparations of the feast. He is nourished by the blood of the victim and by the megin of the earth, *i.e.* he grows as the preparation of the meat and the sacrificial hearth proceeds. He is the watcher of the gods on the rim of the world; he is the father of the “holy host” that assembles in the blot hall. Heimdal is the blot itself, the stillness and the peace, not in modern abstraction, but as the power which resides in the house and which comes in the men, constraining them to forbearance against each other and to anxious observance [255] of the rules necessary for the happy proceeding of the sacrificial acts; he is the spirit guarding against mishaps and inroads from powers hostile to the blot, and watches on the rim of the world or the cosmogenic hearth. We are led to infer that the skull of the victim was placed near or on the fireplace, and performed a symbolic part in the sacrificial drama, and when it is said that in poetical language Heimdal's sword is called his head, the meaning is probably that he was represented by the skull with its horns attached, and that this skull was a ceremonial weapon turned against the powers of evil. But this symbolic impersonation does not, of course, exclude the possibility that one of the officiants may have played his part in the cultic observances, just as the chief who performed the slaughtering and battle with the giants in the cattle fold and in the hall impersonated Thor, the god of the clan who had his abode in the sacred hammer.

To this class of divine apparitions also pertained the daughter of Thor, Thrudr, who is “power”, and his sons, Modi and Magni, who are his powerful courage and resolution. To understand these personifications it is necessary to realise the difference between primitive psychology and modern abstraction, and to bear in mind that psychic states were experienced as attributes of the soul; all virtues and passions are instinct with personality, because they represent men in a peculiar state of courage or fear rather than passions loosened from the substratum by analysis as in our psychology. In Modi lives the resolution

which makes Thor and his human representative go on with the fearful work of killing the sacred animal and combating the demons.

Among the gods, Loki occupies a place of his own. His part in the sacred drama is that of the plotter who sets the conflict in motion and leads the giants on to the assault that entails their defeat. His origin and *raison d'être* is purely dramatic; like his confreres in other rituals and mythologies he is a child of the "games", and herein lies the cause of his double nature. As the wily father of artifice whose office is to drag the demoniacal powers into the play and effect their down- [256] fall, he comes very near representing evil, and he is thus mythically related to the unheore ogres with which the gods contend; from his is born the serpent whose head Thor repeatedly crushed, as also the wolf Fenrir, the adversary of Odin. But as the sacred actor who performs a necessary part in the great redemptory work of the blot, he – *i.e.* his human impersonation – is a god among gods, beneficent and inviolable. He is the humourist and jester of the rites, foul-mouthed and ever fertile in contrivance. Under the influence of Christian ideas and legends, this double-faced originator of fateful events naturally expanded into a personification of the evil principle in existence; the legends in which he played a prominent part were so pregnant in character that they needed no forcing to develop into the life story of a malignant demon. Loki came near to becoming a counterpart of the Christian devil, but his origin rendered him far superior to the father of evil in subtle shades of character. It is partly due to this intensely human and thus eminently demoniac figure that the eschatology of the viking age acquired depth and grandeur excelling the rigid dogmatism of its model, or rather inspiring example, the apocalypse of the Christian church.

The sacrificial feast now lies open to us in its whole depth. The blot is the transfiguration of life, and we shall see without wonder the mood of the participants spreading out over the entire scale of life. The feast comes as a stoppage in the current of events, which causes life to flow on and fill man with its might, until he almost lifted from his seat.

There was a great tension in the soul, which meant that luck had power far beyond its daily measure in the men, that the high holiness reigned in them according to its will, and did not leave them free to act upon the casual impulse of the moment. All motions of the soul and body were stronger than usual, but also heavier. The holiness bound them. Men moved in the daily holiness as in something great which fitted, the life of the feast was felt as the greater thing that overshadowed.

Every act and every word is eternal, working, not as in [257] daily practice upon a finite and circumscribed object towards a particular goal, but as we should say prototypic; proceeding from the hamingja as a whole and influencing its fate as a whole. The blot is creation in the deepest and widest sense of the word. By sacrificing, men draw the gods into themselves and scoop life-giving draughts from the source of the hamingja; and on the other hand they create the gods and life itself. By slaughtering and eating, they absorb life from the sacred animal, the repository of the hamingja, but none the less they create the herds and make them advance into new and fruitful existence. When all is said, the truth comes out; the blot is not men creating gods or gods creating men, but a creative act out of which gods and men and everything proceed. The fundamental experience of primitive life often expressing itself directly in the spirit and morphology of the language is: being and becoming, doing and suffering, whereas to us, life centres round the individual who is or becomes, the doer and the sufferer; our sentence is centred in a subject governing the verb, but behind the language lies another type in which the verb is the soul, men being rather manifestations and mediums than subjects. The best illustration of this view is contained in the Nordic words denoting gods: *ráð* and *regin*, both of them neuters, meaning power or hamingja, the powers who possess the quality of personality but are personal in virtue of something deeper and broader (cf. II 246).

There was something more, a solemnity of tension which accompanied every little detail in the actions of the cult-fellows, because a future whose horizon was the world and the extinction of which was the shattering of that world, was eased over, little by little, through

the ceremonies, from the world of possibility to the world of reality. From man to man the horn passed down the hall, one by one the glances of those present were drawn up, and the voice of the standing drinker sounded through a silence of anticipation; whether his words flowed from his lips without stammering, whether he drank properly, whether he drank the whole cup; these things decided both luck and honour. [258]

There was tension at the sacrifice, but not fear. Certainty as to means and end was a necessity for the blot-man. He could not step forward and deliver his *formæli* if he did not feel in himself that which made his words whole; as soon as the mastery of the world failed him, the time of blot was for ever past for him and his clan. But the certainty had its strong religious glow, because it depended on men's will and power to submit to a definite order of things, which meant strength to him who stood in the centre, but death to any who chanced to turn athwart the law.

All this is contained in the word blot. Its latent fervour can be felt when we witness it serving the experience of Christianity. Most tribes discarded it as being too strongly imbued with ancient ideas and emotions; the Goths, however, enlisted it into the service of the new god, using the *blótan* of worshipping God with a holy body acceptable unto God, applying it to Anna the prophetess who served God with fastings and prayers night and day, and to the true worshipper of God who doeth His will.

A peculiar stillness was required at the blot.

The devotion of the blot feast did not ring out unheeded, we find an echo in the provisions of the mediæval guilds regarding the brethren's habits of drinking. Everything is carefully thought of; that first of all the minni cup shall be carried round without interruption, that all shall sit in quiet anticipation paying full attention to the act, neither leaving their place nor going to sleep on the benches during the solemnity, that the individual shall rise and perform rightly and to the full the religious duty with the cup before sitting down again; provision is also made for the case of any who should let the minni cup slip from his hand, or refuse to accept it when his neighbour hands it on, or scorn to rise and celebrate the minni when he is addressed, or stand on the floor and chant the minni with his dagger on and his head covered. In these orders as to what is to be done and what avoided when the minni is being blessed or sung, lies the veneration of the cult; indeed, the fact that the rules of propriety should be enforced or in [259] case of need upheld by punishment, cannot but enhance the impression made upon us; for many of the rules were purely traditional, so that the observance of them is only a testimony to deeply ingrained custom.

But the stillness had to have its precise counterpart in festive tumult, the rejoicing aloud at the victory of life. The feast had to be drunk with strength, all must feel that the god was in the house. There was little joy at the feast, runs the lament over a blot that failed.

As the symbol of the toast-drinking, the introductory verses of the *Sigdrifumál* have a claim to be heard; they are a poetic fantasia on the ritual of life, generalised into a picture of two heroes, *i.e.* typical human beings, under the sacredly powerful forms which held their culture together.

When Sigurd had slit Sigdrifa's byrnie with his sword, thereby releasing her from the enchanted sleep, she sat up, looked at the man, and said: "What by my byrnie? What loosed me from sleep? Who freed me from slumber-pale spell?" He answered: "That did Sigmund's son and Sigurd's sword – newly has it spread a feast for ravens." Then he asked her name. Whereupon she took a horn of mead and gave him a minni-drink: "Hail day, hail day's son, hail night and night's kinswoman; with gentle eyes see hither and give victory to those sitting here. Hail ases, hail asynies, hail many-useful earth, grant gift of speech and man-wit to us two athelings, and hands of healing as long as we may live."

To translate this *heill*, wherewith the gods are given luck and praised for luck, would be equivalent to transforming our culture to that which in its late flowering produced these verses.

## ESSAY ON RITUAL DRAMA

It is a task of almost disheartening difficulty to interpret the culture and religion of a primitive race in modern language. Our words are incapable of expressing ideas that are not only divergent from our own, but run in totally different dimensions. In order to reproduce the intellectual life of these races, we must unlearn our psychology, and learn another, no less reasonable but differing in its very principles. Primitive ideas and sensations and sentiments have a harmony and tension of their own, because their holders group the harvest of experience according to another point of view, bring it to a consciousness under strange aspects and construct a reality so alien to ours that words like god and man, life and death, as they are understood by Europeans, carry no meaning in their language.

In preference to the term of primitive – conveying the preposterous idea of something incipient and consequently less “developed” – I would suggest the use of “classical” to indicate the type of culture confronting us in the ancient peoples of Greece and Rome and India etc. as well as in contemporary races beyond the pale of European civilization. A nomenclature allusive to the antagonism between ancient Greece and modern Europe is better suited to bring out the vital characteristics of the classical, realistic, all-embracing harmony of experience as opposed to our romantic civilisation, the reality of which is centered in the human soul and embraces only the reactions of mind on a shadowy world outside in the form of ideas, sentiments and moods.

The antagonism between classical and romantic culture is most keenly felt in the circumstance that the former presup- [261] poses a conception of time and space incompatible with our most elementary ideas and still more irreconcilable with our actual experience. In our experience the primary property of bodies is extension, whereas in classical culture it is primarily a force or life that governs all ideas; the earth is not principally the expanse of fruitful soil, but soil, fertility itself, and the reality of the spacious earth is as wholly present in a clod resting in my hand as in the fields stretching far and wide; a mouthful of water is water in the same sense as all the rivers and oceans of the world. In the same way, time is, in our experience, a stream of events descending from the unknown mists of beginning and running in a continuous flow down the future into the unknown; to the men of classical ages the actual life is the result of a concurrent beginning and has its source in the religious feast. The festival consists in a creation or new birth outside time, eternal it might be called, if the word were not as misleading as all others and as inadequate to describe an experience of a totally alien character. When the priest or chieftain ploughs the ritual furrow, when the first seed is sown while the story of the origin of corn is recited, when the warriors act the war game, they make history, do the real work, fight the real battle, and when the men sally forth with the plough or the seed or the weapons, they are only realising what was created in the ritual act. As with the future so with the past: the religious events constitute reality, and actual life acquires reality insofar as it develops the experience acquired in the world of the gods, into successive incidents and definite particulars. During the festival the gods take possession of the whole place; everything is filled with divine life, creating power: mean and their belongings, the house in which the sacrifice is held, the time from the opening consecration to the last ceremony of consummation; the events are eternal and dynamic like a germ that hides a coming plant in its core. The acts that fill up the time may differ in degree of holiness, but there is no difference in kind; one and all they print ineffaceable lines on the physiognomy of the future. This pregnancy of life during the festival makes itself felt in the anxious care of the worshippers – as [262] manifested in strict rules of conduct – to eschew any occupation likely to influence the coming time to its disadvantage. The road of the sacrificers is marked by prohibitions as well as by injunctions; it is a road leading to gladness and strength, but lined with tabus indicating dangers to be avoided.



Consequently, classical culture is essentially active. In our experience time and history are given facts: a destiny linking the life of the individual to the lives of his predecessors; time being a flow of events, we cannot help but being waves in the stream borne along by the sheer weight of the past. Primitive man feels the importance of past events as keenly as we do, and he appreciates their determining impulse still more keenly, but to him the past is energy; he embraces his destiny, or rather the destiny of his race as it has manifested itself in the ancestors, as his own will, and instead of reacting upon the past he acts from it and remoulds it into living actuality.

Hence it follows that his religion is dramatic in character; his piety does not find an outlet in devotion and surrender, in praying and receiving, but in action. Life must be won, death, sin, evil must be conquered. To form a true idea of this conquest of life, it is necessary, however, to bear in mind that classical thinking is concrete in its very essence; in our experience, life is something abstract, power or energy entering into a variety of forms, whereas in classical culture it is "luck and honour", life as it manifests itself in the character of the race, in its history, in its traditional friendship and enmity towards other circles of men, its individual relation to the powers and beings of nature. The festival covers the history of the clan or the people from its very beginning to the day of the feast, concentrated into one tremendous event. It recreates life, not as a plastic possibility, like clay ready to be moulded into any shape, but as a destiny, as a definite sequence of events, made up of war or husbandry, of marriage and child-bearing or formation of friendships, as history went onward into the future. The person who fights in the ritual is the god, the clan personified, as we say, in one heroic figure, and his antagonist is the enemy, all the enemies of the race, spiritual as well as material, imper-

[263] sonated by the demon; when Thor crushes the giant or Indra slays Vritra, his deed comprehends all the wars living in the memory of the clan, and his success ensures the repetition of its victories in the future. The god fights the battle *kat' exochen* and wins the victory *kat' exochen*. Our words being unable to express the wholeness or fulness of classical experience, we are reduced to defining it from different points of view, f.i. by calling the events of the festival prototypic. In order to give expression to the fulness, the eternal or universal force of the ritual, we are tempted to reduce it to acceptable terms by a sort of peeling, f.i. by saying that the ceremonies represent a divine act or event, while at the same time symbolising the history of the clan. This may be our only way of approach to classical experience, but it is nevertheless true that by such an explanation we have irretrievably perverted the meaning of the ritual and destroyed the organic wholeness of its conception. The religious principle does not admit of an analysis on our lines nor of any translation into our historical forms.

The rites of worship are predetermined by the active character of classical culture. In reality no special forms of religion exist, in the sense that piety gives rise to acts or gestures peculiar to a spirit of devotion; ritual ceremonies are nothing but the functions of ordinary life: eating, drinking, working, hunting, ploughing, fighting, exalted by the festival into eternal prototypically pregnant acts; in fact, every act performed during the sacred period necessarily turns into a rite. When circumstances require that the sacrificers move from one spot to another, their walk becomes a procession, a creative march; when any instrument has to be shifted into another position, a holy rite of religious import is born; when the worshippers partake of meat and drink, a sacrament comes into existence. The forms of religion vary according to the character of the people and to its habits of life; among hunters they consist of scenes of the chase, among peasants of scenes of ploughing, sowing and harvesting, among shepherds of scenes of sacrificial banquets, among warriors of fighting episodes: in short, ritual reproduces the history and the daily life of the people in [264] the dimension of holiness. The predominant motif of the drama among Aryan races is strife: the contention between the gods, or life-giving powers, and the demons, who are constantly on

the watch for an opportunity to sow death and destruction and turn this fair world into a barren wilderness.

The divergence of experience occasions a radical difference between the fundamental principles of classical and of modern drama. A modern play is made up by a sequence of events which are unrolled chronologically before the spectators, and we look on with the same expectant interest as we watch an episode of the street in the process of development; we expect to be told a new story, to be introduced to persons who up to this moment have been strangers to us, to be initiated into their destiny by following their discourse and interaction; we strain eager eyes anxious to learn how the catastrophe is prepared, in what way the conflict becomes tense and fearful, how the problem is solved. In ritual drama the exact reverse holds good: classical drama presupposes that the fable is present to the minds of the participants, the worshippers stand in need of no enlightenment or exposition of the theme, the drama being their own history, its evolution the working out of their own destiny. In fact, they are not spectators but actors, and their presence makes up the play. They are not present to learn how the story goes, but to live it and carry it through to a happy conclusion; they know exactly what is going to happen and how it is going to end, but they are all of them responsible for a consummation which turns a possible tragedy into the triumph of life. With them there is no scope for an emotion such as our curiosity; our eagerness of expectation is replaced by an interest of far keener tension, waiting as they are with bated breath for history to realise itself and to win through to a new, powerful existence.

The principle of ritual drama involves a form totally different from the structure that comes naturally to us. Modern drama rises like an arch tensely spanned from exposition through conflict to solution, whereas ritual drama is characterised by an intensity and condensation not comparable to any form in [265] our experience. To make its mode of expression clear, we must go to classical culture itself for a suitable illustration, and recall that life is not confined to one form of appearance nor dependent for its reality on a visual manifestation, but exists as a force intensely capable of emerging into shapes apprehensible by the senses. Ritual drama does not evolve within the boundaries of the feat: the festival is the drama itself; the whole extent of its theme is inherent in every single moment and comes out in each several situation during the festival. When f.i. the Vedic worshippers kill the victim, when its flesh is eaten in the sacrificial meal, when soma is pressed and when it is offered up and consumed, on each occasion the fight of Indra comes to life before the sacrificers.

The identity of the festival with the drama brings it about that every act required for practical and ritual purposes must necessarily give expression to the motif of the drama; a turn of the hand, the flash of a knife, the lifting of the victim from the ground, the partition of its body: every item means acting a part. As a consequence an outside spectator will never be able immediately to read the import of the gestures; his explanation will consist of guesses at random, unless it is founded on positive information imparted by the initiates. Thus ritual drama is made up largely of symbolic acts, in no way realistically representing the event implied, but these conventional gesture shade off by degrees into imitative movements and attitudes, more or less suggestive of the acting in our theatres. Accordingly our distinction between symbolism and realistic mimicry does not hold good in the case of ritual drama, and even the words symbol and symbolise are apt to be misleading insofar as they imply a merely fictitious or adventitious parallelism between form and idea. In the following pages "symbol" only serves the practical purpose of indicating dramatic gestures and objects the import of which is not discernible to the uninitiated.

Our phrase "the festival is the drama", involves still another consequence, *viz.* that no line can be drawn between ritual actors and ritual implements. The god may be impersonated by a man, but it is no less probable that he will make his ap- [266] pearance in the form of a skull, a ram's head or horn or any other object resting on the sacrificial place, and in this guise play his part as well as by means of the acts and gestures of the sacrificers.

In classical culture, action and speech make up the totality of the drama, so that neither of the two can drop out without the drama falling to pieces or disappearing. Our plays are

composed on the fundamental principle that the words cover the story or plot, so that a reader will be completely instructed in the history of the persons by reading the dialogue consecutively; the play is acted in order to bring out the events implied in the word. In primitive drama, action and speech supplement one another so intimately that the drama comes into life through their interaction.

The subject and the purpose of a ritual drama are developed in a legend which can be defined approximately as the programmed of the play. The legend reproduces history as it really happened, *viz.* as it was enacted on the ceremonial stage during the festival; thus to eyes accustomed to other forms of tradition, legend has the appearance of mixing up real events with elements of a different character. A patient scrutiny of classical history as opposed to modern records of past events should disclose a difference not consisting in divergent forms of tradition but in incompatible modes of experience. Our historical events move to the tempo of chronology, classical history turns on an eternal creative reproduction operative in the festival and resulting in the renewal of daily life; or past is preserved as a series of facts, consummated once for all and unchangeable, strung on a thread of dates like dried berries, whereas classical history is living and breathing, is for ever being actualised into fresh combinations and new harmonies of experience, as is the wont of living things or beings. It is this history which manifests itself in drama and legend. Either mode of experience creates its own form according to its needs; obviously these forms cannot be measured one against another, so that no analysis, no formula or theory regarding what is called primitive mentality suffices to convert legendary history into chronological [267] record. The interpretations of myth given by European analysis fall wide of the mark, because the analyst naively credits the narrators with his own historical sense, as if it were possible for classical man to step out of himself and look at himself from outside; the ethnologist regards myth as a piece of figurative disguise or makeshift, and searches for a kernel of fact beneath the trappings of mythical fancy, as though this scientific treatment really implied that "primitive man" is able to examine his own ideas and feelings from a point of view unnatural to him, and only huddles them into inadequate forms for want of time and opportunity to develop his mental powers. As soon as the original character of legend is recognised, mythology will take on a new aspect and disclose itself as a body of valuable "historical documents".

The only highway to the interpretation of a people's legends lies through an intimate study of its experience and its ideas, or more correctly, through a realisation of the individual harmony of experience and idea which constitutes the foundation of its life and institutions; the historian of religion will not be able to elucidate the ritual and the legends of a classical race until he has succeeded in identifying himself – so far as such an identification is possible to modern man – with the worshippers, until he has learnt to look at things with their eyes, to re-experience heaven and earth, animals and plants, and convert this new experience into appropriate ideas. No general research into the customs and myths of "primitive culture" can do more than prepare the ground for an examination of each particular people as a personality.

The legend does not originate in the cult as an explanation of its rites and ceremonies. Speculations as to the origin of the myths are idle, as in most cases they hail from times that are inaccessible to our eyes, even if we be furnished with the strongest glasses of prehistoric theory. In fact, the origin of the myth, its provenance, whether grown in the soil or imported from without, are questions of inferior interest, the myths are real insofar as they have been incorporated into the ritual and made motifs of the drama. In an examination of the matter of mytho- [268] logy we are confronted by another problem of greater importance, *viz.* the distinction between true legend and free myth or story; the latter is nothing but a piece of entertainment which can be told anywhere to while away the time and to raise a laugh, whereas the former belongs to the feast and may not be narrated otherwise than during certain periods of time and in certain circles of men. Norwegian literature exhibits specimens of such fairy tales as f.i. the story of Thor's visit to Utgarda-Loki (SE 44). Contes of this kind are absorbing interest as refracting the ideas and emotions of the narrators and listeners; the

burlesque of the god plunging and floundering in the net of illusion woven by the giants, gives a thrilling picture of the Norwegian's weird experience in Utgard. In their form, too, such fables necessarily bear the stamp of the imagination at work in the legends – man having only one sort of imagination to do duty in his leisure hours of jest as well as in his moments of tense passion – and thus the pictures of the myths shadow forth the solemn images of the ritual. Some of the scenes of the Thor myth – such as the killing of his rams – obviously turn upon pure cult motifs, but in the case of this myth the problem is complicated by the fact that the Northern myths have been subjected to a literary treatment; probably Snorri or a predecessor of his had a hand in turning a jolly tale into a work of art by the intermixture of features from several sources.

The legend not only develops the dramatic action into narrative forms, it releases, also, the conception inherent in the scenes and the motives and emotions of the participants in the drama, their anxiety, their tension of feeling, their triumph. The malice and enmity of the demons which lie at the back of the drama like a dark, threatening storm to be dissipated by means of the happy consummation of the ritual, are projected by the legend into epic activity; if the gods did not continually foil the schemes of the evil powers, if they did not create the world over and over again, the giants would turn it into a wilderness, they would steal Thor's hammer, swallow sun and moon and extinguish the light of the world, carry off the goddess and her life-giving food, hide the ale, making everything [269] unheore, and in the legend this dreadful possibility is put into time as if it had really come to pass and required to be remedied. If the dragon were not slain over and over again, the events of Ragnarok as described by the myth would immediately come true: the dragon blow venom far and wide and fills all the air and the sea with his poisonous breath, thus the legend telling how the god frustrated the plotting of the demon will run, as in the verses of Vsp. (2-6) "Who has filled the air with poison and carried off the goddess to the realm of the demons? – Thor rose, he seldom keeps his seat when such things reach his ears".

In classical culture, religion is the heart of the people. During the festival, life is brought to its highest pitch; ritual drama represents the passionate expression of life enjoyed to the full, and becomes play or art. In modern civilisation where art and religion have parted company, men leave work in order to play: they indulge in games for recreation, they suspend their practical pursuits – or avoid altogether becoming entangled in worldly cares – to contemplate life and their own souls in poetry of aloofness, to sing lyrics and compose dramas dealing with life. Play has its very *raison d'être* in its absolute character, its self-existence, in other words its independence of the laws governing actual life, its irreality, as is expressed forcibly in such terms as to "play at" being, and "art for art's sake", whether this phrase is taken to mean that art has absolutely no purpose outside itself, or that it is expected to act indirectly as a mental tonic upon the happiness and morals of ordinary people. In every sense of the word our intellectual life is the life of a spectator at a play, and our literary and artistic interests have developed forms of their own; through this bisection of life art comes into existence as a separate reality and aesthetic enjoyment is born, side by side with and consequently in opposition to religious devotion. In classical religion art can never be divorced from religion, because religion is art in itself and religion becomes art by working in a sphere above the exigencies of the hour. Ritual drama was a play, a game in a sense that sounds unfamiliar to our ears, because it involved a real contest, drew

[270] its interest, in fact, from the circumstance that the issue was of greater moment than all secular decisions, that the perils exceeded all possible risks in daily life, that it had practical results of far more vital importance than any successes achieved by work. The joy of playing is rooted so firmly in passionate earnest that it would lose its spice in the event of its being turned into mere make-believe; heaven and earth, luck and honour, past and future, happiness, in body and mind, hang in the balance and are won – or lost – by the game. No wonder that the play ends on a note of triumphant, overpowering joy: there was gladness in the hall.

A statement that the emotions called up by the festival were intensely, even exclusively of a religious character, thus amounts to saying that they included what we call an aesthetic enjoyment of the scenes as art and of its language as poetry. The ritual moves in a region of speech above the commonplace dialogue of every day; it gives birth to a vocabulary abounding in metaphors and images, in stately solemn phrases bearing in their very rhythm and cadence the weight of chanting. This formal speech is poetry because it is the passionate language of life at its highest and strongest moments; not the cry of a soul artificially and aesthetically exalted to a tension, partly delight and partly pain, by high-strung emotions and raptures of ecstasy, but the soberly fervent words of life in the throes of new birth, hovering on the brink of tragedy and triumphantly redeeming itself. Classical poetry voices the experience of history – the history of the clansmen – coming to life and through its new birth gathering strength to achieve greater and more ambitious objects. The poetical language differs from habitual speech in being more ornate in dress as well as more passionate in spirit, but not in being less true to nature; its images and metaphors stand out from the homely phrases of the day, because they illustrate the facts of life as they appear on the ritual stage: life as it really is.

Among the Teutons, poetry has preserved the ritual language in its kennings and epithets. The principle of style, obtaining in the scaldic poetics, that warriors are correctly para- [271] phrased by a divine name, as f.i. the Tyr of the sword, is derived from the ritual fact that men were gods during the festival; when woman is called the dis or goddess of the ale, we catch a glimpse of the sacred figure carrying the cup round the hall along the row of worshippers. By the eleventh century the poetical language had become a literary idiom, or rather jargon, and most of the kennings are little more than clichés, but these very clichés owe their currency to the pageant of the ancient drama. When gold is called the light of the water, the shield is styled the ship of Ull, the sword is paraphrased as Heimdal's head, and Odin is characterised as the friend of Hoenir, the kenning is nothing less than a dramatic scene – and a myth – crystallised or rather stylised into a compact figure as a picture in so-called conventionalised art.

In the court poetry the kennings were reduced to poetical equivalents of the naked word, to be used at random according to the demands of rhythm and rhyme; originally their use was determined, not by aesthetic fancy, but by truly artistic, *i.e.* religious reality, to illustrate an actual situation or to reproduce an actual picture from the dramatic scene. The literary craftsman would make Odin the friend of Hoenir when metrical or aesthetic reasons demanded variety or the poet felt that his verses needed a little polish; in ritual poetry the kenning reflects a scene in which Odin and Hoenir acted together, and thus add precision to the imagery of the drama. In a paraphrase like that of Odin as the robber of the ale or mead, professional poets saw no more than a pretty substitute for a rather hackneyed name; in the legend it conjured up a scene of vital influence, and consequently of overwhelming power over the imagination of the listeners. The original force of the poetic language is recognisable in the verse of Grímnismál (50) in a list of Odin's names: "I called myself Svidurr and Svidrir in the house of Sokkmimir, when I concealed my name to the ancient giant and slew his son Midvidnir". The earliest scalds had not wholly emancipated themselves from the reality of the festival; frequently a display of flowing poetic draperies has replaced the clinging metaphors of legendary poetry, but occasionally the [272] clear-cut images of the drama shine through the elaboration of their comparisons. An excellent example is furnished by the opening verses of Eyvind's Háleygjatal, cf. *infra*. p. 327.

The dramatic character of the festival is attested by the style of the Eddic poems which still bears witness to its origin in the stirring spectacular life of the drama. It has none of the characteristics peculiar to epic poetry, its slow, steady stride, its attention to the things marking its way. The Eddic poems do not even tell the story; one scene leaps forth after another, evoked at times by a lightning revelation of an attitude or of a sword descending on a head, at other times by a piece of a dialogue. The sequence of the pictures suggests a chain of events composing a forcible, passionate story, but it is left to the memory -- not to the imagination – of the reader to supply the links between them.

In its suggestiveness and its allusiveness, its appeal not to the imagination but to the memory or to an imaginative power or recollection, in its vividness of effect, this style represents the language of the legends, though in various stages of evolution, as becoming a literary medium. Some of the poems are all but pure legends – the only unadulterated legends left to us – others are so far evolved as to be poems founded on legend and displaying odds and ends of ritual material.

The character of the sacrifice among the Teutons is further indicated by the word in use for play or game; *leikr* – A S *lác* – denotes play and sacrifice (f.i. Gen. 975, 1497, 2843, 2933; applied to mass: Guthl. 1084; hence the meaning of gift as in Beow. 43, 1863, B A Po. III 183(1); cf. *infra* p. 278). In Norwegian *leikr* enters into kennings denoting battle, a fact indicative of the holiness of the warriors and the religious character of war (Hildar *leikr* etc.); cf. Beow. 1561 etc.

Our hope of forming an idea of the ritual among the Northerners is founded on the examination of these reminiscences preserved in poetic similes, completed by that of the legendary material embedded in the myths. On account of the abrupt, allusive and partly obscure character of the remains, the traces of the drama would scarcely be recognisable, if the eye of the [273] examiner had not been trained by experience in other parts of the world, where religious forms are presented in their integrity and effectual power. The fragmentary state of the material will never admit of reconstructing the ritual drama as a whole, but the fragments should be numerous enough to reproduce a variety of scattered scenes sufficient to reveal the character of the blot. At times our information is such as to lead us to the very threshold of a hypotheses and mockingly to leave us standing in the dark with one foot seeking for a hold in the void. The material examined here is far from being exhaustive; I have given no account of a great many expeditions that landed the investigator in hypotheses that had nothing to recommend them but the possibility that they were true; but I feel confident that a greater amount of ingenuity and constructive power will succeed in gathering together into an orderly pattern threads that have here been left hanging loose.

## FIGHTING THE DEMON

The dominant motif of the Northern drama is the struggle between the gods and the demons. Under the hands of later redactors and not least through the narratory skill of Snorri the myths of Thor have been transformed into subtle works of art, but for all the literary skill of the antiquarian the stamp of their origin as legends or programmes for ritual dramas is not entirely effaced, and in some cases the allusions to an underlying drama are plainly visible – preeminently in the myth which relates Thor's visit to the giant Geirrod.

Once upon a time the god was enticed by Loki into setting out for the realm of the giants without his hammer and customary accoutrements of belt and gloves. On his road he put up, along with his companions Loki and Thialfi, at the house of a giantess who was called Grid and was the mother of Vidar. Grid warned the god against the perils awaiting him in the homestead of Geirrod and supplied him with a girdle and a pair of iron gloves and in addition with her staff, Gridarvolr. Thus equipped Thor sallied forth and reached the bank of a [274] broad river called Vimur. He put on the girdle of Grid and waded into the stream steadying his stride by thrusting the staff into the bottom against the force of the waves, and supporting his friends who caught hold of his belt. In the middle of his passage the river swelled to such a degree that its waters rose over his shoulders. Casting a glance up the mountain he saw that the daughter of Geirrod was standing astride the river, and ceased from wondering at the mighty flooding. A river should be stemmed at its source, he exclaimed and flung a stone at her with the result that the waters subsided and he was able to lift himself and his companions out of the stream. This incident explains why the rowan is called the saviour of Thor. On his arrival at the residence of Geirrod he was shown into the goat's house, but no sooner had he taken his seat than he felt the chair being raised under him, and he only saved his head by thrusting this staff against the roof and pushing back, and instantly a loud outcry

was heard, for by forcing his chair toward the floor he had broken the backs of Geirrod's daughters. After this Thor was invited into the hall; he found fires burning down the length so of the room and the inmates engaged in games. He was placed opposite to the giant, and Geirrod took up a glowing bolt of iron and hurled it at the god, but Thor caught it with his gloves and raised it ready for striking. Frightened by the threatening attitude of the god the demon hurried behind a pillar for safety. Thor threw the bolt with such force that it went through the pillar and killed the giant crouching behind it.

By analogy with the rites of other religions – first and foremost those of the Aryan brethren of the Teutons in Greece and India – we are justified in supposing that the combat of the god was dramatically expressed in the slaughtering of the sacrificial victim, and in Snorri's version of the Geirrod myth there are still some traces of an ancient legend, clear enough to show that the struggle between Thor and Geirrod was enacted during the festival. On his arrival Thor is shown into the goat's house and from there into the hall where games are going on: in other words, the scene of the story is in the sacrificial feast. [275] The narrator evidently believed that the reception was meant for a gesture of contempt, and by a rather scatter-brained copyist goat's house has been altered into guest's house; but Thor's visit to the small cattle may safely be regarded as anything but a romantic episode in the career of the hero god. The legend alluded to a dramatic scene of slaughter in which the god, or in ritual words the representative of the god among the sacrificers, started with his assistants for the fold to kill the victim and, symbolically, to slay the demon. For this purpose the leader of the ceremony was furnished with a staff. As a rule the glorious killer of the giants wields a weapon of more impressive appearance, and the myth supplies an explanation how it came about that the god was unprepared for action and had to put with this quaint substitute for his famous hammer. This episode of the visit to Geirrod intimates that the sacrificer in this part of the drama was equipped with a cult instrument of a peculiar character, and thus furnishes a parallel to the Frey myth explaining that the god had to kill his antagonist with the horn of a stag, because he had parted with his sword (S E 38). In reality this part of the myth, or rather of the legend at the back of the myth, is not explanatory, but reproduces a ceremony introductory to the sacrifice in which the officiating person was consecrated for his task and invested with the sacrificial implements appropriate to the act. The ritual character of the staff is sufficiently marked by its name; in the first place staff is expressed by a ritual word, *völr*; in the second place its character is defined by its relation to a power that can only be characterised as the friend of Thor.

As to the shape of this implement the first part of the myth may perhaps offer some intimation. We find there a graphic description of Thor's journey into Utgard, where his progress is hampered by foaming rivers which would have swept him off his feet if he had not thrust his staff firmly into the bottom. In all probability this part of the god's exploit, his braving the streams that flowed icily cold with venom and cutting swords, had its representation at the sacrifice, at the moment when the blood spirted from the victim. The shedding of the sacred [276] blood was an occasion for anxiety and solicitous care, and it is probable that Thor's perilous march has been dramatically and symbolically rendered in the rite that was necessary to prevent the blood from running outside the vessel and being wasted. The connexion between legend and rite is seen in the trait that the god lifted himself out of the river by grasping a rowan – probably the sacred staff had to be made of rowan's wood; the words: “rowan is the rescue of Thor”, read like a ritual formula or a poetical kenning based on the ceremonial phrase.

As it happens, this legend has received poetical treatment in a poem which has come down to us: Eilifs' Thorsdrapa. A scrutiny of the verses reveals that the poet was in touch with the language of the drama and very probably had himself seen the myth enacted; his kennings are not mere pomp of words gathered at random from the vocabulary of courtly poets and put together according to the demands of style and metre, but for the greater part at least are chosen to fit in with the situation of the drama. In Eilif's metaphors the foaming rivers are called the blood of the giantess, the spirting jet of her blood, the sword-produced fluid. True to the ritual representation he designated the sky as the roof the hall. In v. 7 he

has preserved part of the sacrificial formula; the only resource – *ráð* – left to Thor when the stream all but overwhelmed him, was to cry out: “My megin shall grow up to the roof, unless the blood of the giantess is stilled”. The version of Snorri translated the formula into an epic piece of mythology: “Do not swell further, waters of Vimur, I must wade your stream unto the seat of the giant; know, if you grow higher, my asemegin will grow as high as heaven”. The matter is identical in the poem of Eilif and in the myth of Snorri, but in the poetical version the incident is drawn from the stirring scenes in the sacrificial hall.

As to the ritual handling of the staff we are left in ignorance by the myth, but some hints, if not a complete explanation, may perhaps be sought in a story incorporated in the *Landnámabok*. An Icelandic peasant, Lodmund, was involved in a conflict of long standing with his neighbour, Thrasi. One day the latter became aware that a flood of water was coming

[277] down from the mountain above his homestead; he conceived the bright idea of turning this natural phenomenon to account and by some art known to himself he led the water so well and wisely that it bore down upon the farm of his adversary. Lodmund was sitting his hall when one of his thralls came panting in and shouted to his master that a sea was making for the house; the old man, who was blind, rose and bade the thrall lead him to the brink of the water and thrust his staff into the stream, then he gripped the staff, set his teeth in a ring attached to it, and the water turned right about taking its course towards the fields of Thrasi. Thrasi accepted the challenge, and now the pair of sages followed and directed the stream turn and turn about, until they met at the brink of a chasm and agreed to let the river find the nearest way through the cleft to the sea. This story, or legend as it should be properly called, reveals that the staff, cunningly applied, had power over flowing waters, and may be read as an intimation of its use in the sacrifice to guard against the blood running outside the vessel in which it had to be caught.

The myth of Geirrod affords a glimpse of a sacral art involving the use of a staff, adding by way of a commentary that his rite implied a symbolic representation of the god's journey into Utgard. This myth covers one moment only of the proceedings, the collection of the blood; the killing of the victim, and by implication the slaying of the demon, must have had a legend of its own, now lost. As a matter of course the incidents of the journey also symbolised the victory over the demons – an illustration of the comprehensiveness or fulness of the dramas alluded to above – but from the breaking of the giantesses' backs we can draw no conclusion as to the mode of killing the victim; a dramatic concept, as expounded in the legend, is not pictorially identical with the rite and cannot be used as the point of departure for a guess at the form of the ceremony. The kenning of Eitif alluding to the blood as “sword-drawn fluid” clearly points to other incidents in the sacrificial drama.

The scene in the hall of Geirrod is no less pregnant with allusions to the drama. We are told that Thor was invited into [278] the hall to take part in “games” and was seated opposite to the giant. In the episode of the iron bolt the motif of the fight insists upon a fresh representation, and once more the character of the rite behind the legend is revealed to us by the poem of Eilif. The corresponding verses in the *Thorsdrapa* imply a description of the scenes all but identical with the version of Snorri, but the kennings in which Eilif clothes the contest bridge the gap between the myth and the drama in suggesting the dramatic setting of the story, and thus indirectly bring out the original legend.

We know that the sacrificial meal was initiated by a ritual testing of the entrails or some parts of the intestines which were considered eminently vital and sacred – Homer's *splēgna pēsanto* – and on account of the holy virtue of these portions the act of tasting gave divine strength to the sacrificers and consequently dealt a crushing blow to the demons. In Eilif's metaphors the red-hot piece of iron – or mass of red iron as it probably means – is characterised as “a piece of meat cooked in the forge”, as “the red bit of the tongs”, as “the mouthful raised aloft”; and correspondingly the gripping hand of Thor is paraphrased into: “Thor gaped with the mouth of the arm and swallowed with the eager jaws of the arm”.



Finally the piece of meat is rendered by *segi*, a word of ritual provenance, the sacral signification of heart; it recurs in a scene of ritual character in the compound *fförsegi*, the flesh of life or heart Faf. 32, v. *infra* p. 333). The kennings are so peculiar and consistent – in their very artificiality drawing upon traditional ideas – that they disclose a dramatic core within the mythical rind; we are justified in supposing that the poetic language of the drama is refracted through the other parts of the poem, even if the scantiness of supplementary evidence prevents our understanding the allusions. Euphuistic as the Thorsdrapa is, it differs from the artificial poetry of the eleventh century to the extent that the poet does not go to mythology as to a storehouse abounding with masks and gorgeous dresses, but in the choice of his images is aiming at actual dramatic situation. It is a safe guess that he composed amidst the scenery of the ancient cult. [279]

Another form of the battle with the demon is recounted in the myth of Thiazi. Once upon a time when the gods Odin and Hoenir and Loki were engaged in roasting an ox, they had the misfortune that the meat would not cook. They became aware that an eagle was perched on a branch over their heads; he discovered himself as the giant Thiazi and told them that the hitch in the preparation of the meal was due to his influence. The gods agreed that he should get a share of the meal, but when he caught up at one grasp the hams and the shoulders of the ox Loki flared up and aimed a blow at him with a bough. The bough stuck in the eagle, and Loki not being able to free himself was dragged over stones and stumps until he begged for peace. Thiazi released him on the condition that he enticed Ydun, the goddess of the life-giving apples, out of Asgard and left her to the mercy of the demon. On the disappearance of the goddess the gods turned grey with age, and they compelled Loki on pain of death to set out for her rescue. He accomplished his task and carried the goddess off from the giant in the guise of a falcon; when Thiazi pursued Loki over the wall of Asgard, he was caught by the flames of a fire the gods had lighted in the courtyard, and was killed,

This myth turns upon a later moment in the sacrifice and reflects a rite used at the lighting of the fire to ward off the influence of the demon and to secure the preparation of the sacrificial meat. In this ceremony the staff of some similar instrument makes its reappearance as a cult instrument. The danger lurking in the design of the demon comes out in the latter part of the myth; if he had succeeded in his scheme and gods and men were deprived of the sacrificial meal, they would lose all luck: youth and health. This myth finds its commentary in Thjodolf's poem of Haustlong; the design of Geirrod is branded in the Thorsdrapa by the kenning: the robber of the sun; in Haustlong the demon is characterised as the thief of the treasures.

In the former legend Thor plays the leading part, whereas Odin is the principal character in the latter; this divergence only indicates that the myths represent ritual dramas originating with different circles of worshippers. Harbardsljod 19 witnesses [280] to a form of the Thiazi myth in which Thor is the central figure. The legends agree in representing the god acting in concert with two fellow gods, thus reflecting the circumstance that in some rites the officiating chieftain was assisted by two acolytes in the performance of his task. This rule that certain ceremonies required three officiants or, from a dramatic point of view, three actors, each having his particular duty allotted to him, is vouched for by a variety of myths; here it is Thor, Thialfi and Loki or Odin, Hoenir and Loki (cf. Regin.); or Odin, Vili and Ve. One of Odin's ritual titles is Thrirdi, the third and by implication the most important person of a triad, another Tveggi, which probably means the god who acts in collaboration with another. In their kennings both Thorsdrapa and Haustlong hark back to the actuality of the dramatic situation; so far from being mere poetic titles their metaphors are used to give actuality to the scene in alluding to a cooperation between the gods, characteristic of the moment; Loki and Odin are "the friends of Hoenir" as Hoenir is "the friend of Odin", and it is no straining of a hypothesis to assume that the rest of the kennings – as f.i. Loki being called "the kinsman of Farbauti" – do not owe their introduction to poetic fancy.

Concerning the ritual task of these actors the legends are not very informative. The character of Loki is apparent in the myth; he is the stirrer up of strife and thus the provoker of victory, but as to the rites expressive of this activity we are left in ignorance. From the

Haustlong we learn that Hoenir had the ritual task of lighting and blowing the fire: *Hoenir hlaut blása*, it is said v.4, and it is worth noting that the verb *hljóta* is ritual in tone. The refrain of the Thorsdrapa: “angry the brother of Roskva was standing, the father of Magni was victorious, neither the heart of Thialfi nor of Thor was trembling”, is anything but poetical padding; the words indicate a ritual attitude which the officiating persons were bound to assume in order to ensure a happy result. Finally the Haustlong presents us with a number of kennings expressive of the gods' activity in pronouncing the appropriate forumlæ; they are called *segjandi*, speakers – *segja* [281] denotes ritual or legal speech; Odin is named *hapta snytrir* (v.3), the instructor of the gods, or in other words the leader of the sacrifice (cf. *infra* p. 319); *sagna hroerir* (v.9) probably signifies: the god who is spokesman or recites holy texts.

The slaughtering of the animal is a sacred act necessary for the preservation of life and luck; to procure the sacred meal the animal's life must be taken. At the same time it is a proceeding fraught with danger and in its principle nefarious as encroaching on something holy and divine; it implies a violation of the inviolable, no less portentous and appalling for its being inevitable – XXX. To ward off the evil consequences and the guilt involved in the act, the slaughtering is confined to strict ritual forms; moreover the recklessness and fearfulness of the act is dramatised in a ceremony which is reparative as well as exculpatory and expiatory as f.i. in the ox-killing in Attica, where the sacrificer had to undergo a mock-trial for murder before a ritual tribunal. In the legends the reverence of the worshippers finds expression in a statement that the god is struck with fear and hides himself, like Indra after he has killed Vrithra, or flees and goes through a ritual of purification, like Apollo after the slaying of the Python.

Dramatically the sacrifice symbolised victory over the demon, the power of evil, and consequently the rite of atonement implicitly stood for a form of redress, or paying of weregild, due to the adversary of the gods for the act of violence. The remains of his body or his bones were revered as sacred, objects of reverence and worship, which is identical with the part of the victim, not eaten, being sacrosanct. The Norwegian myth of Skadi turns upon an expiatory ceremony of this kind. When Thiazzi had been slain, we are told, his daughter made her appearance in full panoply to ask for weregild; the gods received her with fair words and made an offer of reconciliation and reparations giving her free choice of one of the gods for her husband with one reserve only, that nothing but their feet should be on view. She chose the fairest pair of feet among the company under the erroneous belief that they could belong to none else but Balder, the perfection of beauty; instead Njord [282] leapt up and claimed her for a bride. In addition she made her consent dependent on the gods making her laugh, and Loki satisfied her on this point by a piece of buffoonery; this legendary description of Loki's little joke evidently forms the programme of a dramatic “game” performed to restore the gladness of the sacrificers after the gloom of the slaughter or in other words to demonstrate the success of the expiatory ceremony – a parallel to the well-known scene in the Eleusinian drama.

The myths here mentioned cover only part of the ritual required by the slaughter of the victim; probably each moment of the ceremony might give rise to a legend, and one of the series is preserved in a myth relating to the cutting up of the victim symbolising the creation of the world, v. *infra* p.288 seqq. Another form of the divine battle is reproduced in the myth treating of Thor's fight with Hrungrir (S E 85 cf. 115, Skjald. I 17, Harb. 14). The giant made a boast that he would kill the gods and carry off the goddesses Freyja and Sif, and he challenged Thor to meet him in single combat on the border at Grjotunagard. The giants knowing that their very existence hung on the success of Hrungrir, made a man of clay, nine miles high and three miles broad across the chest, on the field of battle, but could not find a heart big enough, until they cut one out of a mare and placed it in his breast. Flanked by this clay giant Hrungrir took his stand covered with a shield of stone and carrying a hone for his weapon. Thor drove along in thunder and lightning, but in the nick of time Thialfi ran on in advance and fooled the giant into pushing his shield underfoot by shouting at him that the god had gone underground and was attacking him from beneath. Thor hurled his hammer

from afar, and the weapon was met in its flight by the hone, but nevertheless it reached the head of the giant, and while he sank on his shield Thialfi made short work of the clay man. In falling Hrungrnir crashed down on Thor, one of his feet pressed down the neck of the god, and none of the ases was able to free their brother until his son, Magni, came up and threw off the foot at one pull. A bit of the hone stuck in Thor's forehead and was never removed. [283]

This legend contains several allusions to a dramatic enactment in the sacrificial hall: the features that the giants raised a man of clay and furnished him with the heart of a mare, and that his fall was identical with the fall of Hrungrnir, obviously originate in a ritual arrangement; moreover Hrungrnir's head is said to have been of stone and three-cornered like the sign "called Hrungrnir's heart", a ritual symbol, in fact. The circumstance that the demon is slain on a shield directly reproduces a ceremonial act. Haustlong simply states that he fell on a shield, with no other explanation than: "thus the gods ordered, thus the dishes arranged"; the death of the demon, then, took place on a shield.

The demon appears in the guise of a serpent or dragon in a myth telling how Thor killed the Serpent of Middle-garth, but this myth has come down only in a literary, rather etiolated form (Hym. Cf. S E 54 seqq.). Thor accompanied the giant Hymir on a fishing expedition, baited his hook with the head of an ox and angled for the Serpent; when the Serpent's head appeared above the surface, Hymir was so alarmed that he cut the line. Thor hurled his hammer at the disappearing head, but nobody can tell whether it took effect. In the drama Thor had to kill the demon, and the original version is implied in fragments of Thor poems (Skjald. 132 cf. 129). The fight is commemorated in Vsp. 56, where it must necessarily conform to the religious views of the poet; but though the idea of the poem requires that the gods and the demons should kill one another, the author gives Thor time enough to enjoy his victory for a few moments.

The drinking feast that succeeded the sacrificial meal runs on the same dramatic motif; when the ale was consecrated and the horn emptied, the demon suffered defeat. This scene is literally illustrated on the Gosforth cross, where the sacrificer is depicted standing, horn in hand, beside the dead body of the demon (Aarb. for nord. Oldk. 1902 p. 161 and reference; also Haas: Bilderatlas zur Religionsgeschichte I nr.49).

The episode of the ale feast was intimately connected with the sacrifice: the ale spiritually drew its power and luck from the killing of the victim and the shedding of its blood. This

[284] fact, that the drink of life was inspired by the blessing created by the sacrifice, is clothed in a mythical formula by a verse in the Grimnismal (25): the mead runs from the udders of the goat Heidrun. It is further developed in the myth of Kvasir whose blood ran into the ale vat (S E 60, 71, 79); Kvasir is called the wisest of beings, he was killed by dwarfs who collected his blood in a vessel, mixed it with honey and in this way made the precious drink of mead; later on they were compelled to give it up to the giant Suttung in ransom for their lives.

The ale was ritually called *lögr* (Sigrdr. 8, 13, Alvis. 34, Hym. 6), and judging by the kennings this term applied to the blood of the victim as well.

In the ritual connected with the brewing of the ale and its offering up in the drinking feast the victory was won and celebrated; the drama inherent in the ceremonies is transcribed in a myth telling how Odin robbed Suttung of the life-giving fluid. Snorri (S E 60) has retold the myth with sly humour in a version containing numerous reminiscences of the ritual, worked up with elements of fairy tales into an intricate whole that defies our attempts at analysis. The main features recur in a group of verses incorporated in the Hávamál, 104 seqq., and this version evidently keeps much closer to the original form of the legend: "I paid a visit to the ancient giant and now I have returned. I won small gain by holding my tongue, by a good many brave words I showed myself off. Gunnlod placed me in a golden chair and gave me a drink of the precious mead; she was niggardly rewarded for her true spirit and her

great love. I let Rati gnaw a passage through the stone, above and below stood the roads of the giants; I risked my head in the deed. I have happily enjoyed the drink happily won, a cunning man accomplishes his aim. Now the kettle Óðrörir has been brought up and placed on the holy spot of men. I had hardly escaped from the seat of the giants even now, if Gunnlod had not given me her assistance, the noble maiden who rested in my arms. The day after, the frost giants strode into the hall of Hár and asked for Bolverk, whether he dwelt among the gods or had been slaughtered by Suttung. I think Odin swore an oath on his [285] ring; who can trust in his covenant; he betrayed Suttung for his ale and left Gunnlod weeping”.

This version displays its authority, by its succession of ritual dialogue and ritual images, as a reproduction of dramatic scenes. Snorri completes the allusions by describing how Odin forced his way through the rock – the roads of the giants – by means of a gimlet, Rati, and further by the information that Odin in his disguise had assumed the name of Bolverk; but he has dropped such ritual reminiscences as the chair on which Odin was seated and the final scene when the giants enter to ask for compensation are once more cheated out of their right.

The deed of Odin is perpetuated in a number of kennings. These poetical heirlooms of the blot have degenerated into poetical tinsel, but now and again the original stamp shines through, for instance in the prologue of Eyvind's Háleygjatal (Skjald. 68); he apostrophizes the god Odin as the god who bore the werewild of the dwarfs on mighty wings from Surt's gloomy vales in the nether world, *ór Surts Sökkdölum*; Sokkdalir and Sokkmimir occur elsewhere as ritual names of the nether world and its prince (Grim. 50, Ynglingatal 2, S E 197).

The viking age celebrates the drink mainly as the source whence poets and wise men drew their inspiration. From earliest time the cup flowed with *ráð*: speech, powerful words, wise thoughts – the power of the ale made the traditions of the clan ever fresh and strong – but this blessing was part of a more comprehensive luck, rich enough to renew the clansmen, body and soul, as well as their labour and possessions. In their onesided praise of the inspiratory ale, the scalds obscured its value as the drink of life. Snorri's version of the Suttung myth reflects the sentiments of the viking age, whereas the verses of the Hávamál have retained a truer conception of the mead, that of an invigorating draught which colours the cheeks with the hue of blooming health, the sign of youth and strength, and makes the blood run warm and red in the veins. “I happily won *litar* and happily enjoyed them”, ruse the verse (107); *litar* means simply hue, strength, and health. [286]

The great moments in the festival, such as the sacrifice, the meal and the drinking ceremony, are but religious peaks towering above and descending by numerous degrees into a maze of ritual moments, from the very first preparations to the dismissal of the worshippers. Every little piece of arrangement: the brewing of the ale, the rinsing of the vessels, was carried out with the gravity of ceremonial, and each moment of ritual employment is implied the dramatic motif of the feast. Concerning the ceremonies of preparation we have only one piece of information in a legend connected with bringing out the ale vat and making it ready for use. Hymiskvida – in form one of the most literary poems of the Edda, but nevertheless firmly rooted in ritual legend – presents us with the programme of the brewing process or part of it. The gods decided upon holding an ale feast and took omens to the effect that Ægir ought to prepare the ale. On his protesting that he lacked a proper vessel Thor set out to win the ale vat from the giants. This legend shows how the holiness and luck of the brewing and of the utensils were vindicated; its ceremonial import further manifests itself in the fact that the conquest of the vessel is closely bound up in the legend with the god's struggle against the Serpent of Middle-garth.

By means of a comparative examination of the evidence contained in the myths and of the information conveyed by the poetic vocabulary, we are able to form an idea of the ritual drama among the Northerners, exhibiting the features which are typical of primitive or classical religions. The events which form the theme of the drama are living in the worshippers, their memory and imagination are filled with images ready to emerge at the slightest allusion. They saw the god striding across the bleak, forbidding fells of Utgard,

through fearsome ravines swept by fierce hurricanes, wading through icy rivers, which cut into his flesh with corroding venom and slicing swords, to seek out the giant in his monstrous grandeur and grimness; these visions were illustrated or rather realised in the scene when the victim collapsed and the blood spirted from the wound. The images stored in memory are called into life by the triumphant joy of victory and emerge in the objects handled [287] during the ceremonies, in the acts and gestures which were necessitated simply by the requirements of the sacrifice. The drama was largely made up of such ritual functions as did not owe their existence and dramatic force to any histrionic or artistic impulse; on the other hand purely ceremonial operations shade off imperceptibly into poses and attitude of marked dramatic character, of the kind hinted at in the refrain of the Thorsdrapa: "Angry the brother of Roskva was standing, the father of Magni was victorious, neither the heart of Thialfi nor of Thor was trembling". But even in these cases the attitude had primarily a ritual and religious purpose, as we see from analogous forms in other religions; in order to carry out the sacredly outrageous attack on the animal the officiant must do violence to his feelings and ceremonially stiffen or harden himself, and it is this ritual necessity which gives the gesture its dramatic force. By degrees the ceremonies pass off into genuine mimicry and imitative acting; the drama underlying the Hrungrnir myth probably found outlet in a scene more closely related to our ideas of symbolic representation, and, reticent as are our sources of information on this head, the intimations of this story taken in conjunction with other allusions are sufficiently clear to complete the picture.

And yet, in this attempt to realise the sequence of ideas in primitive or classical culture and to translate the psychology underlying those ideas into modern forms of experience, we are putting the cart before the horse. We insist on explaining the spirit of the drama on lines natural to us, as if the memories stored in the minds of the worshippers were evoked by means of the suggestion of the ritual in the shape of a dramatic experience of the myth; but what ranks as secondary to our mode of thinking is primary from a classical point of view; the drama constitutes reality, and imagination or recollection are nothing but the reflexes of the mighty events experience in the drama.

Probably the demons, too, were symbolically represented in the ritual drama, but on this head our information is extremely meagre. It is worth noting, however, that *gandr*, the staff or magical instrument of witches, makes its appearance in mytho- [288] logy and probably in ritual as a synonym of demon. It is applied to the Serpent of Middle-garth – Jormungandr – and to the Wolf, in the compound Vánargandr, which contains an allusion to the river Ván of the nether world (S E 35 cf. Solar. 54). The Gosforth cross presents the demons in the characteristic shape of broad bands intertwined and terminating in a gaping head; there is a possibility that the carver chose this ornamental pattern because it resembled or recalled the customary figure in the blot hall.

## CREATION

The sacrifice brought about a rebirth of life; the worshippers renewed their hamingja or luck, and this renewal implied that the world was created afresh, that the "usefulness" – benevolence, fertility of nature – was called into new life. Through the blot this fair earth with its leaping and flying and growing beings and the heavens with sun and moon, light and heat were saved from falling into the hands of the demons and turning unheore; in the language of myth: the world is won from the giants, rising fresh and strong out of their death. It is an obvious conclusion that the Nordic drama included a creative act, giving birth to the world and to the clan, or the people, as is the case in other religions of similar type; this conjecture is justified by legends that evince a vigorous sense of drama and, what is more, bear marks of their having been ritually staged. For our knowledge of the ancient cosmology we are mainly indebted to the account of Snorri in his Edda; Snorri

evidently worked scattered traditions up into a comprehensive history of the world, and his version bears the character of a harmonised text, but upon the whole the original features of the legends are forcibly brought out in his reproduction.

In the beginning of time there was no earth and no heaven, no sea washing a shore, but in the middle a vast abyss, Ginnungagap. To the north loomed the icy Niflheim where grim storms raged in the misty darkness; in the middle of Niflheim the well of Hvergelmir surged and sent out a multitude of ri- [289] vers; to the south Muspellheim shone out, so glowing hot that none but the natives were able to dwell in it scorching fire. Surt is the guardian of this land, and his sword is the fierce flame.

Before the gods were born the ice swelled in Ginnungagap; for raging rivers gushed forth, and in the brooding and drifting mist over Niflheim the streams congealed like slag running out of a fire, the ice gathered into heavy glaciers advancing wave upon wave, and settled into Ginnungagap. The mists and rain that sagged over the ice hardened into a cover of rime. But from Muspelheim a hot wind struck against the ice of Ginnungagap and stood quivering as the air on a sultry summer day. When the rime met the heat it melted and dripped living drops, and the drops took the shape of a man. Thus arose an immense giant, Ymir, who is called Aurgelmir by the frost giants. While he was still asleep a perspiration started all over his body; in his left armpit a man and a woman grew out, and his right foot begot a son on the left. From these children of the primeval monster a brood of giants descended which very soon filled the world.

The crust of rime still melted and dripped, from the drops a cow sprang, Audumla, and by her milk Ymir was fed. While the giant sucked her udders, she licked the salt stones sticking out of the glacier; in the evening a man's hair came out of the stone, next day it had grown into a head, and on the third day the man leapt up and stood free on the ground. He was handsome, of great stature and strength, and his name was called Buri. Buri's son Bor wedded a woman from among the giants and became the ancestor of the gods: Odin, Vili and Ve.

When the gods grew and gathered strength they slew Ymir, and his blood flowed in torrents and drowned the world, so that the whole of his kin perished in the flood. One only, Bergelmir, climbed for safety upon a lúðr and was saved along with his wife; the couple gave rise to a fresh brood of giants, and these compose the race that still plays mischief in this world. The gods carried Ymir into the middle of Ginnungagap and made the earth of his body; his blood flowed out into rivers and the [290] sea, his flesh became land, his bones mountains, his teeth and broken bones were scattered as boulders and pebbles. The gods led the waters forth until they flowed all round the earth in a ring, and thus they fortified the abode of gods and men with the great ocean. They raised Ymir's skull above the earth and made from it the roof of heaven, and they placed a dwarf to guard each of the corners, east and west and north and south; under heaven the brain of Ymir is drifting, and that is the reason why the clouds are cold and grim like giants' thoughts.

The sparks which originated in Muspelheim and whirled in the air were placed in the sky to give light to the earth. The gods ordained a fixed course to all the heavenly bodies and made them advance in regular order as day succeeds day and year follows year.

Thus it came about that the earth rests in the midst of the deep sea. On the rim of the ocean the gods settled the giants, but in the middle of the earth they hallowed a land and surrounded it with the eyebrows of Ymir for a wall, and this enclosure was called Middlegarth, the abode of men.

This account is supplemented by a verse in Vaf. (29) adding the names of the successive generations of giants: Aurgelmir, Thrudgelmir and Bergelmir.

This graphic description of primeval history, when the inhabitable earth grew into shape through the contending forces of heat and cold, represents the Northern view of nature; the men who formed these legends had the roar of the ocean in their ears, they had felt, too, the forlorn bleakness of the fells and the cold gusts sweeping down from the glaciers. Their conception of the forces at work in the world does not, however, originate in

abstract speculation, neither does it issue from vague floating theories of a hypothetical state of things; whether the cosmological view of the world includes an element of speculation or not, it settles and clarifies into images drawn from the drama and from the sacrificial place. The illustration in S E of the glaciers advancing like the slag flowing from the fire is certainly not due to the stylistic ingenuity of Snorri; the trait goes back to the legends on which he moulded his literary ex-

[291] position. In fact, it is more than probable that the observation that gave rise to Snorri's elucidating simile lies at the very root of Norwegian cosmological speculation. In the placing of Hvergelmir as the centre of Niflheim there is a precision of statement that not only suggests a dramatic picture, but directly reveals an interplay between ritual experience and cosmological speculation as to the forces at play in the elements of the world. In fact, the legend is created by a man who had seen the consolidating forces of fire and water at work in shaping the world.

The centre of the creative episode of the drama is found in the fire and the sacrificial kettles. Ymir's death is an ancient sacrificial myth that reads like the programme of a creation play; the wording of the legend still bears the impress of its dramatic setting: the gods carried Ymir to Ginnungagap and placed him in the middle of the vast abyss. If we were not left in ignorance regarding the meaning of the names borne by the primeval giants: Bergelmir, Thrudgelmir and Aurgelmir, the features of the ritual act would stand out in higher relief; as it is, we must rest content with a general statement of a symbolical creation ceremony implicit in the cutting up of the victim and its preparation for being cooked.

One single scene appertaining to this drama is still left standing among the débris of mythology, *viz*, the myth of Bergelmir, which alludes to an incident in the birth of the waters; but unfortunately it is worded in too concise and obscure a form for us to be able to complete the picture. In Vaf. 35 the giant is introduced saying: "the first thing I remember is Bergelmir being born and placed on a *lúðr*"; this verse evidently reproduces a ritual act of dramatic import, but unfortunately the explanation hinges upon a word of unknown significance. In the Grottasong *lúðr* means a quern box; like the Darrad Song (cf. here II 220-1) this poem is a free composition inspired by a ceremonial scene: the ritual drama that "ground" wealth and luck for the king. In a scaldic poem a kenning combining *lúðr* with the word of malt designates the brewing vat (see Lex. Poet. s. v. *lúðr*). Further *lúðr* occurs in a formula used to ensure fair weather on sea (Gróg. 11): "*gögn* — luck, probably sacrifi- [292] cial luck (cf. Thorsdr. 21) — and sacrificial fluid may enter into an advantageous combination for your benefit and procure a peaceful journey". The upshot of a comparative examination is that several sacrificial vessels were designated by the term *lúðr*, and we are left in ignorance of its character in the story of Bergelmir.

These stray reminiscences throw a fresh light on the description in the Vsp. of the earliest times. The opening verses lead straight into the hall at the moment when the creative drama is produced: "At the distant time when Ymir lived, there was neither sea nor sandy coast breaking cool waves, no earth, no heaven above, only Ginnungagap where no blade of grass sprouted until the sons of Bur lifted the land and made the fair Middle-garth; the sun shone from the south on the stones of the hall, and the earth was clothed in green herbs". This raising of the land, the growth of the soil, was probably represented by ritual handling of the cult implements and the body of the victim, by minute gestures and movements of the hand and other symbolic operations, some of which are still discernible; we know from the Grimnismál 42 that the lifting of the kettles off the fire entered into the drama as a creative act: "then the worlds open before the gods, as a new-won possession" (v. *infra* p. 294). Though the Vsp. cannot add to our knowledge regarding the sequence and character of the ceremonies, its verses introduce us to the scene and setting of the drama; the hall is the world, as the roof of the house is the sky in the scene of the Thorsdrapa; the first rays of the sun strike the flagstones of the sacrificial place. In the description of the earth or land Vsp.

makes use of a poetical term, *bjöð*, probably of ritual origin, which to the worshippers conveyed the vividness of the scene when earth appeared and settled into its place.

According to the *Vsp.* the creation of the world is succeeded by a scene in which an erratic chaos of heavenly bodies was reduced to fixed order and rhythmic motion. At first sun and moon had no luck and *megin* (cf. I 249) and wandered vaguely about the heavens, until the gods shaped their courses and ordained them to regulate years and days; v. 6 exposes the ritual [293] in plain words: "The gods went to their seats of council and gave names to night and moon-less dark, to morning and noon, afternoon and evening, for the numbering of years".

Creation is brought to conclusion by the birth of man, the rise of the clan. Three gods found Ask and Embla on the land, beings that had as yet no luck and no destiny or purpose. Odin gave breath, Hoenir mind, Lodur warm blood and hue: *litr*, luck and strength (cf. II 235); thus the men grew from fate-less beings into men of honour whose life had a purpose and an aim. This description is throughout reminiscent of the drama; in his introduction of the three gods the poet makes use of a suggestive expression: "three came from that assembly, powerful and gracious" (v. 17); we need no great effort of imagination to see three officiating sacrificers proceeding from the body of worshippers to perform their sacred task.

Another rite suggestive of a *hieros gamos* is repeatedly hinted at, but never worked out in clear outlines, cf. *Lokas.* 26 and *infra* p. 337.

## SYMBOLISM OF THE SACRIFICIAL PLACE

The principle of life, the mode of experience that determines the ideas and actions — and their harmony or interplay — among the Teutons necessarily impart cosmic importance to the blot; this fundamental characteristic of the feast suggests a view of the sacrificial place as a cosmological symbol, and a hypothesis of this kind is borne out by a comparison with related rituals in other parts of the world, not least by the expositions of the Brahmanas concerning the Veda. The sacrificial place represented a dramatic imitation of the whole world, as it is likely to be expressed in our language, the prototype and origin of the dwelling-place of mankind, as it must be defined by the Teutons and their spiritual kindred. In the North, the fireplace and the kettles together with the ale vat composed a cosmic scene abounding in symbols which took their several parts in the drama; on this stage, or altar, heaven and earth had their substitutes, as we gather from a number of stray allusions. The [294] map of the world unfolded in S E becomes intelligible when it is discovered to be drawn from legends founded on ritual representation. The waters that give rise to all the rivers feeding the earth are found in the sacrificial kettles and still bear names suggestive of their provenance: *Hvergelmir*, or kettle *gelmir*, and the two *Kerlaugar*, or fluids of the vessels (S E 11, 21).

This cosmic character of the altar contributes greatly to the elucidation of several obscure verses in the Eddic poems. *Grimnismál* 42 suggests a ritual act of dramatic significance; from his place between the fires Odin says: "The favour of Ull and all the gods shall light upon the man who lends a hand at the fire, for open worlds expand round the sons of the gods when the kettles are lifted off the fire". And the words of the god in a former verse (4): "the land is holy which I see extended near the gods and the elves", reveal the image of the place round the fire as it presented itself to the view of the sacrificer. Through *Hávamál* 107 we catch a glimpse of the stirring activity of the scene: "Now *Öðrörir* has been brought up and placed on the rim of the earth", the extremity of the sacred place of mankind (according to the cogent conjecture of Bugge). The verse implies a dramatic rendering of Odin's descent into the nether world for the drink of life, as it is related in the *Suttung* myth; by means of



this verse we are made spectators of the final scene, when the kettle is solemnly put into its place in the hall.

By these hints we are initiated into the mythical geography of the altar, and at the same time into the cosmic importance of such acts as the kettles being placed on the fire or taken off. This observation further throws a light upon the composition of the *Grimnismál* and suggests an inner, associative coherence in what seems at first glance a lumber-house of mythological items. The poet starts by depicting Odin standing between the fires, and proceeds to give a list of the manors and an inventory of their furniture; now we understand that the author's didactic synopsis of divine dwelling-places is motivated by his experience from the blot hall. It is also of interest that he makes use of a ritual term for fire, *funi*, as does the poet of *Fafnismál* in an episode of ceremonial origin (vv. 32, 37 cf. *Alvis*. 26). [295]

The altar contained a symbol representing the useful, fruitful earth, probably consisting of a small heap of mould. The ritual name of this cosmic mould is *aurr* — “earth is called *aurr* among the high gods”, we learn from the didactic *Alvismál*. The *aurr* is styled white, certainly not on account of its colour, but in allusion to its purity and its holiness, its power of cleansing and blessing. This sacred symbol is further called the power or luck — *megin* — of earth (e. g. *Hynd*. 39), and from such formulæ as that mentioned in *Gud*. II 21, we learn that it was used for purposes of consecration, mixed up with other sacrificial ingredients such as water and fluid from the kettles. This *aurr* was poured, laid round the roots of the world ash to ensure its being green and fresh (*Vsp*. 19). *Vsp*. 14 offers an allusion to this ritual spot when it is said of the newly created dwarfs that “they proceeded from the flagstones of the hall to *Aurvanga*”, the seat of the *aurr*-fields, *aurvanga sjöt*.

The centre of the world is formed by the holy ash *Yggdrasil*, from the roots of which the life-giving waters take their rise. According to the account of *S E* (20-1) the boughs of the ash tower up into heaven and spread out over the whole world; it has three wide-branching roots, one among the gods, another among the frost giants in what was once *Ginnungagap*, and a third one over *Niflheim*; under this root *Hvergelmir* flows, and *Nidhogg* gnaws the root. Under the root stretching towards the frost giants is *Mimir's* well. The third root stands in heaven, and the most holy well, *Urdarbrunn*, is under this root. At first sight this description impresses the reader as lacking inner coherence, and possibly it is made up from several legends of different origin; but it is by no means improbable that the altar contained several representations of the water, *Urd's* well as well as *Mimir's* well — for *Hvergelmir* cf. *supra* p. 288. The sacred tree and the well belonged to the holy place outside, but the principle of the blot rendered it indispensable that they should be represented on the altar. When it is said that the rivers take their rise in the centre of the world, it is identical to saying that they flow from the feast and spring from the ideal — *i. e.* the real — world situated on the altar in the sacrificial place. [296]

In all probability the tree was carried into the hall in the form of a branch or twig. The cosmos of *Vsp*. being, as we have seen, drawn against the background of the feast it becomes probable that the *volva*, who says that she remembers the time when the tree was beneath the mould, has before the eye of her mind a dramatic situation previous to the moment when the branch was planted in or at the side of the *aurr*.

In *Vsp*. 27 the tree is honoured by an epithet, *heiðvanr*, that is certainly not a piece of poetical embellishment. The compound immediately suggests as its meaning: something connected with an object or a person called *heid*, or possibly — in accordance with a usage like that of *Sigrdr*. 36: something that wants, cannot do without *heid*. This word recurs in a couple of mythical compounds evidently of ritual origin. In the first place mention is made of a goat, *Heidrun*, who feeds from the leaves of *Lærad* and fills the ale vats from the stream of her udders (*Grimn*. 25, *S E* 40); secondly *Sigrdr*. 13 speaks of some runic lore that *Hroptr* found in the fluid flowing from the skull of *Heiddraupnir* and the horn of *Hoddrofnir*. Regrettably enough the verse is not elucidated by any parallel tradition regarding these enigmatical images, but the context suggests that *heid* refers to the contents of the ale vessel. We are further led to think of a mythic phrase in one of *Kormak's* poems (*Skjald*. 79): *gjalda haptsoenis heið*; *haptsoenis* is not clear, but the compound is probably connected with *Son*,

the ale vat. Thus an examination of heid leads to a hypothesis that *heiðvanr* turns upon a libation of ale performed over the tree that shaded the aurr on the altar.

As already mentioned the waters were represented by the kettles and the ale vat. “All the waters spring from Eikþyrnir's horn: Kormt and Ormt and the two Kerlaugar”, we read in the *Grimnismál*. Through these kettles Thor went to Yggdrasil, or in other words, the god of the drama passes by the kettles in his ritual procession — “for the bridge of the gods is on fire and the sacred waters are seething” (*hlóa*, *Grim.* 29; possibly Hlorridi is a ritual name to be explained in allusion to this rite).

The ale vessels and the meat kettles are hardly distinguish- [297] able in the legends, for this very reason probably that they were identical from a dramatic point of view, representing either the holy waters, or the prototype of the sea and the rivers; their ritual name is *lögr* (cf. *supra* p. 284) designating ale and blood, and consequently in the poetical derivation of the ceremonial language: sea and water.

As shown in the text, the treasures and heirlooms of the clan incorporated the life and luck of the family; the ring of the chieftain, at once the symbol of his honour and the warrant of his authority, accompanied him to battle and thingmoot, it was used when oaths were sworn, it rested on the stallr of the blothouse (cf. II 139). From their sacred character we may safely draw the conclusion that the treasures entered the blot; their presence was necessary on account of their incarnating the hamingja of the clan, on the other hand they must, like their wearers, participate in the new birth originating in the sacrifice (cf. 11167). The ritual power of the treasures is transfigured mythically in Draupnir, the ring of the god, that every ninth night sheds eight rings of equal value (S E 58-9, 97 seqq., *Skirn.* 21).

The analogy of Vedic ritual suggests that the gold was dipped into the primeval waters, and this guess is confirmed by the verse of *Grimnismál* (27), where it is said that the rivers coming from Hvergelmir flow round the *hodd* or treasure of the gods. In the language of the poets this dramatic scene is fossilised in a number of kennings, paraphrasing gold as the light or splendour of the water (cf. *infra* 336 and *Lokas.* init. prose). The oath mentioned in *Helg. Hund.* II 31: “by the bright water of the light and the cool stone of the wave” possibly alludes to a ceremonial act: words confirmed by the sacred fluid and the gold resting in its midst and thus enforced not only generally by the power of the blot, but also particularly by the actual event inherent in a dramatic scene.

The ritual name for gold and possessions or rather for the luck of the heirlooms and possessions is *auðr* (cf. *Add. Note 2, eadig*); to be deprived of audr and joy is the quintessence of human misery, the existence of the niding and the wolf (*Helg.*

[298] *Hund.* II 33). This audr is personified and entered into the cosmic genealogy, as a near relative of earth and day and night, in recognition of the fact that audr played a part in the drama representing the creation of the world (S E 16, 92, *Skjald.* 147).

Analogy from the ritual of other peoples further warrants the conjecture that the cult implements resting on the altar played a part in the drama; they would symbolise a person or a place and could not be handled or moved from one spot to another, taken up or put down, without marking a mythical event. While the gold rested in the middle of the waters it may have represented a world in the process of being created, or a place in the new-born world. Some hints regarding the dramatic employment of the symbols may be gathered from mythology and poetical kennings.

From among the cult objects exhibited on the altar we are not astonished to perceive the gleam of a sword. The *Fjolsvinns-mál* is a repertory of ritual images, but on account of its abrupt allusive character it presents to us the appearance of a lumber-room of riddles; v. 31 however apparently treats of a hall which constantly — for a long time — quivers on the point of the edge and is surrounded by a fire: *vafrologi* (cf. *infra* 334). This allusion recalls a verse in the *Vsp.* (37 cf. S E 65), in which we are introduced to the ale house of a giant situated in Ókolfir, the place where it is never cold, and the name of the hall is *Brimir* (*brimis bloði* (*Vsp.*

9, cod. reg.) is irrelevant, being a false reading, cf. parall.). Further we know from Grim. 44 that Brimir is the name of a sword — the most excellent sword, as it is called with an epithet used to distinguish divine or ritual objects. These broken hints fuse and achieve some sort of coherence when they are confronted with a piece of sacral language cited in Sigrdr. 14: “He stood on the hill with Brimir's edges and in a helm, then Mimir's head spoke its first wise word”; this “he” is Hroptr who found runic lore in the drops of Heiddraupnir's skull. This picture reflects the figure of the sacrificing chieftain as he approached the altar and lifted the sword, which was inspired with luck through its sharing in the blot, in order to take omens. In the light of this passage the other verses [299] cited above discard some of their obscurity; the sword — or in Fjolsvinns-mál possibly the spear — might also like the gold symbolise a place in the ideal world.

From these allusions to the role played by Brimir in the ritual we are led on to a verse in Lokasenna (49) suggesting that the fettering of the demon Loki was illustrated by a ritual act in the sacrificial hall, and that this act implied the use of a sword: “the gods will bind you on the sword with the bowels of your frost-cold kinsman”. The myth alluded to tells us that when the gods had caught the trickster they slaughtered his son Vali and tore out his bowels to bind Loki; now the ritual is clear: the demon is chained down by the intestines of the victim. Haustlong offers a glimpse of the sacrificial place at this point in v. 7, elucidated by v. 11, alluding to Loki as “He whom the gods see fettered”; the poem contains a description of mythological scenes painted on a shield, and in the first place this sentence applies to the picture on the shield; but this picture reproduces as is evident from the very wording of the phrase — a scene in the blot hall, where gods and men had the captive demon before their eyes in some symbol or other. This makes clear sense of an obscure verse in Vsp. (35): “She saw lying below the wood of the kettles — the tree on the sacrificial place in fetters something sinister in the semblance of Loki”, *viz*, a cult symbol of the fettered Loki. From this ritual picture the author draws his inspiration for the stirring prelude to the day of doom: “The ash shivers, the ancient tree, the giant goes free” — the demon, who was lying tied hand and foot under the tree in the hall, breaks his fetters.

The wisdom engendered by the blot was hidden in the holy waters under the tree; good counsels, omens and prophecies flowed from the well to be garnered by ritual means; out of the well destiny was born, or in a mythical personification, the norns, the hamingjas who gave to men the luck of the future. This wisdom or power of good oracle had a representative in Mimir, the counsellor of Odin. Sometimes Mimir makes his appearance as a head, and a myth retold by Snorri explains how it came to pass that his head was severed from his body [300] and was preserved for oracular purposes; the legend is founded on a ritual fact, *viz*, a head that gave out oracles — to be looked for either in the skull of the victim or in the kettle or more plausibly in either symbol — represented Mimir, the power of wisdom. Mimir's well, the ale vat, was the centre in a ritual scene alluded to in the verse of Vsp. and in the didactic prose of S E, when Odin pledged his eye to obtain the wisdom, but owing to the abruptness of the tradition and the lack of parallels any attempt at reconstructing the ritual act is doomed to failure (Vaf. 49, S E 20, 63, Vsp. 20, 46, Sigrdr. 14, Vsp. 27, S E 21, Heims. I 13).

## VOLUSPA

### I

Through the flotsam and jetsam of ancient literature we are just allowed some broken glimpses of a ritual drama. Luckily there is in existence a work which gives a comprehensive view of the sacrificial feast, *viz*, the Voluspá, but in order to bring out the evidential value of the poem in its bearing upon the scenes of the blot and their religious importance, it is necessary to form an estimate of the place occupied by its author in the intellectual development of the viking age.

The Voluspá is not intended to be an illustration of the sacrificial feast. Its author is a genius who has pondered deeply on the destiny of men and the meaning of history, and his

thoughts flare up into a vision of the cosmic tragedy from the beginnings of time to its fulfilment; to give expression to his vision he assumes the disguise of a volva, the wise prophetic woman of the North, whose eyes pierce through all worlds and search into the future — which has not “come forth” as yet — as well as into the remote depths of the past.

Her memory reaches back to the time when nothing existed, no cool waves, no green grass, no sky spanning a world; nothing but a vast abyss. Out of the gaping void earth is lifted, sprouting with green plants, by mighty beings; the sun shines out of a bright sky and enters upon its orderly course. The gods are [301] seen moving on the new-born earth in the pride of youth; they rear high-roofed temples, they smelt ore and hammer treasures — gold is abundant; they rejoice and sit on the greensward before the door playing at tables. Over their heads Yggdrasil, the world ash, vaults its boughs rustling with evergreen leaves, and from between its roots there ascend the maidens of destiny.

All of a sudden a change comes over the world; the gods are drawn up in battle array against the host of the Vanes. Odin hurls his spear for luck and victory. War has come into the world, and the tramp of warriors is heard.

The eyes of the volva become aware of a ring of sinister faces closing in upon the bright realm of the gods. The gods take counsel about building a wall to keep out the demons and strike a bargain with the giant who is willing to barter his strength against the promise of sun and moon; and when the two ends of the wall are nearing one another, the gods have no choice but to trick the demon out of his wages, if the light of the world is to be saved. For ever after the jotuns are lusting after the heavenly lights and the love of the goddess, and the gods must use the weapons they have forged and tempered with fraud and broken promises to ward off the wiles and brutal force of their enemies. Filled with anxious forebodings Odin goes out to consult the woman sitting out in the dark; she sees the valkyries riding over the ground to the thunder of hoofs.

Destiny is let loose to run its course. One of the gods is seen bleeding in the midst of his kinsmen; Balder descends to the fields of the dead with his brother's arrow sticking in his breast. A voice of weeping is heard, the goddess mourning over the woes of Valhal. And now a view is opened downwards into the bleak region never touched by the rays of the sun; the blighted realm of Nastrond is swept through with fierce rivers swelling with swords and foaming with venom, and nidings, breakers of oaths, unholy murderers battle their way through the whirling, heavy-smiting waves. The door of the hall standing on the bleak ness opens toward the north, and poison dew drips from its roof.

In the wild, impenetrable forest the wolves are breeding; [302] the cubs run up into the heavens snapping at the sun, they gorge themselves with the bodies of the slain, and blood slavers from their jaws down onto the seat of the gods, tingeing the sunlight with a lurid red.

The world resounds with ill-boding voices; the gleeful singing of the demon from his eyrie on the hillock, the crowing of cocks chiming in with one another, out of several worlds — the gold-combed cock that rouses the inmates of Valhal, the bright red cock among the jotuns — down to the soot-red bird crying from the fence of Hel — above the conflicting noises the hoarse barking of the hound in front of the rocky cave echoes through the world.

Life is blighted, and the curse spreads from the gods to the dwelling-place of human beings. The thoughts of men are darkened and confused by the upheaval in nature and the tumult of their own minds, and in their distraction men violate the very principles of life. The bonds of kinship give way to blind passion: brothers fight with one another, kinsmen shed their own blood, no one trusts his fellow; a new age dawns: the age of swords, the age of axes, the ears of men are filled with the din of shields being splintered and of wolves howling over the bodies of the slain.

A shiver runs through the boughs of the ash, the land resounds with the patter of restless feet and with the groaning of the dwarfs outside their rocky doors.

The barking echoes from the rocks, but now the fetters snap, and the Wolf gallops over the land. From all quarters the hosts advance; the Serpent of Middle-garth writhes through the deep, lashing the waves with his coils; dead men throng upwards along the misty road;

Muspel's men come rowing from the east, Loki standing at the rudder-oar; Surt hastens from the south, the battle sun glittering from his sword.

Now the anguish over which the goddess has long brooded comes true: Odin faces the Wolf, Frey closes with Surt, gods and demons slay and are slain. Thor wreaks his wrath on the Serpent and carries his victory nine paces over the battlefield.

The sun is darkened, the earth sinks back into the waves, [303] stars rain down, and the flames leap up and lick the heavens. The barking is heard for the last time as the world-fire flickers down. When the roar and the voices are stilled the earth once more rises out of the sea in evergreen freshness; brooks leap down the hills, the eagle wheels on high peering into the streams. The gods meet among self-sown fields, they call to mind the tale of deeds and former wisdom, and in the grass before their feet the golden tables are found lying. A new hall rises golden-roofed and fairer than the sun; here a race of true-hearted men will dwell and rejoice in their hearts' desire.

Then from above descends the mighty one, all powerful. The dusky dragon flies past brushing the ground with his wings weighted down by dead bodies; he sinks into the abyss and disappears.

This vision of the poet is more closely akin to the eschatological history of Christianity than to the cosmology of the ancient Teutons, and there is no mistaking that he has been impressed by the apocalyptic prophecies of the Church. But here as in all other places where we are concerned with men who are living, the words of "loan" and "influence" are worse than useless; the analytical method that sifts out the minds of men into shreds — ideas from somewhere and images or forms from elsewhere — ought to take a rest after having succeeded through the history of religion and literature and other branches of history, in laying waste the world of living men and turning it into a heap of intellectual débris.

So far from being Christian, the ideas and emotions of the poet and the vision in which his hope and fear join issue do not bear the slightest stamp of Christianity. His anguish does not originate in the Christian's dread of sin and the consequences of disobedience, but in the Teuton's anxiety at seeing the reverence for kinship undermined by ambition and thirst for power. He goes to the storehouse of ancient religion for the matter of his verses, and the ideals which animate his images and mould them into a drama of doom and resurrection, have their roots in the faith of his fathers. Horror-struck he looks on the upheaval of the times in which honour, the fountain [304] head of all virtue, is submerged and noble men are caught up in the tempest of fate and whirled on by its blinding fury. It is the holiness of frith that gives dramatic tension to his poem, and it is in the ancient antagonism between the gods and the demons that the catastrophe of his drama reaches its consummation. It is true that the poet has been inspired by an acquaintance with Christian eschatology, from its apocalyptic scenes he has drawn the inspiration to read his own thoughts and to interpret the experience of his own time, the viking age.

## II

The men of the viking age were a race to whom life appealed as being an adventure. Those great kings and petty chieftains who crossed the ocean and fought on many a coast were not mere soldiers of fortune; many of them at least were shrewd politicians who set out into the world to carve out for themselves a kingdom or an estate. But the spirit of adventure is strongest and most true to itself when it is farthest removed from aimlessness and trusting to chance. Adventure ran in the blood of the vikings and engendered ambitious schemes, and the better calculated were the schemes inspired by the spirit of adventure, the greater was the élan of the adventurers.

The life of the peasant at the homestead had a steady, slow-going rhythm; for him, the events followed one another as orderly and regularly as one season succeeded another; the aspirations and achievements of the sons were firmly linked to the deeds of their fathers, grew out of them in fact, being inspired by the traditions and the luck of the clan. Among the

roving chieftains, life was apt to turn into a game for renown and power in which the warrior staked his very existence again and again, ever ready to run the risk of all or nothing.

For the Teutons, living implied fighting, man means a living being who keeps his weapons sharp by grinding them on his honour. Nevertheless it was not war but work that determined the trend of life and gave form to institutions, social as well as religious. A man asserted his gentility no less by tilling his land

[305] in luck and showing a generous hospitality, than by courage in action. When the connection with daily occupations and obligations had been severed, as it had to be in armies settling on foreign soil, war filled the scene, and the truest, nay the only proof a man could give of his gentleness consisted in deeds accomplished with the axe. These gallant knights were sometimes fain to pour contempt on the patient toil of the bread winner as in the epigram of the Harbardsljod (24): "Odin owns the earls who are slain in battle, Thor owns the race of the thralls". According to ancient custom war and feast were inseparable; at the courts of sacred kings the horn circled in ceremonial fashion every night; when the king's hall was transplanted into a foreign country and his luck plucked out of the fields and grazing grounds surrounding his manor, life necessarily became a round of battles and drinking feasts.

At the homesteads luck and honour were a family treasure handed down from one generation to another to be maintained by the united strength of all the clansmen; abroad every man more or less had to carve out his own fortune and maintain the standard of his kin single-handed. And just as the athlete of asceticism strives to outdo himself because he has lost the sane measure of social intercourse, so the viking is tempted to overshoot his own mark: his honour becomes more exacting and often roars like a rapacious beast that never knows when it has had its fill. Many a viking had seen kingdoms won and kingdoms falling, and that man was reckoned the greatest character who said: a kingdom is lost, but there is time to win another. When moral strength showed itself not so much in the man's proving himself worthy of his honour as in acquiring glory, it was just as great and possibly a greater act to die than to conquer; survival on the tongues of coming generations was the fairest and surest gain. Honour had been the daily bread of the clansmen, now it turned into the strong drink of immortality that threw open a world of bliss beyond the portals of the grave.

The influence of history on the intellectual life of the viking age has left its strongest mark on the conception of fate. In the old country destiny was bound up with the luck of the clan, [306] the *norns* shaped — "chose" — the life of the child by adding substance to it: a measure of years, events to fill them and aims to make striving worth while, and their "choice" was not accepted as a decree but embraced and acted upon as will. In the life of the viking fate asserted itself as a deity with a will of its own and as often as not struck the weapon from his hand; true to the spirit of his ancestors he accepted the ordinance of fate as inevitable and made it a point of honour not to wince at meeting this arbitrary power which one day raised a man into the royal seat and another day drove him to sea with a ship and a handful of men at its oars. A man proved his moral strength by his skill to sail before the wind so long as it filled his sails, and to go down smiling when his "day" had come.

Nowhere in the viking age is there any breaking away from the principles of Teutonic culture; the conquerors and kingmakers wholeheartedly uphold the traditions of their ancestors. The keenest scrutiny will never disclose any change in thoughts and feelings, in ideals or institutions; but there is a new pitch, the old emotions are heightened into a hectic glow and transfigured by their very intensification. And consequent on this spiritualisation religion takes on a new aspect; through the shifting of the accent the ritual and its underlying ideas acquired a new import in the same way as social forms came to serve new purposes. When the Scandinavians went beyond the sea their migration meant more than a change of place. At home the world, large as it was, could be surveyed from the homestead with the eyes of the mind, but as one horizon burst on the view and another closed in to take its place

the ancient Middle-earth lost its definiteness and made way for something more akin to our universe. This change of outlook gave birth to a new conception of gods and men. The local deities whose power was coextensive with the territory of their worshippers were replaced by a corporate body of gods ruling the world. The holy place with its blot-house which had formed the centre of Middle-earth, was raised on high and turned into a divine mansion. Time-honoured myths setting forth the doings of mutually [307] independent deities were worked up into a poetical mythology, a divine saga, on the same lines that had been followed by an earlier race of vikings, the Homeric Greeks.

This religion brought a new god to birth: Odin, the leader of men, the lord of the battlefield. Odin is young in the same sense as his followers. He sprang from a clan of chieftains in the South, being the incarnation of their hamingja, and the history of his growing from a local deity, resting in the holy place of the clan, into a warlike genius is identical with the history of his people. The place where he was born must at best be a matter of conjecture; from ancient time he is at home in the legends of Sigurd and his kin, but we have no sure means of settling the identity of the Volsungs or even to decide whether the Volsungs were the original impersonators of the drama. Thus much is clear from the hints of history and legend that during the centuries of upheaval that preceded the birth of mediæval Europe the influence of Odin spread by means of alliances between the leading houses. From the pedigrees and family traditions it is evident that the ambitious princes among the Scandinavians eagerly sought for alliance, by way of matrimony or in other ways, with kingly clans who could boast of possessing the hamingja of the Volsungs.

In the religion of Odin, the ideals of the warriors are transfigured into the laws of the world. War is the meaning of life, the years are measured by their harvests of fame, death is celebrated as the entrance to the paradise of heroes, in which the joy of battle is renewed day after day and the ale flows every night. Valhal is a divine counterpart of the court: the god presides in the high seat, the warriors circulate the cup in memory of past deeds and in still higher expectations of the future, bathed in the light of the fire reflected from swords and shields that embody the luck of their chieftain.

The god wears the features of the high-born king. He is called the Wanderer. He appears on the battlefields in all parts of the world and makes his power felt by a wave of the hand; he knows of no joy but that of hearing the swords clash and seeing men meet to give and take the gift of an honourable death. [308] He sets kings on to fight, eager to fill his seats in Valhal with einheries. "I roamed in Valland haunting the battles, I egged on kings and never worked for reconciliation", such is his confession according to the knightly poet of the Harbardsljod (24).

Odin strides from one battle to another, but he also goes from one love assignation to another. In the Harbardsljod 18 he makes a boast of his conquests in the way of love — "I enjoyed to the full their goodwill and their delight" — and his boasting is borne out by the number of escapades recorded in his legends. The Odin myths reflect the boisterous mirth of the court, its idealisation of war, its jests and quips, its dare-devil humour and its admiration for the poet.

The same tendencies that deified the king also pushed the poet into the foreground. When he stood forth and extolled the prowess of the king the verses were not meant to please for an hour: their heavy ornaments and exuberant imagery served to make the drapa an everlasting monument to the king and his body-guard. The change of tone that had come over the ideas of luck and honour effected a new orientation of the cult; the cup which had formerly overflowed with fertility in man and beast and field as well as with success in fighting, now bubbled with illustrious deeds of arms and undying fame. And when honour crystallised into posthumous fame the poet grew into the priest of honour who made the king immortal by his verses, and literally shaped the body in which the warrior would live among coming generations. This transformation puts its stamp on the legends: Odin usurps the place as the bold robber of the ale of life and immortality, but the kettle which he carries up from the world of the demons and triumphantly deposits on the edge of the sacrificial hearth now contains inspiration for the scalds. The version of the legends handed down to us bears

the impress of the viking age; with sly humour Snorri retells the myth, how the god copped the wiles of the demons with tricks of his own, in desperate boldness forced his way into the rocky cave of the giant, blinded his daughter with his love and took his flight with the precious liquid safely lodged in his belly; he winds up his tale with a compliment to the poets [309] who have been favoured by the god with free access to the true source of inspiration.

The version of Snorri echoes the self-consciousness of the court poets; but belonging as he does to an æsthetic age, he improves on the story with a touch of literary criticism: Odin luckily evades the pursuit of the demon in time to make use of the vessels his brethren hastily produced, as he swooped over the fence of Asgard, but in the need of the moment some parts of the mead took a wrong turning, and these drops are left unguarded; thus we know where bad poets go for inspiration in their verse craft.

The god in the high seat bore the features of the king, it was said, but the lines in his face are deeper and carve a countenance mysteriously disclosing and veiling a mind that takes counsel of its own thoughts and keeps that counsel to itself —the same wayward mystery which the warriors have seen in the face of Fate. His decisions are inscrutable or rather capricious like the decrees of fate: he marks the men for victory or for death, according to his own good pleasure, he chooses his favourites among the kings without regard to right and worth, humouring their wildest ambition, thwarting their plans in the very moment of success, always directing with a high hand, according to the good pleasure of his will.

This religion of the vikings is built on ancient foundations, and as far as its forms are concerned its creators stand acquitted of innovation. The constant celebration of the ale feast in the king's hall, the importance for posthumous life of poetry or ritual recitals, the robbery of the mead, the drift and contents of the legends, even the love motifs in the chronicle scandaleuse of Odin: wherever we look we are confronted by time-honoured elements of ritual and drama. And yet everything has changed. Life has swung over into a new rhythm, and with the altering of measure a new harmony imposes itself. When thoughts and feelings and deeds interact in another equilibrium, they may give out a tone as strange as, or stranger perhaps than any revolutionary doctrine is able to produce. In the life of the viking fighting and honour make up what we call fundamental [310] values of existence as in the days of old, but now they are exalted into being the very rules of the principles of life governing the universe: through his living and dying the warrior — qua warrior or man of the sword, it must be added — has contributed to the shaping of the destiny of the universe.

The poems of the viking age resound with the thunder of war and the breaking of shields; they are illumined by the blaze from burning towns. But the boisterous and rather shrill hymn of Odin singing the beauty of war and the majesty of death when met courageously, has an undertone of tragedy and almost of sadness. The men who were caught up in the whirl of conquests sometimes paused aghast at the revolution, mental as well as social, brought about by this breathless struggle for power and fame. In the course of expeditions and especially in the settlements abroad, men were uprooted from their traditional surroundings, thrown together in a fellowship which as often as not overruled or at least put a strain upon the obligations of kinship. In their pursuit of dominion, brothers would be whirled into antagonism, and the self-seeking might grow to such excessive heights in the individual that his ambition broke through the restraint of frith. The Teuton could not find words more poignantly expressive of dismay and utter despair than those verses by the Voluspá poet: “brothers fight one another, cousins do not trust one another”. In the feeling of kinship ethical life had its origin and being, and when the root of all virtues was poisoned the very will to honour was dissolved. When brothers fall out there follows not only an age of sword and axe but an age of wolves, as the Vsp. has it: whoredom is rampant, treachery, breaking of oaths and treacherous murder. Moral dissolution strikes at the very root of life, the poet continues; for the enjoyment of life, fertility and all blessings, material as well as spiritual, are bound up with honour, and on the failing of honour luck, the effectiveness of life, is blighted. The age of war lapses into an age of storms, of blasted crops, of frost and winters lasting all the year round, in the words of the Vsp.



Beneath the glorification of war as the measure of men and [311] death as the appraiser of human worth, there is found lurking a note of suspense as of fate brewing into a tempest that will burst in a sudden eruption and shatter the whole world with its lightning. The story of Balder's death as it is handed down by the Icelanders, is a poetic work inspired by the tragic mood of the viking age. It is overspread by a sinister, fateful gloom radiating from the central scene of the tragedy, in which the gods throng round their kinsman's body, speechless with an agony of apprehension. When blood was shed within the clan the deed threw a shadow of coming disaster across the possessions of the kinsmen; here the shadow is so broad that it envelops the whole world in the blackness of death.

The story of Balder is founded on ancient myth. It abounds in legendary features sufficiently clear to warrant the hypothesis that it is moulded upon a sacrificial drama, probably akin to the ritual of Frey as it is worked out f. i. by Neckel in his book on Balder (G. Neckel: Die Überlieferungen vom Gotte Balder, 1920); but we have no means of reconstructing the original form and contents of the legend. An unnamed poet of the viking age has steeped this matter in his own experience, transformed the myth into a poem with a purpose, as we would say. By concentrating the scenes around the idea of a divine outrage — *nidingsuerk* -- so that the anguish of the gods standing with drooping heads and faltering hands steeps every word with an icy dread of coming events, he has changed a fertility drama into a poetic symbol implying that the course of history is tending irresistibly towards a day of doom.

The poet of the Balder story was not a solitary figure in those troubled times; the literature of the viking age proves that other minds had caught a comprehensive view of history as a cosmological drama — in the modern acceptation of the word — tending towards a catastrophe and finding its consummation in a trying of conclusions between the gods and the evil powers. In the light of this idea, fate — or the will of Odin — is unveiled and discovers a far-reaching purpose. The eyes of the god peer into the future and read the signs on the horizon, he knows that the destiny of the world will depend on the depths of his

[312] ranks when they are drawn up against the Wolf and his brood. There is a deep-set plan at the bottom of his designing; he urges on the kings regardless of their private aims and ambitions, he leads them to the field of death with a fine unconcern for their friendships or enmities, with the object of filling his seats with the best men.

This spirit has found a magnificent expression in the *Eiriksmál*, a poem composed to the memory of Eric Bloody-axe. When he fought his last battle its din called up an echo in the hall of Odin so that the wainscots creaked again. There is a noise as if thousands of men thronged forward. Odin is roused from dreaming that the benches of Valhal are strewn with fresh rushes and the vats of ale are made ready for the welcome of heroes entering from the battle. A feeling of joyful anticipation tells him that famous warriors are on the way, it is the arrival of Eric that is announced by the thundering of feet. — Why do you expect Eric more than other kings, it is asked. — Because he has reddened his blade in many countries and carried his sword far and wide heavy with blood. — Why did you rob him of victory who was without blame? — Nobody knows what is coming, the grey Wolf is scowling at the seat of the gods. -- Eric makes his entrance surrounded by five kings, heading a mighty procession of followers, from the storm of swords into the seats of the god.

During their residence in the British Isles the Northmen came into touch with a religious system that differed in character from that of their fathers. No reader of the viking age literature can fail to discover that the poets have been impressed by the thought and imagery of Christianity and chiefly by its eschatology. But the Northmen were not carried off their feet in the stream of Christian ideas; so far from succumbing to the influence of English culture they gathered strength from contact with men of another creed. The history of that age is not made up of a series of piratical expeditions resulting in the establishment of a few short-lived kingdoms and an admixture of Scandinavian blood; with better reason it might be

called a spiritual conquest which produces far-reaching effects in the [313] moral development of the conquerors and of the conquered as well. The invading Scandinavians did not content themselves with a wondering or a greedy look at the exteriors of the English churches, they entered upon an intercourse with the Christian men and acquired an intuitive comprehension of the new wisdom that was far from being superficial. It is a remarkable proof of their spiritual and moral strength and the originality of their minds that they were not overwhelmed by the rush of new ideas and images; they learned freely and as freely turned their learning to account according to their own need. Christian eschatology worked in them as an inspiration that crystallised their experience, and the emotions stirred up the comedy and tragedy of these troubled times into clear-cut ideas. The spiritual gain accruing from their contact with the culture of England was in the first place a liberal outlook on the world, an original vision of history and of the struggle of mankind. In reality the tenth century became an age of cultural expansion; the spirit quickened by the stir of events, moral as well as political, found vent in a literature of remarkable depth and beauty, which passed beyond the national boundary and took rank among the works belonging to the world.

### III

In this literature the author of the *Voluspá* occupies a place of his own. His poem stands out from the other literary works of the same age by virtue of a master idea that knits the verses together as firmly as the links in a chain of reasoning, inspiring them at the same time with a poetry of tense, almost quivering force. In his view the course of history was determined by the entrance of unrighteousness and strife into the world. Life is tragical at the core, and the tragedy is of the gods' own provoking; the power of the gods is bought by deceit and violence and thus suffers from an inner weakness; since the first war life bears a secret burden of guilt that rolls on by its own impetus and irresistibly drives gods and men towards the abyss of death. For the sake of honour and luck the gods must again and again [314] resort to wiles and treachery, by their very regard for truth and right and beauty they are forced into the crooked ways of the tricksters; if the world is to be saved from falling into the clutches of the demons, they must meet insidious stratagem with subtle cunning.

By every victory won over the powers of darkness and brutality the gods sow the seed of destruction and death. The traditional scenes of mythology are arranged by the poet with a view to showing how the seed sown is sprouting and putting forth ears of corn to be reaped on the day of doom in the great Ragnarok.

The first shadow was thrown across the world when Odin flung his spear into the ranks of the Vanes and inaugurated the first war, and it deepened when the giant was cheated out of his reward; through these scenes the poet leads up to a vision of the world, in which mortal men are groping, blinded by the deeds of the gods. The fall of Balder is the prelude to a pandemonium in which men poison their souls by setting the holiest, most sacred laws, the very principles of life at naught. The shadows lengthen and gather at the horizon into a black cloud, and all of a sudden the flames from the demons' realm of death flare up behind the dark mass and transform it into a blaze of lurid red and yellow.

The poet does not end on a note of despair. He looks forward with strong hope to a day of regeneration, a new world of peace and righteousness. The curse burns itself out, gods and men enter upon a new life full of honour and luck and frith, and the life of integrity and goodwill calls down the mighty one from on high. Death is driven out of the world: the last vision passing before the poet's eyes is of the old dragon sinking into the gaping abyss.

This poet is not the man from the North expounding the faith of Thor and Odin, as a generation of romantic historians imagined; neither can he be numbered among the saints of the new creed. He preaches a religion neither Christian nor heathen; it keeps touch with the ideals and emotions of large circles among the Norwegians in the viking age, but it is of startling [315] originality, the confession of an individual soul. Probably the religion of the

Voluspá never had more than one adherent, the man who saw the vision, but for all that he takes his place among the religious seers of the world.

The poet achieves his object by a masterly handling of ancient material. Through the greater part of the poem the composition consists of time-honoured legends reproduced simply in the form that was current among the author's contemporaries, but with a minimum of adaptation the poet suffuses his matter with new life by making it subservient to his own experience. The effect is brought about by a deliberate arrangement of the myths so nicely planned that a historical perspective emerges through their reaction on one another. Often the story acquires a novel significance by its very position in the series of visions, as is the case with the war of the gods or the birth of the wolves. Wedged in, as it is, between the ride of the valkyries and the opening of Hel's dark places, the death of Balder is vitally connected with the past and exhibited as a turning point in history; through the divine murder the corroding guilt that has eaten into the heart of life comes to the surface and darkens the whole world. Sometimes the poet puts a fresh point on his theme by a minute twist, as in the tricking of the giant: with a fine economy of art he effaces the note of triumph inherent in the myth and substitutes an anxious pondering on the price paid for victory: the claims that victory must necessarily entail on the conqueror, when he is compelled to buy his triumph at any cost. The great mass of the legends treating of the struggle with the demons is held over for the latter part of the poem to furnish material for the description of the day of doom, when the gods are overtaken by their tragic fate and a new world is to take the place of an earth that is filled with strife and stained with blood. With the sure touch of consummate art the poet dovetails some popular tale into the system with the result that it gives out a tone of horror: the verse depicting the giant singing merrily from his post of observation on the knoll, the crowing of cocks calling to one another from the world of the gods down into the realm of the dead, the barking of the hound — [316] compose a mosaic of current beliefs, but in the design of the poet these items picture the gathering tempest and the atmosphere tremulous with apprehension before the burst of the storm.

The details are chosen so carefully that no single trait is otiose; by means of a masterly composition each particular is absorbed into the vision and quickened by the underlying concept, so that it lights up the past as with a fierce light and at the same time throws ominous gleams far into the future.

#### IV

The force and grandeur of the Voluspá is largely due to the suggestive power of its imagery; sometimes the verses are like trees bowing and shrieking before the storm, at other times they are filled with softly descending light, as in the lines depicting the cascades leaping from the rocks and the eagle circling on outspread wings. But the poet never achieves his effect by elaborate description; the grip of his pictures, the visionary clearness and suddenness of his scenes result from a terse, allusive economy of words. He never unfurls the events of the drama; in a couple of bold strokes he conjures up a situation, and the story is told in the grouping and in the attitudes of the characters. But over and above this allusive, all but impressionistic vividness of effect there is an uncanny force in the choice of words and images that no analysis of the poet's art can attain to, still less explain. The reader who approaches the poem for the first time will probably grope his way through the verses feeling like a man who passes through a succession of dark places barely marked off from one another by streaks of light. The poet never tells his stories: "Who had filled the air with poison or given Oth's maiden to the giants? Thor struck the blow, oaths were broken", this is his account of the dealings between the gods and the demon who built the walls of Asgard and got nothing but a broken head for his labour, and if we did not know the myth from other sources we should never be able to reconstruct the sequence of events or even the drift of the story. [317]

The poet handles his material with the skill of a master, but his art, perfect as it is, was prepared for him just as the material lay ready to his hands to be moulded into a perfect work of art; in fact, both were inseparable, for the art was inherent in the matter. There was no need for him to recount the stories; he could not only rely on his contemporaries knowing the ancient tales and being able to evoke them at the slightest allusion, he could draw upon their experience, on their having witnessed the events recounted in the legends. By his words he forced his listeners to see, and this power was given him because his own eyes and the eyes of his friends were filled with the throbbing life of the feast and viewed without effort the entire world concentrated in the scenes of the sacrificial drama. The overwhelming pathos of the poem springs from the visionary power of the images; a hint, a few glimpses suffice to call up not only a situation but a drama touching the depths of existence and reaching to the end of the earth. To feel the suggestiveness of his images we must try as far as lies in our power to realise the comprehensive fulness and the concentration of primitive drama, its religious *i. e.* vital connexion with the actual experience of life and its influence on material and moral welfare.

Modern playgoers may be moved, and moved deeply, by a new-born sympathy linking them up with strange personalities and destinies; whereas in the classical worshipper, every thought and every sentiment had its root in his holy drama or rather in his living through the events of the drama. The poet was not called upon to expose the significance of his visions, because his listeners were brought up with poetic ritual, images of cosmic or eternal import. When he strung the stories together they coalesced and made up a whole on the strength of a leading idea, in the same way as the dramatic incidents of the blot owed their coherence to an all-pervading theme that found expression in a religious formula: the antagonism between good and evil. His eschatological epic was constructed on ancient lines, with one essential difference, that his idea was startlingly new; he needed not to expound his gospel or to give an express statement of its novelty, as he could trust it to appear im- [318] diately to minds which were prepared to understand the significance of things.

No wonder that the *Vo!uspá* is a difficult work. Though the hearing of it cannot fail to impress the listener with a vague feeling of awe, it scarcely admits of a translation, because it is bound up with ancient ideas and images to such an extent that modern words cannot exhibit the depth and power of its phrases. A paraphrase may bring out some of the salient points, but nevertheless it can do little more than indicate the way of approach to its mystery through a comprehensive sympathy with Norwegian culture in its totality.

## V

When we have considered the *Vo!uspá* as a religious document and formed an estimate of its bearing upon the spiritual conflicts of its age, we have made it possible to read it as a contemporary description of the ancient feast. The poet does not present us with a photographic illustration of the drama or an index to the sequence of the ritual scenes; in his poem he paints an ideal view of the drama as it developed before the eyes of the sacrificers, and indirectly but forcibly brings out not only the stirring life of its scenes but still more the poetry, the depth of feeling and poignancy of thought, the experience of a reality, more real than everyday life, which surged in the worshippers, when the gods moved on the stage of the altar.

Incidentally the poem adds some items of considerable interest to our knowledge of the sacrificial technique. The momentous undertakings of the gods are preceded by a ceremony, thus described in the verses: "Then all the gods went to their *rök* seats and consulted together" — there they discussed such questions as: how the heavenly lights should be named and arrayed in the heavens, who should take upon himself to create the dwarfs, whether the gods should pay tribute to the Vanes, who was the demon who had poisoned the air and caused the loss of the maiden to the giants. These verses delineate an episode of the blot feast: the ritual deliberation that must neces-

[319] sarily precede the ceremonies; there the gestures and formulæ are rehearsed in order to ensure a performance without any hitch or stumbling, there the prospective officiant is nominated — in accordance, of course, with a fixed routine — in other words, he went to the rök seats to be invested with authority to carry out his sacred duty (cf. the opening verses of the Hym.).

The same seats served for pronouncing sacred formulæ, for the recital of traditions and genealogies, for the repeating of rules and wise sayings: all the wisdom that belonged to the clan and was necessary for right living, was here brought into close contact with the ceremonies. In the Voluspá a list of names is appended to the scene of the dwarfs being called forth from the “foaming” blood of the sacrificial victim, and there are other hints of the rehearsal of mythological lore as an accompaniment to the dramatic performance (cf. 18, 20, 37). Such ceremonial recitals furnished the pattern for didactic handbooks on mythology and cosmology, such as Grimnismál, Vafthrudnismál and Fjolsvinnsmál, or on ritual terminology such as Alvismál. From these poems we get the information that the recitals generally took the form of a dialogue, one of the officiants questioning and thus drawing forth the ritual wisdom of the leader — *hapta snytrir*. When the Hyndluljod is examined in this light it becomes probable that this poem reproduces the genealogical recital of a Norwegian clan, at most slightly touched up to fit into the literary forms of the tenth century. The collection of didactic and ritual pieces called Hávamál, too, preserves for us the forms of ritual pronunciation, and part of this miscellany is no doubt culled directly from ceremonial texts. In fact the poem closes with the ancient formula that wound up the recitals by “fastening” the luck of the words on the sacrificers: “Now Hávi's words are spoken in the hall of Hávi, useful to the sons of men, unavailing for the children of the demons, heill for the man who spoke, heill for the man who knows, full enjoyment of the words to the man who learned, heill for those who listened”. (For the meaning of enjoy = *njóta* cf. II 16, 80).

Through the Voluspá we are moreover led on to the dis- [320] covery of the technical term denominating these ritual discussions and proclamations, *viz. doema*, “deem”. Drinking and deeming, *drekka ok doema*, is a formal compound denominative of the proceedings at the feast, note *e. g.* Rig. 31, Sigurd sk. 2. The slaughtering is preceded by a scene where the men deem before starting for the sheep fold. The clansmen deem in the Hyndluljod of kinship and relations, in Hávamál of runes, and when the gods meet after the battle of Ragnarok they deem of the mighty events and of the gigantic Serpent of Middle-garth.

The corresponding nomen is *dómr*, which naturally signifies ritual speech as well as ritual event, *viz.* the holy history inherent in the scenes of the festival. The rejuvenated ases recall the momentous *dómar* they have passed through. The famous verse of Hávamál 77: “Cattle will die, kinsmen will die, you will die yourself, one I know will never die, the *dómr* of a dead man”, thus alludes to the fame — *eptirmæli* as it was perpetuated in the blot. *Norna dómr*, the judgment of the norns, is identical with the destiny or luck originating in the well at the foot of Yggdrasil and manifesting itself in the omens received from that place during the sacrifice. When the Christian gospel required a name that sounded familiar to the ears of the Northmen, it was naturally called *hinn djfri dómr*, the precious “doom”, the words and deeds of the new god (Lex. Poet. s. v.).

Now the name, too, of the divine seats is clear; rök is a synonym of *dómr*: ritual speech and hence the holy events which were embodied in the drama. “You know all the röks of the gods”, are the words which Odin makes use of to draw out the giant in Vafthrudnismál (38, 42), and in the Alvismál Thor incites the dwarf to trot out his learning by a piece of flattery, thus: “you know *rök fira*”, the ceremonial knowledge necessary to the sacrificer.

The locality of the rök seats is not far to seek, they were found near the spot where the holy luck, the blessing of the feast, was concentrated: at the foot of the tree by the well within the sacrificial enclosure. In the language of the legend, Thor and the ases go to Yggdrasil to deem, this phrase of the Grímnismál carries a hint of the ritual praxis when the gods [321] went to their rök seats. Another picture of the ceremonial procession to the rök seats is furnished through the mythology of the same poem (29): “through these — the holy waters —

Thor wends his way every day to Yggdrasil, for the bridge of the Ases is on fire and the holy waters are seething"; we see the sacrificers passing along the fire to the rök seats at the back of the seething kettles overspread by the holy branch symbolising the world ash.

One of the speeches of the *Hávamál* is introduced by this formula: "Now is the time to rehearse sacred words — *þylja* — from the speaker's seat — *þular stól* — by the well of Urd"; this verb evidently indicates ritual speech not in dialogue, which was pronounced in a chanting voice from the holy place — it is used of poets reciting their poetry and of people talking to themselves (*Háv.* 111, v. Fritzner s. v. and cf. Danish runic inscr.).

When Eilif, the poet of the *Thorsdrapa*, had embraced the new faith of Christ, he voiced his reliance on the new god by saying: "Christ is sitting by Urd's well in the South"; in translation Rome was the place of the precious *dómr*, the rök of Jesus, his words and deeds.

## CLAN GODS AND RITUAL GODS

From our point of view the gods divide themselves into two groups: the god of the clan, the divine representative of the kinsmen's luck or *hamingja*, and the ritual god representing a phase in the drama. Properly speaking, the whole festival: the circle of worshippers, the house in which the blot took place, the ceremonial implements and acts and words are god, but this divinity assumes a personal appearance or crystallises into a character in every act of moment, as is dogmatically illustrated by the functional gods of the Romans. This ritual manifestation of the *hamingja* in a definite attitude is actually identical with the sacrificer who performs the sacral action and pronounces the formula appropriate to the ceremony. Such ritual divinities are not possessed of any individual permanence outside the [322] scene in which they act; their particular existence begins and ends with the episode and thus will never acquire what we call a distinctive personal character.

In poems and fragmentary myths, in kennings and lists of names there is preserved a great number of cult epithets, more than sufficient to prove the intricate structure of the drama, but in most cases such names are nothing more to us than cues to scenes that have been irretrievably lost. At times we dimly recognise in the epithet a cult title expressive of a duty incumbent on the god, or his impersonator, as f. i. when it is said of Odin in *Grimnismál* (v. 50): "I bore the names of Svidurr and Svidrir in the house of Sökkmimir".

This class comprises the triads mentioned in connection with the fight with the demon and the creation. Hoenir discovers himself as the blower of the sacrificial fire and the giver of life; Voluspá introduces him as "choosing" the omen-sticks, thus alluding to another of his functions in the blot. The quaint remark of the *Heimskringla* (113) that Hoenir as a ruler was dependent on the wisdom of Mimir and in every difficulty appealed to him with the words: "let others decide", may very well be a rationalistic interpretation of a ritual fact.

An interesting epithet, belonging, so far as we can make out, to Hoenir and referring to still another function of his, is Meili; the name implies a ritual cooperation with Thor in his fighting the demon. In the poetical terminology of *Haustlong*, Thor is called Meili's kinsman (14 cf. *Harb.* 9). The name recurs in a compound, Fet-Meili (*Haustl.* 4), the walker or strider. From these indications we may form a tolerably clear idea of the significance of the title. Like Vishnu in the Vedic ritual Hoenir has to perform a ceremonial pacing in order to hallow the place, to make it safe and to ensure the success of the sacred acts performed on the spot; one aspect of this ritual walk finds a parallel in the procession round the territory by which a squatter appropriated a piece of ground. The same ritual duty is hinted at in other kennings designating Hoenir: the fleet áss and the Long-foot (*S E* 84). The epithet *aurkonungr* (*ib.*) indicates a connection with the aurr. [323]

The god Ull probably belongs to the group of ritual gods. The facts to be drawn upon for the explanation of his character are firstly that he is called the stepson of Thor, and secondly

that he is closely associated with a shield, and these two facts form parts of the same evidence. The first datum indicates his place in the drama as the companion and helper of Thor — in the same way as Hoenir, but in different situations; in the Thorsdrapa the relationship between the two divinities is defined by a ritual word of unknown acceptation: *gulli*. The character of their cooperation is sufficiently indicated by the shield that plays a part in either drama, in the former the shield on which Hrungrnir was slain, in the latter the shield that saved the companions of Thor from being drowned when crossing the infernal river. The programme of these scenes is given by S E (115): “shield may be called the ship of Ull or paraphrased in allusion to the foot of Hrungrnir”; from this note we learn that a shield was a ritual implement in the drama, and further that the functional divinity of this shield was called Ull. The passage in the legend of Hrungrnir stating that the giant thrust the shield under his feet or, as Haustlong has it, that he was slain on the shield, indicates the ritual staging of the act. Probably the shield and the shield god, as Ull is poetically named, performed in situations other than those accidentally mentioned in mythological literature, as it has come down to us.

Grimnismál 42 adds one more item to our knowledge concerning the part played by Ull in the drama; the verse (*v. supra* p. 294) intimates that the god was connected with the sacrificial fire and the kettles. This hint is probably elucidated by Baldrs Draumar v. 7, whence it appears that the holy vat of ale was covered by a shield: “Here stands the mead brewed to welcome Balder, pure drink covered by a shield”. Further epithets belonging to Ull are bow-man, ski-runner, god of chase, but in default of explanatory legends or other hints, the significance of these names must be left undecided. The remark of S E (31) that he is worth calling on before entering on a duel probably hinges on his ritual role as Thor's helpmate.

If our knowledge of the god Ull must remain somewhat [324] vague and circumstantial, we are on surer ground when we approach the figure of Heimdal. Though our material does not furnish more than broken glimpses of his position in the ritual, the rays of light are so numerous and play upon him from so many angles that we get a pretty clear view of his character and sacral importance. According to the rather systematic account of S E (30), he is the warder of the gods and sits by the rim of heaven to guard the bridge against the giants. When this mythological image is translated into a ritual fact, the meaning is that he is the protector of the holiness of the feast. Like Varuna in the Vedic ritual, Heimdal is the personification — the functional god — of the feast frith; he keeps watch over the worshippers so that no member of the sacred circle may infringe the rules and tabus on the observance of which the blessing of the blot was dependent, and through his insubordination lay the holy place open to the pernicious influence of the demons. In this character he is called the white ase (S E 30, 83, Thrym. 15), the whitest and purest of the gods, and from another point of view: *sif siffaðan*, the incarnation of frith and the solidarity of kinship (Hynd. 43).

The sacrificers are called the sacred kin or sons of Heimdal (Vsp. 1), because they are consecrated and thus subjected to the rules of the feast frith; actually it means that Heimdal's Sons or kin is the sacral name for the congregation during the moments when the ceremonial hints at or turns upon the consecration and moral duties of the feast, in the same way as the circle of worshippers in Vedic ritual appeals to Varuna and Mithra as the guardians of the sacrifice.

The sanctity of the feast implied euphemia: ritual silence and devout attention, during the performance of the ceremonies and the chanting of the sacred texts; in the sacral language this euphemia is called *hljóð*, and *hljóð* is bound up with the horn of Heimdal, the symbol or incarnation of his authority. The horn is simply called his hljod and according to Vsp. (27) it is hidden — *i. e.* it rested — beneath the world ash in the sacrificial place. Vsp. opens with the verse: “I ask for hljod from the sacred kin, the sons of Heimdal”, lines in which a [325] ritual formula is paraphrased or more probably directly transcribed.

In the poetry of the viking age the horn of Heimdal figures as the trumpet that heralds the battle of Ragnarok. Whether this fanfare is a poetical invention due to the battle-heated imagination of the Ragnarok poets or it has its origin in ancient ritual is a question that must

be left in abeyance; the ritual epithets never allude to the blowing of the horn, but their silence is no proof that it cannot have been in use as an instrument of music.

The ceremonial and dramatic appearance of Heimdal is not obscure; he was present in the horn resting on the place of sacrifice. The scene is pictured in the kennings of the scalds that render the sword by “the head of Heimdal”; we learn moreover that the symbol consisted in the horn of a ram, the sacrificial animal, for Heimdal is a ritual and poetical name of the ram, and *hallinskíði*, “ram”, is an epithet of Heimdal's, cf. III 80, S E 30, 209. S E (83, 145) proffers the information that the head of Heimdal is called sword on account of a story to the effect that he was pierced with the head of a man, *lostinn mannz-höfði í gögnum*, and in continuation of this startling piece of news we read: “that is the reason why the head is called Heimdal's *mjötubr* or destiny, and sword means the destiny of man”. It is evident that there is a hitch somewhere in the chain of reasoning, at any rate the author has made a mess of two kennings or epithets, *viz*, that the sword can be styled Heimdal's head in allusion to a ritual scene turning on the horn of a ram, and on the other hand that the god was pierced with a man's head; and the summing up of the author in the form of a logical conclusion: head is the destiny of Heimdal, sword is the destiny of man, therefore head is sword, looks pretty like an artificial makeshift. In all probability the sentence is the outcome of the author's attempt to make sense of an epithet the meaning of which was lost or obscured, but this does not exclude the possibility that he had at his disposal two different kennings which had got mixed up. This being the case, the latter epithet alludes to an unknown rite suggesting the legend of the kettle being called the pledge of Odin.

[326] But we get a little nearer by examining the word *mjötubr*, that is used by the author in support of his logic. *Mjotubr* is a ritual expression for luck, or destiny, *i. e.* the future as it is bound up with the sacrifice and created by its proper performance. This fate is concentrated in the sacrificial place, as we have seen, by the well; it is thus closely connected with the horn of Heimdal, and with the world ash that shades the sacred spot. The tree is said to possess this *mjotubr* — the power — among men, to help women in the throes of birth (Fjols. 22). *Vsp.* (2) offers a parallel form, *mjötviubr*, that should mean the tree of destiny, but this compound is possibly due to a late rationalistic redactor who tried his best to make sense out of an obscure text. According to *Vsp.* the battle of the gods and the demons is ushered in by the *mjotubr* bursting into flames by the ancient *Gjallarhorn*, when Heimdal raises the horn and blows a loud blast. The phrase is not clear, but it evidently turns on the fact that the tree is called *mjotubr*, in the same way as Heimdal's horn is called *hljod* as being the “symbol” of euphemia.

Heimdal is called the warder of the gods sitting at the rim where heaven joins the earth: a mythical expression of the fact that he rested *við jarðar þröm* (Hynd. 35), at the edge of men's holy place, *viz*, the sacrificial place where the real or eternal world was found. There he dwells in close contact with the sacred aurr; Loki twits him with leading a dog's life, his back soiled with mud: *aurgu baki* (Lokas. 48), a travesty that finds a mythical parallel in the *Grimnismál* 13: Heimdal drinks joyfully his mead at *Himinbjorg*.

The consecration of Heimdal or mythically speaking his birth, is described in words that reflect the ritual with its formulæ. According to Hynd. 38 his power was created from the *megin* of the earth — *jarðar megin* that resided in the aurr — the cool waves and the fluid from the sacrificial kettles. He is the son of nine mothers. Through these abrupt phrases we catch a glimpse of the ritual that initiated the feast and constituted its frith: the horn of the ram is carried forward and deposited on the “altar”, consecrated to be the guardian of the blot, [327] born by nine mothers, nine ritual acts, as in default of better knowledge we must be content to say. Later on a series of ceremonies proceeded from this guardian, or had his symbol for their centre, as is tantalisingly hinted at in obscure allusions to his horn.

In the prose sentences introducing the *Rigmál*, Heimdal is identified with *Rig*, the father of men, but the evidential value of this gloss is rather doubtful. It is not intrinsically impossible that the identification may be inspired by a genuine tradition, that of Heimdal taking part in the dramatic birth of the clan, but the poem itself contains no intimation of *Rig* being looked on as an avatar of Heimdal.



So long as the feast lasted the congregation was under the protection of Heimdal, but during the moments when holy words were spoken from the rök seats, the solemnity of the hour found expression in another ritual word. The recitals are Hávi's speech, the congregation is Hávi's hall, and from such formulæ we learn that another ritual god, Hár or Hávi, presided over the chanting and watched over the correct enunciation of the sacred texts (Háv. 109, 111, 164). A ceremonial formula relating to this aspect of the blot crops up in the poem which Eyvind composed in honour of Earl Hakon: "I ask for hljod in Hár's assembly" (Skjald. 60 cf. *or því liði*, Vsp. 17 and Háv. 111).

The opening verse runs as follows: "I ask for attention in the assembly of Hár while I raise the mead — the weregild of the giant — and reckon up the kin of the Earl to the gods in Odin's kettle's fluid — *lögr* — which he bore on mighty wings from Surt's deep, gloomy vales". Even though we were to strain our words to the point of breaking, we should never succeed in reproducing the precise import and significance of these verses; the only way of approach is possibly to describe the setting of Eyvind's poem. He had composed a poem in honour of the Earl of Hladi taking for his theme the traditions of Hakon's race; in his verses he gives a list of the earl's ancestors or a compendium of his hamingja, the names of the genealogy naturally implying the history represented by these several [328] figures. Such a poem makes up a rök or dómr; it gives real honour to the Earl by calling the fame of his family into new being and thus increasing his strength and luck. Hence it follows that it could only be recited at a feast as a piece of worship, baptised and made "whole" by the sacred cup. As a matter of course Eyvind opens his poem with a ritual allocution, addressing his listeners in a ceremonial phrase allusive to their holiness "in the hall of Hár". Further he clothes his opening phrases in images referring to the ale indicative of the feast in which his poem makes up a formæli. It is not an idle poetical metaphor when his poem and the legend of the ale combine into a comprehensive idea, that of reciting the drapa and that of serving the ale; thus we are led to feel the force of the kennings in this verse: He who bore the ale up from the dim vales of the nether world king.

All that can be said of the god Vali may be expressed in one word: the avenger. According to the legend, he was begotten by Odin for the sake of revenge, and he placed his antagonist on the pyre at the tender age of one night, before he had washed his hands and combed his hair; this mythological biography is sufficiently elucidated by his dramatic function: he is the god who restores harmony after the slaughtering of the victim, he is "born" to his task, like Heimdal, and he has no personal existence outside the scene of restoration (S E 83, Hynd. 29, Bald. 11, here I 100-1).

To the same category belong gods like Modi and Magni, divine strength and power or megin, representatives of some situation in the drama; the remainder of ritual gods are but names to us and must be left in the twilight of a broken tradition.

The principle of the ritual drama involves an inner tension that — to our view — brings about a bewildering intricacy in some of its scenes, as of a double fugue running upon discordant themes. The body of the sacrificial animal is the Holiest of Holies, at the same time playing the part of the demon; the explanation is to be found in the creative power of the ritual in which the fundamental sentiment of the Teutons finds ex- [329] pression: to be pure and true, life must again and again be snatched out of the reach of the giants, to be good and fruitful, earth must be built on their dead bodies. In S E 11 the question is raised: What did Odin do before the world was created, and the query elicits this answer: He dwelt among the frost giants. These words originate in an ancient legend and reproduce the proceedings of the ritual. Not only such grand objects as heaven and earth, sun and moon, but ritual symbols, the ale vat and the ale itself, must be reft or acquired from the demons. The myths frequently allude to a ritual connection between the divine powers and forces of demoniacal appearance, to matrimonial or amorous alliances between gods and maidens belonging to the world of the giants, f. i. Thor's friendship with Grid that resulted in the acquisition of the Gridarvolr — according to S E Vidar was the son of Grid — the love affairs between Frey and Gerd, Odin and Gunnlod (cf. Hym. 8).

Thus it comes about that the ritual demands the cooperation of figures — whether human actors or acting implements — who are at once holy and accursed; accursed because they have to impersonate — for a time — the mischievous influence of the evil powers, holy because they have to appear in the drama in order to be overthrown, and cannot take part in the ritual unless they belong to the body of consecrated worshippers. Their task consists in representing objects or forces that have to be made heore, *nýt*, and it must never be forgotten that the creation of the world, the conquest of the gold or of the ale, the slaying of the giant, are not so many pieces of make-believe.

This category of ritual persons includes the giant's maiden, whose part was to initiate the ceremony of atonement; in the legend we see Skadi mounting the stage with the object of giving the gods an opportunity to cleanse themselves of the guilt incurred by the death of Thiazi. *Haustlong* and *Thorsdrapa* still preserve the ritual name of this figure: *Mörn*, and we catch a reminiscence of the drama when the demon is styled the father of *Mörn*. This ceremonial title crops up in *Volsathattr*, a piece of Christian persiflage on rustic idolatry, in which, moreover, we are presented with a formula containing the name: [330] “*Moernir accept this blot*”. To all appearance the title reappears once more in a magic verse composed as a lampoon against a Danish king.

The Skadi of the legends certainly hails from a drama belonging to a group of worshippers in the Drontheim parts of Norway; the importance of this figure in the ritual is vouched for by the fact that she gives birth to the clan of the Earls: Odin and Skadi were the progenitors of this race.

In the council of the gods there is no figure more arresting than that of Loki. He was a favourite of the poets in the viking age; they gave him an ample chance of playing the villain in the piece, and in their poetical myths extracted the full measure of slyness, double-dealing, cock-sureness, effrontery, cunning, cowardice and foolhardiness that lay hidden behind his sleek, ingratiating features. He becomes the leading character in the tragedy of the world, the most entertaining person in the history of the gods and at the same time the sinister power who shapes the fate of the world by his strength of weakness and his daring of cowardice. The threads of a destiny involving gods and men meet in his fertile brain and are twined by his ready wit and spiteful cynicism into a net that draws the whole world into the abyss of death. Double of tongue, glib of speech, never at a loss for a jest and a trick, he passes backwards and forwards between the gods and the demons; again and again he lures the gods to the brink of destruction; every time he contrives a way out for the sake of saving his own head; by his double-dealing he slowly but surely prepares for the day that shall set free the enemies of life and is to see him marching at their head into the battle-field.

This subtle friend of the gods is rather refractory to a sober method of analysis dividing him into mythological and folkloristic elements. As a matter of course he has been caught time upon time and placed on the anatomist's table, has had his body dissected and his inner organs numbered as belonging partly to a corn spirit, partly to a spirit of nature and partly to something else; but the analysis has never succeeded in depriving him of his deftness and agility, he slips from under [331] the hands of the anatomists and springs to his feet ready with a shocking jest. The only explanation of his character is the momentous drama of history in which he plays the leading part. The viking poets anthropomorphised the gods and all but turned them into studies of character, but their subtlest art was lavished on this divine jester and trickster, so as almost to make him a symbol of the mysteriousness of the human soul. There are few figures in the human portrait gallery to match the sly judge of humanity, or, rather, divinity, bewilderingly complex in his straightforward spitefulness, possessed of a foolhardiness equal to his cowardice, carrying the sharpest steel of subtle cunning in a sheath of cynical garrulity and abuse, handling his weapon with magisterial obsequiousness — a sly rogue who loves a trick disinterestedly for its own sake, able to turn his very blunders to account, spending his time in getting into scrapes to provide an opportunity for testing his wits in getting out of them and never alighting more gracefully than when he has been hoist with his own petard.

This figure of demoniacal humour is not evolved out of nothing by sheer psychological ingenuity; matured as his powers have been, he is of ancient dramatic extraction. The poets manufactured Loki, but they did not create him. To put the matter briefly, he was the sacrificial actor whose business was to draw out the demon, to bring the antagonism to a head and thus to prepare for victory — hence the duplicity of his nature; to act the part he must partake in the holiness and divinity of the sacrificial circle, and when this ritual fact is translated into the language of the legend, it assumes this form: Loki is of giant extraction, born in Utgard and admitted to the company of the gods on his entering into friendship and a blood covenant with Odin. In the Lokasenna he triumphantly claims his seat on the strength of this covenant, and reminds Odin: did we not mingle blood in ancient times, you made a vow never to touch the cup of ale unless I had a share. The “ancient times” — *árdagar* — alludes to the origin of time in the sacrifice — cf. esp. Vaf. 55, Hynd. 35 — and this verse of Lokasenna is probably a reminiscence of a ritual scene, a council, held in the rök seats in preparation of the ceremonies. Such a figure has to bear the blame of the tricks and feints necessary to provoke the conquest of life, he becomes a comic figure, the trickster who is predestined to be overreached. The philosophical poets of the viking age paint their Loki on the canvass of old stories, and we may believe that the humour of this figure was foreshadowed in the ritual character. The scenes presenting the demon tripped up by his own stratagems and hurled head over heels into destruction were imbued with grim humour, but the bantering, laughing scorn had in it a clear ring of triumph, coming as it did from men who were able to do justice to the dangerous strength of their enemies. The worshippers did not sneer at the demons, for in overcoming the onslaughts of evil they had to put forth their utmost strength, and through the perilous contest they had tasted and got to know their own power and the might of their gods.

## THE DRAMA AS THE HISTORY OF THE CLAN

The sacrificial drama covers the history of the clan from the very birth of time to the actual present of the blot — hence the pregnancy of its several scenes — and makes up a whole repugnant to the very idea of a distinction, in our view of fundamental importance, between cosmic or mythical events and historical incidents. The fight with the demon spells victory over the enemy in every shape, the overcoming of enmity; in this act the clan wins all its battles for ever. This implies to our understanding a twofold or rather manifold meaning to the legend, because we are unable to grasp a mental attitude of such a complex or, rather, of so condensed a character; our experience being directed from a chronological standpoint prevents our conceiving history as a totality or fulness that never loses its inner coherence, even if it readily splits up into episodes when any incident is brought back to memory.

In the dragon fight the traditions of the clan are transfigured and celebrated, and the scene is consequently distinguished by an individual tone according to the experience of various

[333] groups (see II 38 seqq.). The legend never describes those actual incidents which to us are equivalent to history, but reproduces the events remembered in their ritual acting. In Scandinavia the ancient traditions have been remoulded into literature under the influence of English and Irish narrative art; here and there however, the traces of older forms are discernible beneath the surface, and in one case the dramatic structure of the story is plainly visible, only slightly retouched by the fancy of the poet.

In the princely clans of Scandinavia kinship with kingly houses in the South was highly prized and fondly cherished; a chieftain of illustrious extraction and far-reaching ambition felt with pride the blood of the Volsungs coursing in his veins and their hamingja working through his schemes, it is accordingly no wonder that the legend of Sigurd the dragon slayer should occupy a prominent place in their traditions. The myth has been subjected to poetic treatment over and over again, but has happily survived in a form that bears a legendary stamp and shows how the story of Sigurd was re-enacted under the guise of the dragon fight.

A group of Eddic poems comprising the *Fafnismál*, *Reginismál* and *Sigrdrifumál*, is moulded on the drama or the sequence of dramatic episodes at the blot.

The prelude, disclosing the activities of the three gods Odin, Hoenir and Loki, is pure sacrificial myth. The second part is bound up with the sacrifice in its description of the fight in pictures from the blot — the conqueror tastes the heart of the victim — and the verses still hinge on ritual terms such as *funi* for fire and *fjörsegi* for heart. The enemy still appears in the character of the demon: not only are Fafnir and Regin styled jotuns, but they have the ritual epithets of the demon appended to their names: the old jotun, the frost-cold jotun, as in *Vaf.* 21 where it is said of Ymir: “the sky was made from the frost-cold jotun's skull”, in *Lokas.* 49 where Loki is bound with the bowels “torn from his frost-cold son”, in *Háv.* 104: “Suttung the ancient jotun”, and in *Voluspá* 25: “the ancient one, the mother of wolves”, etc. The third part describing the meeting of Sigurd and Brynhild bears the features of the drinking feast: [334] she hands him the horn and graces the act with a *formæli* that is nothing less than an opening or invocatory hymn; hether they be a literal transcription or a poetical paraphrase of words used at the blot the verses contain the most precious piece of ritual apostrophe preserved to us.

The dramatic representation of the incidents is further indicated through numerous *dómar*, recitals embodying mythical lore and ethical exhortations. The poems under discussion offer valuable information supplementary to the elucidations of *Voluspá* and *Hávamál* regarding the arrangement of the recitals in continuance of the ritual acts; the slaying of the jotun introduces a dialogue on destiny and the norns, on the battle between the gods and the demons; the offering of the horn gives rise to a lesson in runic lore; another incident leads to a discussion of practical and moral wisdom. According to *Háv.* 111 cited above, the officiating person who proceeded to the *rök* seat in order to make a ritual proclamation was in this capacity at times called *pulr*, speaker; the poem occasionally hints at this aspect of the blot by appending the ritual epithet *pulr* to the name of Regin (*Faf.* 34).

The dramatic origin of the poem is further apparent through the psychology of the heroine. As far as we can understand, Brynhild is split up into two persons, the woman and a mythological double, Sigdrifa; but the apparent inconsistency is caused by our looking at the drama from without and consequently puzzling over the simple fact that the heroine is dramatically represented by a figure displaying mythical attributes. The *vafrogi* that encircles her dwelling-place is probably reminiscent of the scene where part of the ritual was enacted, being in fact nothing else than the sacrificial fire. This symbolic or dramatic fire recurs elsewhere, f. i. in *Skirnismál*, in a scene of ritual character; and if further evidence is needed it is furnished in unambiguous terms by a phrase in *Fjolsvinnsmál* (31-2): “What is the name of the hail encircled by *vafrogi*? — It goes by the name of Hyrr” — fire, probably a ritual term — “and flickers for a long time on the edge of the spear”, cf. *supra* p. 298. [335]

Primitive drama combines stability of form with plasticity in application. It is tied down to a pre-determined model, in which the dominating idea or motif of the sacrifice finds expression, but the model is adaptable insofar as it readily lends itself to the exposition of local episodes, or history in our sense of the word.

This interweaving of divine and human history will often produce a feeling of bewilderment in modern readers and either occasion disgust at such rather frivolous handling of facts, or, if they be men of learning, urge them to titanic feats of analysis and interpretation. A case in point is the story of Balder which is preserved in two parallel versions, that of the Icelanders and that of Saxo the historian. To all appearance Saxo took his romance from unknown sources that had their origin in real legends, reproductions of a clan drama; his saga of Balder and Ollerus as well as his Hading myth represent divine myth incorporating historical traditions, and they thus fall into line with the Sigurd legends. As his sources are unknown, we shall probably never succeed in making out how great a part the euhemeristic partiality of the monk played in the formation of his style, and his pages will for ever remain somewhat intractable material for historical and mythological speculation; but if we are right in supposing that he had genuine legends at his disposal, he may be acquitted of

mere arbitrariness in the treatment of his material — the legends offered a handle to which he could attach his euhemeristic theory.

In Eilif's Thorsdrapa the legend still preserves its actual character. In the middle of the poem the progress of Thor's exploits is held up for a couple of verses devoted to the praise of some contemporary expedition or expeditions; on account of their actuality these stanzas are sometimes gently removed by modern interpreters as insertions which conspire against the unity of the poem. More probably they may be considered the heart of the drapa — the poet weaves actual battles into the victory over the demon and in accordance with the central theme makes his kennings play on real ethnological names — Gandvikr Skotum, Skyldbreta, vikingar etc. — all of which [336] proves that he was in close touch with the ritual forms of poetry or more probably reproduced a sacrificial drama in his drapa. If we had the means of running his allusions to earth we should probably be able to identify the king at whose court Eilif recited his poem.

“Heimdal fought with Loki for the Brisngamen at Vágasker and Singasteinn” (S E 83), thus runs Snorri's tantalising report of an important legend concerning the conquest of the gold; and beyond this concise index to the contents of the myth we are only vouchsafed a hint that the precious necklace rested in the middle of the waters and that Heimdal carried off the prize. The myth implies a dramatic game enacted in order to save the treasures of the clan from the rapacious grip of the demons and at the same time to renew the luck inherent in its possessions. The poet of the Voluspá has this drama in mind when he makes a pair of antagonists out of Heimdal and Loki in the decisive battle between the gods and the demons. The fact that the myth in our version centres in the necklace called the Brisngamen is probably reminiscent of an individual form of the drama hailing from a clan of Brisngs (cf. for another family traditions of a similar treasure, the Brosngs in Beow. 1119). The Brisngs were a clan of Southern Germany, and the introduction of their legend into Scandinavia was due to matrimonial or other alliances, as is notoriously the case with the Sigurd legend. The contest between the god and the demon came in as part of the sacrificial drama everywhere — it is identical with the slaying of Fafnir — and is perpetuated in a number of kennings or ritual formulæ designating gold as the resting place of the serpent or the demon. The justification for the assumption by Heimdal of the character of the rescuer in our version of the legend is not far to seek: the ritual gold having its appointed place on the “altar”, was guarded during the ceremonies by the power of Heimdal.

Another legend which represents a ritual drama against an historical background is handed down to us under the title: The War between the Ases and the Vanes. This grouping of the ancient gods into two conflicting parties reflects a contrast [337] between different rituals or rather between heterogeneous religions. The Ases are the gods of the cattle owner; the Vanes are the deities of the peasant, their sacrificial animal is the swine, and their drama centres round the plough and the scythe. The religion of the tiller of the soil differs from that of the cattle owner not merely in the peculiarity of its ceremonies, but still more in its spirit of fierce exaltation. The drama of origin generally involved a *hieros gamos* or some other symbol of propagation, and it may be presumed that the cult of the Ases included ceremonies bearing upon the birth of the clan or the people; but in the religion of the peasant, the rites of impregnation and conception are suffused with a sensual glow that is foreign to and even repellent to the herdsman; in the old Norse literature, erotic poetry is represented by one solitary poem, the Skirnismál, and Skirnismál is a paraphrase of a legend belonging to the cult of the Vanes.

Where agriculture appeared it carried its rites along with the implements of husbandry; the plough was of no use unless it was accompanied by instructions as to the proper way of handling this new contrivance, and in the directions for use our distinction between manual and ritual management has no force. Any amount of rules regarding the preparation of the soil and handling of the seed would be empty so long as they did not include an initiation into the ceremonies needed for rendering sowing effective, inspiring it with “luck”. When agriculture was introduced among the Northerners this ritual apparatus had to be incorporated into the indigenous blot and assimilated to its drama. The cult of the Vanes in

Scandinavia goes back to the time when the first plough tore the soil and the first handful of barley was scattered in the furrow, but the influence of the Vanic religion varied considerably according as agriculture remained an occupation of secondary interest, as was the case in great parts of Norway down to the introduction of Christianity, or as it occupied a central place as “the staff of life”, as in Denmark and on the broad, fertile plains of Central Sweden.

In our terms, the conflict and the reconciliation of the Ases and Vanes reflect a clash between rival gods or conflicting ritu- [338] als, but such a statement involves the reconstitution of the original facts to suit our quasi-historical abstractions. In reality the legend commemorates a war between a race of Thor worshippers and another group of men who sacrificed to Frey, and this struggle was embittered by cultural prejudices. The influence of the Vanes is symbolised in the uncanny seductress Gullveig, whose figure reflects the hatred felt by the worshippers of Thor for certain ecstatic and erotic phenomena. “She was a bewitcher of minds, a worker of magic, welcomed with joy by evil women”, in the racy words of the Voluspá (22). The war terminated in reconciliation and alliance and, according to the spirit of ancient frith, friendship implied a mingling of luck and consequently community of ritual. This momentous event was incorporated into the history of the race or, in other words, it was commemorated and constantly renewed in the drama, and the legend can be nothing else than an account of the events as they really happened, *i. e.* as they were enacted by subsequent generations in the blot halls. The dramatic situation is graphically rendered by the poet of the Voluspá (23-4): “all the gods proceeded to the rök seats and consulted together, whether the ases should pay or all the gods take part in the feast” — thus the opening of the ceremony, making arrangement for its proper performance; then the drama itself: “Odin flung his spear into the host, the fence of the gods was broken into, uttering their battle cries the Vanes tramped the field”. The events that led up to the war are given in terms of ritual acting, which no analysis, be it ever so subtle, will succeed in converting into historical statement: “The gods propped her up with spears and burned her in Hár's hall, three times they burned her, three times born, often, not seldom, though she is still living” (21).

In the description of the Vane gods their worshippers are portrayed: possessors of broad, fertile fields, horse breeders, bold sailors. As a matter of course this description applies to the race whose drama is represented in the Norwegian tradition, and makes up a piece of self-portraiture; whether it also gave a true likeness of the race who originally fought under the banner of Frey is another question that may possibly be answered in [339] the affirmative, though not on the strength of the Norwegian legend. According to the hints of the Voluspá, corroborated by later accounts, the religion of the Vanes had evolved a peculiar form of ecstatic practice, called *seiðr*, in which the performer hypnotised himself, or herself, by means of songs produced in a setting of weird, impressive ceremonial. Presumably the self-intoxicating, spiritualistic performances of the *seið* were of Finnish or Lapp origin, and it is characteristic of the Vanic religion that shamanistic elements were drawn into its ritual and readily assimilated.

The legend of the war among the gods affords no clue as to its provenance. One tiny, broken ray of historical light only, flickers over the documents; the mythical names of Freyja stand out from all other divine epithets by a peculiarity of their own: she is called the goddess of the Vanes, the woman of the Vanes (Vana-goð, Vana-dis, Vana-brúðr, S E 90, 100 cf. 82) thus indicating that “the Vanes” was originally an appellation denominating the people and transferred by quondam enemies to the Vane deities. We learn from the sagas that the Norwegian worship of Frey had its principal seat in the regions around the Drontheimfiord and was brought to Iceland by families hailing from this part of Norway. A conjecture that the legends reflect battles fought long ago in the Drontheim country presumably with Swedish kings, may not be wide of the mark. The people of that district entered with zest into the affairs of the surrounding world, from early time they were in touch with their eastern neighbours, and later they kept a sharp look-out over the ocean. The pedigrees of the Earls bear witness that these chieftains maintained an active intercourse with the kingdoms in the South and were no strangers in Danish waters.

It goes without saying that agriculture was not introduced complete and at one blow; there was a steady flow of rural rites northward from the Mediterranean area; the harvest of folklore among the peasants of Central and Northern Europe shows unmistakably that this percolation continued far into the Middle Ages, when Christianity had replaced the classical religions ritually as well as intellectually. Our material is, however, too [340] scanty in character to justify a hypothesis as to the origin and development of the Vane religion or even an analysis with a view to tracing subsequent phases in the Frey cult. By a singular coincidence the AS Runic Verses have preserved a reminiscence of a dramatic situation similar to that of the Norwegian legend: "Ing was first seen among the East Danes, he passed eastwards beyond the water, his waggon ran after" (B A Po. I 335 (67)); these lines evidently picture a ritual scene, and the wording indicates that the underlying legend and consequently the drama, involved an allusion to historical proceedings in the ritual of the god and his ceremonial waggon.

In our endeavour to extract the meaning of the legends we are hampered by the fact that the mythology of Scandinavia is handed down in a harmonised form; the myths are torn from the place where they have grown, they are shuffled, pieced together into systems and welded into literature. If it is borne in upon us that our information is largely derived from North Norwegian sources the discovery need not cause us wonder, Our historical documents, in the first place the Landnámabók, bear witness to the part which the high-spirited clans of these regions played in the spiritual revolution, or cultural expansion, as it has been called in these pages, of the North. They can lay claim to the name of vikings in more senses than one only, for they have adventured quite as far into the spacious world of the spirit as they did into the fair countries of the earth; it is mainly due to these venturesome migrants that the wisdom and ideals of their ancestors were carried beyond the narrow borders of the race and developed into forms that have taken their place in the literature of the world. In some cases, the legend still carries the impress of its origin. In the Thiazi myth, Skadi assumes the role of the ritual avenger, and in the dealings between the Ases and the Vanes she also appears as a chief character; her place in the world is firmly established by the ritual pedigree which Eyvind has utilised in his Háleygjatal, saying; "Odin and Skadi were the progenitors of the clan".