

*The Culture of  
The Teutons*



*Vilhelm Gönke*

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## **BOOKS**

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# **THE CULTURE OF THE TEUTONS**

**Volume I**

**By**

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To the Memory of  
Vilhelm Thomsen

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# INTRODUCTION

The term Germanic is ordinarily used to denote the racial stem of which the Scandinavians, the modern Germans, and the English, are ramifications. The name itself is probably of extraneous origin, given us by strangers.

We do not know what it means. Presumably, it was first intended to denote but a small fraction of these peoples, the fringe adjoining the Celts ; in course of time, however, it came to be accepted as a general designation for the whole. The Romans, having learned to distinguish between the inhabitants of Gallia and their eastern neighbours, called the latter Germani, thus rightly emphasising the close friendship which from the earliest times united the northern and southern inhabitants of the Baltic regions and the riparian and forest-dwelling peoples of North Germany, a kinship evident, not only in language, but fully as much in culture, even to its innermost corners.

The Teutons make their entry suddenly upon the stage of history. Their appearance falls at the time when Rome was working out the result of its long and active life; crystallising the striving and achievements of the classical world into the form in which the culture of antiquity was to be handed down to posterity. Into this light they come, and it must be admitted that its brilliance shows them poor and coarse by comparison.

There is little splendour to be found here, it would seem.

We see them first from without, with Roman eyes, looking in upon them as into a strange country. And the eye's first impression is of a foaming flood of men, a wave of warriors, pouring in with the elemental fury of the sea over eastern Gaul, to break upon the front of Cæsar's legions, and be smoothed away in a mighty backwash of recoil. Thus, roughly, Cæsar's first encounter with these barbarians appears in the description of the great Roman himself.

And beyond this flood we look into a land, dark, barren and forbidding, bristling with unfriendly forests and spread with marshes. In it we are shown groups of men who, in the intervals of their wars and forays, lie idling on couches of skins or sit carousing noisily by daylight, and for sheer lack of occupation gamble away their few possessions; horses and women, even their very lives and freedom, down to the pelt upon their back.

And between the groups go tall, sturdy women with ungentle eyes and scornful mien. In among all this shouting and raving sounds here and there a voice of mystery; an old crone making prophecy to an awed stillness round; a vague suggestion that these riotous men at moments give themselves up in breathless silence to the worship of their gods. But what are they busied with in the gloom of their sacred groves? Some slaughtering of men, no doubt: horrible sacrifice and drinking, for shouting and screaming can be heard far off.

To the peoples of the South, these dwellers in the northern wastes were simply barbarians. The Romans and the Greeks regarded their existence as the mere negation of civilized life.

They lay stress upon the unpretentious character of Germanic life. The little needs of these poor people were easily satisfied.

A covering of skins for the body, perhaps a touch of paint about the face, some sort of weapon in the hand – and the external apparition is practically complete. They look magnificent, it must be granted, in their semi-nakedness; for what human art neglects is here provided for by nature, that has given them beautiful muscles. and splendid red or blond hair that would not shame the loveliest lady in Rome. The German is a piece of nature's work, and his place is in a natural environment, among the forests of the mountain slopes. There he *lives*, whether in the excitement of the chase or in some fierce warlike raid.

At home, he spends his time in a somnolent state of idleness and intoxication; he lies amid the dirt and soot and smoke in a place that he may call his house, but which is really nothing better than a shed, a stable where man and beast are equally at home. The need of shaping his surroundings according to a personality of his own, that might well be called the instinct of nobility in civilization, is something he has clearly never felt.

He lives in the wilds, and a house, for him, is merely a shelter from the violence of wind and weather, a refuge easily built, and as easily dismantled for removal to another place.

Living thus in a state of nature, and existing on what nature provides, he has in himself the wildness of that nature. True, he was credited by the fastidious on-lookers of the South also with a certain greatness. He is capable of great devotion; he will risk his life for the sake of a chance guest whose only claim upon him is the fact that he came last evening to the dwelling of his host, and spent the night upon his couch. The women often exhibit an instinctive horror of anything that could in any way degrade them. But in reality, the barbarian knows absolutely nothing of such qualities as faithfulness and keeping to a given word. The power of distinction, which is the mark of true humanity, is something he entirely lacks. It never occurs to him that anything could be good by eternal law. He has no laws, and when he does what is good, his action is dictated solely by natural instinct.

These Germanic peoples live and move in hordes, or tribes, or whatever we may call them. They have some sort of kings, and something in the nature of a general assembly, which all men capable of bearing arms attend. But we should be chary of supposing anything properly answering to a state institution as understood among civilized people. The king has no real authority; the warriors obey him to-day, and turn their back on him defiantly to-morrow; one day, their kings may lead them forth on any reckless enterprise; the next, they may be scattering, despite his orders, and in defiance of all political prudence, to their separate homes. And in their assembly, the method of procedure is simply that he who can use the most persuasive words wins over all the rest. The warriors clash their weapons, and the matter is decided. They are like children in regard to coaxing and gifts, but fickle and ungovernable in regard to anything like obligation, indisposed to recognize any definite rule and order.

Briefly, in the view of the Roman citizen, these Germanic tribes are a people of strongly marked light and shade in character – for such words as virtue and

vice, good and evil cannot be used of them by anyone with a linguistic conscience. The Roman may speak of their natural pride, their stubborn defiance, proof even against the chains of their conqueror's triumph; but such words as majesty, nobility, he will unconsciously reserve for himself and his equals.

Here and there, among the highest types of classical culture, we may find a half æsthetic, half humane sympathy for these children of the wild; but even this is in its origin identical with the layman's mingled fear and hatred, inasmuch as it regards its object as a piece of wild nature itself. In the midst of their civilization, men could feel a spasm of wistful admiration in the face of nature, for the primeval force of life, the power that rushes on without knowing whither. Man at the pinnacle of his splendour might ponder in melancholy wise upon the happy lot of nature's children playing in the mire far below – a state which he himself for better or worse, could never reach.

Tacitus, the romantic, voiced the praises of the simple life in the personal style of the decadent period, with original twists and turns of phrase, and a vocabulary of the very rarest words that he could find. He does not beautify his savage artificially; makes no attempt to show him as wiser or better clad than he is in fact. On the contrary, he is at pains to point out how few and simple are the needs of savage life. His enthusiasm is expressed in the most delicate phrases. Among the Germani, he declares, good customs are of more avail than are good laws elsewhere: "interest and usury are unknown to them, and thus they eschew the vice more fervently than if it were forbidden."

In their customs, these savages find a naïve and simple form of expression for dumb primitive feelings: "It is not the wife who brings a dowry here, but the husband who comes with gifts to his bride...; and these gifts do not consist in women's fripperies... , no; cattle, a saddled horse, a shield, a sword, these are the bridal gifts. And she in return brings weapons for her husband's use. This they consider the strongest of bonds, the sacredness of the home, the gods of wedded life. To the end that a woman shall not feel herself apart from manly thoughts and the changing circumstance of war, she is reminded, in the marriage ceremony itself, that she there enters upon a sharing of her husband's work and peril..." And as between friends: "They rejoice in one another's gifts, giving and receiving freely, without thought of gain; friendly goodwill it is that unites them." In other words, no sickly cast of thought, but pure spontaneous feeling.

Tacitus is concerned to show particularly how all, "virtue" and "vice" is a natural growth among the people he describes.

He depicts them with so affectionate hand, and at the same time with unvarnished truth in detail, because he views his object as a piece of unspoiled nature. So thoroughly is he filled with the sense of contrast between himself and his barbarians, that he fails to mark how every fact he brings forward infallibly tears the frail theory in which he tries to inweave it.

The thing that fills civilized man with horror and loathing of the barbarian is the feeling of being here face to face with a creature incalculable, man devoid of law. Heedlessly, unthinkingly the savage keeps his oath; and will as heedlessly



break oaths and promises; he can be brave and generous in his unruly fashion, and in that same unruly fashion brutal, bestial. Any act of cruelty, any breach of faith, is far more repulsive when it stands without relation to anything else than when it appears as the infringement of an accepted moral law, a lapse from grace.

The barbarian has no character – that is the essence of the Roman verdict. When a civilized man does wrong, he does so at worst because it is wrong; and this the villain's consciousness of being wicked marks him as a human being with whom one can associate. But to receive a barbarian among one's circle of acquaintance is equivalent to building one's house in the immediate vicinity of a volcano. What if the barbarians do build some sort of houses, and till the soil – heaven knows their agriculture is but primitive at the best, the way they scratch at the surface of the earth and raise a miserable crop, only to seek fresh fields the following year; – what if they do keep cattle, and make war, and dispense some kind of justice among themselves? Or grant them even some degree of skill in forging weapons – they are not a civilized people for all that.

It was about the beginning of our era that the Germanic people first appeared in history; a thousand years later, the world saw the last glimpse of them. For a short period the Northmen hold the scene of Europe, working out their racial character and ideals with feverish haste, before they are transformed and merged in the mass of European civilization. Their going marks the disappearance of the Germanic culture as an independent type.

The Northmen, too, have been portrayed by strangers, from without, and the picture has marked points of similarity to that left by their anterior kinsmen in the records of the Roman historians. Wild, bloodthirsty, little amenable to human reason or to human reasoning, gifted with splendid vices, and for the rest devils – thus runs the character given them by mediæval chroniclers. The civilized men who now judged them were Christians who saw the world, not as divided in degrees of culture, but as divided between the powers of light and darkness; whence the incalculable must necessarily be ascribed to some origin in the infernal regions. The barbarians of classical times answer to the demons of mediæval Christianity.

This time, however, the picture does not stand alone, without a foil. Here in the North, a people of Germanic race have set up their own monument to later times, showing themselves as they wished to be seen in history, revealing themselves, not with any thought of being seen by strangers, but yet urged by an impulse toward self-revelation.

In externals, the Northmen seem to have something of the same elemental, unreflecting violence, the same uneasy restlessness that led the cultured world to stamp their southern kinsmen as barbarians. Reckless and impulsive, not to say obstinate, in their self-assertion, acting on the spur of the moment, shifting from one plan to another – the cool political mind might find considerable resemblance between the German brigands and the pirates of the North. But our more intimate knowledge enables us to discern the presence of a controlling and uniting will beneath the restless exterior. What at the first glance appears but aimless flickering shows, on closer inspection, as a steadier light. In reality, these vikings have but little of that aimlessness which can be characterised as

natural. There is more of calculating economy in them than of mere spendthrift force. The men are clear in their minds both as to end and means, will and power. While they may seem to be drifting toward no definite goal, they have yet within themselves an aim undeviating as the compass, unaltering however they may turn.

The old idea of the vikings as sweeping like a storm across the lands they touched, destroying the wealth they found, and leaving themselves as poor as ever, has, in our time, had to give way to a breathless wonder at their craving for enrichment.

The gold they found has disappeared. But we have learned now, that there was gathered together in the North a treasury of knowledge and thought, poetry and dreams, that must have been brought home from abroad, despite the fact that such spiritual values are far more difficult to find and steal and carry safely home than precious stones or precious metals. The Northmen seem to have been insatiable in the matter of such spiritual treasures. They have even, in the present day, been accused of having annexed the entire sum of pagan and Christian knowledge possessed by the Middle Ages; and looking at the Norse literature of the viking age, we find some difficulty in refuting this charge, though it may seem too sweeping as it is urged by Bugge and his disciples. Others, again, ask scornfully, if we are really expected to believe that our Northmen sat over their lessons like schoolboys in the Irish monasteries, studying classical authors and mediæval encyclopedias. This would no doubt be the most natural explanation for modern minds who suck all their nourishment from book and lectures; but we must probably assume that they gained their learning in some less formal fashion. On the other hand, if they had not the advantage of a systematic education, it is the more incomprehensible that they should in such a degree have gained access to the art and science of the age. They had not only a passionate craving to convert the elements of foreign culture to their own enrichment, but they had also a mysterious power of stirring up culture and forcing it to yield what lay beneath its surface.

Even this thirst for knowledge, however, is not the most surprising thing about them. That they did learn and copy to a great extent is plain to see; but even now we may speculate without result, or hope of any result, upon what it was they learned and how much they may have added thereto of their own. There exists no magic formula whereby the culture of viking times, as a whole, can be resolved into its original component parts. So thoroughly have they re-fashioned what they took, until its thought and spirit are their own.

The two sides must throughout be seen together. The Northman has not only a powerful tendency to extend and enrich his mental sphere, but this craving for expansion is counterpoised by a spiritual self-assertion no less marked, that holds him stubbornly faithful to the half-unconscious ideal that constitutes his character.

He does not face the world with open arms; far from it, he is all suspicion and reserve toward strange gods and ways and values, that he feels incongruous with his own self-estimation. All that is alien he holds aloof, until he has probed its secret, or wrung from it a secret satisfying to himself. All that cannot be so dealt with he shuts out and away from him; is hardly aware of it, in fact. But

wherever he can, by adapting himself at first to an alien atmosphere, extract its essence for his own particular use, there he will draw in greedily all he can, and let it work in him.

He has that firmness that depends upon a structure in the soul, and that elasticity which , comes from the structure's perfect harmony with its surroundings, enabling him spiritually to conform to the need of his environment. He is master of the world about him, by virtue of a self-control more deeply rooted even than the will, identical with the soul-structure itself.

In the innermost of his being there is a central will, passing judgement upon all that penetrates from without; a purpose that seizes upon every new acquisition, seals and enslaves it to one particular service, forcing it to work in the spirit of its new master, and stamping it with his image; where this cannot be done, the alien matter is rejected and ignored. All that it takes to itself is transmuted into power, all power subjected to discipline, and flung out then as a collective force. Thus violence, here, is not a mere extravagance of power. The central will gives to each action such an impetus that it overshoots the mark in every case, setting a new one beyond. Thus man's whole life is lived at such a pressure of power that he himself is ever being urged on toward ever farther goals. But the scale and measure of his doing is a thing outside himself. The ultimate standards whereby his life is judged are the verdict of his fellows and the verdict of posterity; standards unqualified and absolute.

The violence is organised from the depths of the soul. It is energy, that keeps the spiritual life awake and athirst, and thus creates the single-minded, firm-set personality of the Northman. These men are not each but an inspired moment, fading vaguely away into past and future; they are present, future and past in one. A man fixes himself in the past, by firm attachment to past generations. Such an attachment is found more or less among all peoples; but the Northman makes the past a living and guiding force by constant historic remembrance and historic speculation in which he traces out his connection with former generations and his dependence on their deeds. His future is linked up with the present by aim and honour and the judgement of posterity. And he fixes himself in the present by reproducing himself in an ideal type, such a type for instance as that of the chieftain, generous, brave, fearless, quick-witted, stern towards his enemies, faithful to his friends, and frank with all. The type is built up out of life and poetry together; first lived, and then transfused into poetry.

This firmness of spiritual organization which characterises the Northman as a personality is no less evident in his social life. Wherever he goes, he carries within himself a social structure which manifests itself in definite political forms as soon as he is thrown together with a crowd of others speaking the same tongue. He is not of that inarticulate type which forms kaleidoscopic tribal communities. However small his people may be, and however slight the degree of cohesion between its component molecules, the social consciousness is always present and active. He is a people in himself, and has no need of building up an artificial whole by the massing of numbers together. As soon as he has settled in a place, for a little while or for a length of time, a law-thing shoots up out of the ground, and about it grows a community. Whether his sense of social order finds scope to form a kingdom, or is constrained within

narrower bounds, it is a tendency deep-rooted, part and parcel of his character itself.

Culture, in the truest sense of the word, means an elastic harmony between man's inner self and his surroundings, so that he is able not only to make his environment serve his material ends, but also to transfigure the impulses of the surrounding world into spiritual ideals and aspirations. The cultured man possesses an instinctive dignity, which springs from fearlessness and self-reliance, and manifests itself in sureness of aims and means alike in matters of formal behaviour and in undertakings of far-reaching consequence. In this sense these vikings are men of character; they possess themselves and their world in lordly right of determination. Their harmony may be poor in the measure of its actual content, but it is none the less powerful and deep.

What a difference between these two pictures; the portrait southern pens have drawn of their Germanic contemporaries, and that which the last of the Germanic race have themselves imprinted into history. Yet for all that, we group them together under one name, and we do so, moreover, advisedly, fully conscious of what it implies. It was early realized that the two are so closely related as not merely to justify, but to necessitate our treating them together. Such indications as we have of the primeval Germanic customs, laws and ethical values, prove that those earliest forbears of the race were one with their younger kinsmen in mode of thought, and in that which unites thoughts and feelings and makes them the bearers of personality.

In this light from the North we can see, then, that the Suevi and the Marcomanni and whatever they were called, were not mere creatures of the moment, devoid of character, as the Romans fondly imagined. With the aid of the Northmen we can interpret all, or nearly all the scattered notes that have been handed down, and find something human in what our authorities found meaningless. We can dimly perceive, for instance, that the alternating fealty and infidelity of the Germanic tribes, which so often led the Romans to harsh measures, had in reality its foundation in an ethical system. And we can plainly see that behind their actions, with such vices and such virtues, stood a character widely different from the Roman, but neither more natural nor unnatural, in principle just as consistent, just as rational, and no less bound by the consideration of preserving a certain unity in the personality. And a political genius like Cæsar recognised that if his plans concerning these barbarians were to be of any firmness in themselves, it was not enough that he thought them out in Latin. His eagerness to penetrate beneath the thought of these Germani, down to the habit of mind which determined their form of utterance, is in itself a testimony to the fact that these barbarians bore the stamp of culture and the mark of character.

We are better off than the Romans in that we have been guided to a view of the Germanic life from within. The Romans had excellent opportunities of observation, and were often keen observers; the great majority of what the Romans and the Greeks wrote about the Germanic people is right in its way.

But every single remark, great or small, reveals its derivation from a sweeping glance across the frontier. We can always notice that the narrator himself stood far outside; he has seen what these people did, but he has not understood why

they did so. Their actions show, in his account, without perspective and without proportion; and the more precise his details are, the stranger seems the whole. Such descriptions leave with us, at best, the same grotesque impression one would have on watching from a distance men talking and gesticulating, but without any idea of what affected them.

There is a great difference between making the acquaintance of a people, as the Romans did, outside, following it home to stand without and gain perhaps a glance at its daily life, and on the other hand, being received into the midst of that people, seeing its men at home preparing for a campaign, and being there again to meet them on their return.

We are more fortunately situated than the southern writers in this respect, but are we so very much wiser? There may perhaps be some danger of arriving too easily at our understanding. The inability of the Romans to recognise the actions of the Germani as human may warn us against letting our own interpretation pass over what was really strange in our forefathers, erroneously attributing to them motives of our own.

The Northmen are a cultured people in the full sense of the word. We must recognise them as our equals. They lived as energetically as we do, found no less satisfaction in life, and felt themselves fully as much masters of life, masters who determined its aim and inflexibly had their way. But the recognition of this fact in itself emphasises the distance between us, because it brings out more pointedly the difference between ancient and modern modes of conquering and enjoying life.

The difference is evident the moment we compare the Teutons with the other North-European race of ancient times, the Celtic.

For all our Germanic descent, we are more nearly related to the Celts. They are a more modern type of people, we might say.

It needs not long acquaintance with them before one comes to intimacy. Here comes a man in whose face the whole world, of nature and of man, is reflected. The beauty of nature, the beauty of mankind, man's heroism, woman's love – these things thrill him, and lead him into ecstasy; he feels and feels till his soul is ready to burst – and then pours forth a lyric flood, plaintive and jubilant, wistfully pondering and earnestly exalting all that delights the eye. A religious ecstasy comes over him, he gives himself up to the invisible, grasping and surrendering himself at once, living the invisible as a reality with real joys and real sorrows; he flings himself over into the full experience of mysticism, yet without losing hold of the visible reality – on the contrary, his inner sense takes its fill of the beauty of nature, of delight in the animal life of earth and air.

The violence of life meets an answering passion in himself; he must go with it, must feel his pulses beating in the same hurrying rhythm as that which he feels without and about him. He can never make his pictures vivid enough, rich enough in colour and shades of colour. Beauty overwhelms him, and in his feverish eagerness to let nothing be lost, he loads one picture on another; the terror and grandeur of life excite him till he paints his giants with innumerable

heads and every imaginable attribute of dread; his heroes are of supernatural dimensions, with hair of gold or silver, and more than godlike powers.

Little wonder that the Celt often frightens and repels us by his formless exaggeration. He fills us at times with aversion, but only to attract us anew. Exaggeration is a natural consequence of passionate feeling that derives its strength and its character from the sensitiveness of the soul to everything about it, down to the faintest motions in the life of nature and man.

Such a breadth of soul life is unknown among the Norsemen, not even to be found as an exception.

Compared with the Celt, the Northman is heavy, reserved, a child of earth, yet seemingly but half awakened. He cannot say what he feels save by vague indication, in a long, roundabout fashion. He is deeply attached to the country that surrounds him, its meadows and rivers fill him with a latent tenderness; but his home sense has not emancipated itself into love. The feeling for nature rings in muffled tones through his speech and through his myths, but he does not burst into song of the loveliness of the world. Of his relations with women he feels no need to speak, save when there is something of a practical nature to be stated; only when it becomes tragic does the subject enter into his poetry. In other words, his feelings are never revealed until they have brought about an event; and they tell us nothing of themselves save by the weight and bitterness they give to the conflicts that arise. Uneventfulness does not throw him back upon his inner resources, and never opens up a flood of musings or lyricism – it merely dulls him. The Celt meets life with open arms; ready for every impression, he is loth to let anything fall dead before him. The Teuton is not lacking in passionate feeling, but he cannot, he will not help himself so lavishly to life.

He has but one view of man; man asserting himself, maintaining his honour, as he calls it. All that moves within a man must be twisted round until it becomes associated with honour, before he can grasp it; and all his passion is thrust back and held, until it finds its way out in that one direction. His friendship of man and love of woman never find expression for the sake of the feeling itself; they are only felt consciously as a heightening of the lover's self-esteem and consequently as an increase of responsibility. This simplicity of character shows in his poetry, which is at heart nothing but lays and tales of great avengers, because revenge is the supreme act that concentrates his inner life and forces it out in the light. His poems of vengeance are always intensely human, because revenge to him is not an empty repetition of a wrong done, but a spiritual self-assertion, a manifestation of strength and value; and thus the anguish of an affront or the triumph of victory is able to open up the sealed depths of his mind and suffuse his words with passion and tenderness. But the limitation which creates the beauty and strength of Teuton poetry is revealed in the fact that only those feelings and thoughts which make man an avenger and furthers the attainment of revenge, are expressed; all else is overshadowed. Woman finds a place in poetry only as a valkyrie or as inciting to strife; for the rest, she is included among the ordinary inventory of life. Friendship, the highest thing on earth among the Teutons, is only mentioned when friend joins hands with friend in the strife for honour and restitution.

There is abundance of passion in the poetry of the Northmen, but it appears only as a geyser, up and down, never bursting out and flowing forth in lyrical streams. Impressive, but grey; powerful, but sober. His epics are marked by a trustworthy simplicity and restraint of imagination keeping well within the bounds drawn by the grand reality of a warlike existence; his heroes are of a size generally comparable to the heroic figures of everyday life, and their powers are but the least possible in advance of ordinary standards. In life there is none of that fever-pulse so characteristic of the Celts, that comes of over-susceptibility, of the tendency to live every moment at the same pace as one's surroundings, or inability to resist the rhythm of one's environment. The Northman's response to impressions from without is so long in coming that it seems as if his movements were dictated solely from within. An impulse from the world without does not fall deadly on his soul, but its force is arrested, laid in bonds, on impact with his massive personality.

And there is but one passion that can let loose this accumulated force: his passion for honour. For the Northman to be affected by this or that in what he meets depends on something that has happened, something past, and something ahead, an event which has happened to himself or his ancestors, and an event which must be brought to pass for the betterment of himself and his descendants. He does not live in the moment; he uses the moment to reckon out: how can it serve him to the attainment of his end? He does not hate a thing for its own sake, or on his own account; for if he can purchase a chance of revenge by giving up his dislike, he tears his hate away, and where he can gain a chance by enmity, the hate wells up again in undisguised power. This does not mean that the Northman is temporarily beside himself when he is seeking redress for his wrongs.

Surely an avenger is all the time a son, husband, father, a member of a legal community; it is not a question of laying aside his humanity, but on the contrary: this wholesale humanity of his puts on the armour of vengeance and comports itself accordingly.

In these very moments of ruthless self-assertion, the Teuton rises to moral grandeur – herein lies to us the test of understanding. There is something in the Northman's attitude towards life which chills away our familiarity at first sight, and if the chill is not felt very acutely nowadays, our complacency is largely due to the romantic literature of the nineteenth century.

By a love, too ready and too undiscerning, the poets and historians have smoothed away the strong and wayward features of the saga men and toned down these bitter figures into recognised heroes and lovers. The old characters have been imperceptibly modernised with a view to making them more acceptable. The hardness and implacability of the Northmen have been pushed into the shade of their heroism and generosity and tacitly condoned as limitations, while the fact is that these qualities are based on the very constitution of their culture. If we are brought up suddenly against their everyday life, we are liable to brand them as narrow and even inhuman, and we do not immediately recognise that what we call poverty and inhumanity means nothing more and nothing less than strength and compactness of character. The



ancients are just, pious, merciful, of a moral consistency throughout, but on a foundation such as could not suffice to bear a human life in our own day.

The humanity of the Teuton is not the humanity of the modern European – hence our aloofness that no romantic revival has been able to overcome. In the North, the European hovers about with the gratification and lurking uneasiness of a guest; in Hellas he feels at home. The heroes of Homer are as friends and intimates compared with the vikings; these battling and boasting, suffering and weeping heroes and heroines are more of our own flesh and blood than the purposeful men and women of the sagas. We call them natural and human because they take life bit by bit, finding time to live in the moment, giving themselves up to pleasure and pain and expressing their feelings in words. In Greece we find men whose patriotism and self-seeking egoism and affection take a course sufficiently near our own for both to join and flow together. Even their gods are not so very far from what we in our best moments, and in our worst, ascribe to the higher powers. There is hardly need of any adaptation on our part; the gods and men of ancient Greece can of themselves enter into us and be transformed. In Hellas we soon learn to recognise, under the alien forms, the aims of our own time; and thus, in the words of Greek poets and philosophers, we constantly catch hints that sound as a still, small voice in times of crisis.

The reason is not far to seek: our intimacy with Hellas is the familiarity of kinship. The main stream of our thoughts and ideals flows from the South; and however far we have drifted from classic standards in many respects, our intellectual and religious history, and no less the development of economical and social Europe, have kept our course in the channel of Hellenism and Hellenistic Rome. For this reason we regard the problems and interpretations of Greece as being eminently human and vital.

We are repelled by the Teutons, because their thoughts will not minister to our private needs; but this instinctive recoil at the same time explains a furtive attraction which was not exhausted by the romantic revival of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The concentration of the Teutons exposes a narrowness of another kind in ourselves; every time we are confronted with a people of another type, a stone in the foundation of our complacency is loosened. We are surprised by an uneasy feeling that our civilization does not exhaust the possibilities of life; we are led to suspect that our problems derive their poignancy from the fact that, at times, we mistake our own reasonings about reality for reality itself. We become dimly aware that the world stretches beyond our horizon, and as this apprehension takes shape, there grows upon us a suspicion that some of the problems which baffle us are problems of our own contrivance; our questionings often lead us into barren fastnesses instead of releasing us into the length and breadth of eternity, and the reason may be that we are trying to make a whole of fragments and not, as we thought, attempting to grasp what is a living whole in itself. And at last, when we learn to gaze at the world from a new point of view, revealing prospects which have been concealed from our eyes, we may perhaps find that Hellas also contains more things, riches as well as mysteries than are dreamt of in our philosophy; after all, we have perhaps been no less romantic in our understanding of



Greece than in our misunderstanding of the Teutons and other primitive peoples.

To appreciate the strength and the beauty of the culture of the ancient Teutons we must realise that their harmony is fundamentally unlike all that we possess or strive for, and consequently that all our immediate praising and blaming are futile. All things considered, we have little grounds for counting ourselves better judges than the classical onlookers. In our sentimental moments we lose ourselves in admiration of the heroism and splendid passion of our forefathers, but in our moments of historical analysis we pride ourselves on styling them barbarians, and this vacillation is in itself sufficient to show that in our appreciation we have not reached the centre whence the Teuton's thoughts and actions drew their life and strength. If we would enter into the minds of other peoples we must consent to discard our preconceived ideas as to what the world and man ought to be. It is not enough to admit a set of ideas as possible or even plausible: we must strive to reach a point of view from which these strange thoughts become natural; we must put off our own humanity as far as it is possible and put on another humanity for the time. We need, then, to begin quietly and modestly from the foundation, as knowing nothing at all, if we would understand what it was that held the souls of these men together, and made them personalities.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **FRITH**

The historians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had one great advantage; they felt themselves as citizens of the world. They were never strangers to their subject matter, and knew nothing of that shyness which the stranger always feels. They felt themselves at home throughout the inhabited world, at any rate, so long as they remained in their own country, or the lands immediately adjacent, in a bodily sense, and made all further journeyings in the spirit alone. They did not sit fumbling over their material, but went straight to the persons concerned, whether men of the immediate past or those of earliest ages; whether Romans or Greeks, French, English, Hindus, Chinese or Indians. The historian stepped forward without formality and took his hero cordially by the hand, spoke to him as friend to friend, or let us say, as one man of the world to another. There was never any fear, in those days, that differences of language, or of circumstances in a different age, might place obstacles in the way of a proper understanding. Men were inspired with faith in a common humanity, and by the certainty that if once the human element could be grasped, all the rest would work out of itself. All mankind were agreed as to what God was, what good and evil were; all were agreed in patriotism and citizenship, in love of parents and of children – in a word, agreed in all realities.

If ever this straightforward simplicity, that sought its rallying point in things of common human interest, were justified in any case, it would be in regard to the Germanic peoples.

We find here a community based upon general unity, mutual self-sacrifice and self-denial, and the social spirit. A society, in which every individual, from birth to death, was bound by consideration for his neighbour. The individuals in this community show in all their doings that they are inspired by one passion: the welfare and honour of their kin; and none of the temptations of the world can move them even for a moment to glance aside. They say themselves, that this passion is love. What more natural then, than that we, who from our own lives know love and its power, should begin with what we have in common with these people we are considering? Given this agreement on the essential point, all that appears strange must surely become simple and comprehensible.

Bergthora, wife of Njal, was a true woman of the old school, strict on the point of honour, inflexible, unforgiving. The key to her character, we might say, is given in the famous words: "Young was I given to Njal, and this I have promised him, that one fate shall come upon us both". There is something of common humanity in the words, something we can appreciate at its true value. On the male side, we have an even more old-fashioned figure to set up as a model : Egil Skallagrimson, the most typical representative in viking times of love of kin. See him, as he rides with the body of his drowned son before him on the saddle, carrying it himself to its last resting place, his breast heaving with sobs until his tunic bursts. It is all so direct in its appeal, so obvious and natural, that one feels involuntarily as if one could read Egil's whole soul in this one episode. Life standards and customs of society, morals and self-judgement derived from such elementary emotion can surely not be hard to understand?

We can easily put it to the test.

In the history of the Faroe Islands, we find two women, Thurid and Thora, wife and daughter of Sigmund Brestison, occupying a prominent place. Both are strong, resolute characters, like Bergthora, and both are guided in all their actions by love of Sigmund and his race. Sigmund was an ideal chieftain of the Christian viking period: strict on the point of honour, never relinquishing a shred of his right, and always able to gain his cause, frank, brave and skilful – altogether a man to admire and remember. After a life of ceaseless fighting for the supreme power in the Faroes, he is murdered, having barely escaped from a night surprise. Time passes, and one day, Thrond of Gata makes his appearance in Thurid's house, asking Thora in marriage for his fosterson Leif. Thrond was a man of different stamp, one of those who are ready enough to strike, when first they have their victim safely enmeshed by intrigue: one of those who can plot and plan with all the craft of evil, and always find others to bear the danger and disgrace of carrying out their schemes; a Christian by compulsion, and an apostate, not only practising the rites of the old faith in his daily life, but even dabbling in black magic. Thrond had been Sigmund's bitterest opponent; it was he who had arranged the killing of Sigmund's father, and the surprise attack which ended in Sigmund's death was led by him. Yet Thora holds out to her suitor the prospect that she will accept his offer, if he and his fosterfather give her an opportunity of avenging her father. And she keeps her promise; she marries Leif, and has her reward in seeing three men killed in honour of her father.

Once more these two women appear in the history of the Faroe nobles. It happens that a son of Sigmund's cousin has been slain while staying in the house of Sigurd Thorlakson, a kinsman of Thronð's. Sigurd had at once struck down the slayer, and these three being the only ones present at the fateful moment, some shadow of suspicion attaches to the host. The mere possibility that one of Sigmund's kinsmen lies slain and unavenged is enough to keep Thurid and Thora in a state of unrest day and night. Poor Leif, who will not or cannot take any steps in the matter, hears nothing but scornful words about the house. When then Sigurd Thorlakson, in his blindness, asks on behalf of his brother for Thurid's hand, her daughter wisely counsels her as follows: "If I should advise, this must not be refused; for if you are minded to vengeance, there could be no surer bait". And she adds: "No need for me to set words in my mother's mouth". The plan proceeds. Sigurd is invited to have speech with Thurid. She meets him outside the homestead and leads him to a seat on a tree trunk. He makes as if to sit facing the house, but she seats herself resolutely the other way, with her back to the house, and her face towards the chapel. Sigurd asks if Leif is at home – no, he is not; if Thurid's sons are at home – yes, they are at home; and in a little while, both they and Leif appear, and Sigurd goes off mortally wounded.

These two were Thurid, "the great widow", and Thora, "whom all held to be the noblest of women". Their greatness lay not so much in the fact of their loving truly and faithfully, as in their understanding of what that love demanded, and their fulfilling its demands in spite of all. The question asked of us here is, not what we think of these two, but if we are able to accept the appreciative judgement of their love as it stands, without reserve.

On a closer scrutiny of Egil's love and sorrow we find, too, some characteristic features that are likely to trouble our serene faith in a common humanity. It is related, that having made provision for his son in the hereafter, by setting him in a burial mound that might content him, the old champion himself was minded to die; but his quick-witted daughter, Thorgerd, artfully brought back his interest in life by reminding him that nobody else would be able to honour the youth with a laudatory poem, and thus enticing him to make a lay of his loss.

And fortunately for us, this poem in which Egil laid down the burden of his sorrow, has been preserved.

There is a depth of meaning in the fact that the most beautiful poem remaining to us from ancient times is a poem of kinship and love of kin, and that it should be Egil himself, the oldest-fashioned of all the saga heroes, who made it. Unfortunately, our understanding and enjoyment of this confession are hampered in a very high degree by the difficulties of its form. Egil was not only a man of considerable character; he was also what we should call a poet, whose soul found direct expression in verse. The *kennings*, or metaphors, which were part and parcel of the ancient poetry, fell from Egil's lips as images revealing the individual moods and passions of the poet. But so strange to our ears are the poetical figures of the ancient scalds, that it needs a great deal of work on our part before we can approach him from such a position that his picture-phrases appear with life and significance. Given the patience, however, to acquire familiarity with the artificial metaphors of the scald, enough to realise what it is

that forces itself through the poet's mind in this cumbersome form, we can feel the sorrow of this bereaved father dropping heavily, sullenly from verse to verse.

He complains that sorrow binds his tongue. "Little chance is here to reach forth Odin's stolen goods; heavy they are to drag from their hiding of sorrow – thus it is for one who mourns". Egil applies the parallel of Odin, who with great pains brought the poet's cup – the mead of inspiration – from the giant's cave, to himself in his struggle to force a way to expression through the walls of his own sorrow.

"The sea roars down there before the door where my kinsman's Hel-ship is laid.

"My race bends to its fall, as the storm-lashed trees of the forested(?) ....

"Cruel was the hole the waves tore in my father's kin-fence; unfilled, I know, and open stands the son-breach torn in me by the sea.

"Much hath Ran (the queen of the sea) stolen from me. I stand poor in love-friends. The sea hath sundered the bonds of my race; torn a close-twisted string out of myself.

"I say to you; could I pursue my cause with the sword, there should be an end of the ale-maker (Ægir, the king of the sea). If I could .... I would give battle to that loose wench of Ægir's (the wave). But I felt that I had no power to take action against my son's bane. All the world sees emptiness behind the old man where he strides along.

"Much the sea hath stolen from me – bitter it is to count up the fall of kinsmen – since he that stood, a shield among the race, turned aside from life on the soul-ways (?).

"I know it myself, in my son grew no ill promise of a man....

"Ever he maintained that which his father had said, ay, though all the people thought otherwise. He held me upright in the home, and mightily increased my strength. My brotherless plight is often in my mind. When the battle grows, I take thought, peer about and think what other man stands by my side with courage for a daring deed, such as I need often enough....

"I am grown cautious of flight now that friends are fewer".

These are words that of their great simplicity can be repeated in all times – or at least as long as life is still a struggle; and it would be hard to find higher praise for such a poem.

The following verses consist – as far as we are yet able to understand them – of variations on these fundamental thoughts: No one can be relied on, for men nowadays lower themselves and are glad to accept payment instead of revenge for the blood of brothers. He who has lost a son must beget another – none else can replace the lost scion. My head is drooping, since he, the second of my sons, fell beneath the brand of sickness; he whose fame was unsmirched. I trusted in the god, but he was false to his friendship to me, and I have little heart now to worship him. – In spite of his bitterness, however, he cannot but remember that he has himself the art of the poet, and a mind able to reveal the

plans of enemies, and he cannot forget that this mastery of words, the comfort of many ills, is a gift from the god who has betrayed him.

Darkly he looks towards the future: I am strongly beset, death stands on the cape, but blithely, unruffled by fear I will wait for Hel.

The first part of the poem is properly independent of time; the reader has no need to look into a distant age and a distant culture in order to understand it. It is the form, and that only, which binds it to Egil and scaldic poetry, and the exegesis of the learned. Even Egil's passionate outburst against the high powers that have usurped the mastery of the world hardly appears to us as strange. On the contrary, we might perhaps approve the words as thoroughly human, and even award them honourable mention as being "modern" in spirit.

Our weakness for all that savours of titanic defiance however, must not blind us to the peculiar form of expression in which it is voiced by Egil. His verses do not express instinctive defiance of fate, but an earnest longing for vengeance and restitution; he is lamenting that he is unable to pursue his cause, or in other words, uphold his right. Is it really to be understood that Egil only relinquishes plans of revenge because he stands alone in the world, without followers or kin? If one lacks in oneself the courage to take arms against a god, can it mend matters greatly to march up with a few staunch friends and kinsmen at one's back? So we may, or must, ask and in the asking of this question our sympathy gives place to a vague poetic feeling that is equivalent to giving up all attempt at understanding.

Sorrow can always drive a man to such extremes of his being that his words run into apparent contradictions, but the inconsistency of passion never sets meaning at defiance; it has its explanation in the fact that the opposites have their point of intersection somewhere in the soul. At times the feelings are exalted to such a degree that they appear irreconcilable, but the sympathetic listener feels he has no right of criticism until he has followed the lines to their meeting-point. In Egil, the cohesion between the apparent contradictions is no doubt very firm. There is an inner contact between defiance of the gods and the outburst of helplessness at sight of one's solitary plight; but we can ponder and speculate as much as we please, a true understanding of Egil's thought here – that he would feel himself master of death if he had a strong circle of kinsmen about him – is not to be won by mere study of these lines; we cannot get at it unless Egil himself and the men of his time give us the real solution. Egil appears to regard life in the light of a process at law, where the man with a strong circle of kinsmen wins his case, because he is backed by a crowd of men ready to swear on his side, and whose oaths carry weight enough to crush his opponent. Let us imagine that this idea of his is not merely a piece of poetic imagery, but that life itself, with all its tasks, appeared as a lawsuit, where a man with many and powerful kinsmen could further his aims and fortunes, materially and spiritually, gaining power over his surroundings, not only by battle, but by oath, in virtue of that power of race which he and his possessed. Let us further imagine, that this faith in the power of kinship and kinsmen's help is great enough to reach out beyond life, and embrace death itself within its scope, believing itself capable of summoning and outswearing the gods, ay, shaking heaven and earth. Egil's words have then a new significance; they lose nothing

of their weight, but they become anything but "modern". The titanic defiance disappears – or almost disappears – and in its place we have the despairing cry of a suffering human soul. The paradox then, lies not where we at first discerned it, but in quite another direction.

And reading now from these words backward and forward, the other verses, that at first flowed so glibly from our tongue, will have gained a strange power and violence – both where he speaks of a string torn out of him, a breach, and also where he calls to mind his son's help, and reveals his own discouragement when he looks about him in the fight for one to aid him. It would be strange if we did not now feel, in place of the confident enjoyment of the words, a sense of uncertainty, that makes us hesitate at every line. The words have become vague, because we have lost our own ground and failed to get a new foothold. Torn out! Our fancy flutters doubtfully away from the metaphorical meaning, which at first appeared the only one the words could have, and hovers about the idea of an actual bleeding to death – but without finding anything to hold by.

And our uncertainty cannot but increase when we discover that Egil's image of the family as a fence, built up of stake by stake, of death as a breach in the family and those left – that these images are common, everyday illustrations, one is tempted to say, part of the technical stock-in-trade. We cannot give ourselves up to the mighty feeling of the poem until we have grasped exactly what it is this breach, this wound, consists of; what precise meaning lies in the word "help". We begin to perceive that we must learn the meaning of every word anew.

Here our trust in primeval, common feeling as a means of communication between men of different cultures breaks down for good. We cannot force our way into understanding through mere sympathy or intuition; there is no other way but to turn round, and proceed from externals inward to the generally human.

Briefly: we must begin with the kin, the race or family; a gathering of individuals so joined up into one unit that they appear incapable of independent action. As to the feeling which so unites them, this we must leave till later; the point here is, that the individual cannot act without all acting with and through him; no single individual can suffer without affecting the whole circle. So absolute is the connection that the individual simply cannot exist by himself; a slight loosening of the bond, and he slips down, the most helpless of all creatures.

We cannot gain speech of the individual human being. Here lies the difference between Hellenic and Germanic culture. The Hellene is nearer to us, for we can go straight to him, speak to him as man to man about the life of man, let him introduce us into the strange world – as it seems to us – in which he lives, let him show us the aims that determine his daily thought and actions; and from his utterance and expression form an idea as to how he reacts in face of what he meets. The barbarian does not move. He stands stiffly, uninvitingly. If he speaks, his words convey no meaning to us. He has killed a man. "Why did you kill that man", we ask. "I killed him in revenge". – "How had he offended you?" – "His father had spoken ill words to my father's brother, therefore I craved honour as due from him to us". – "Why did you not take the life of the offender himself?" – "This was a better man". – The more we ask and pry, the more

incomprehensible he becomes. He appears to us as a machine, driven by principles.

The Hellene exists as an individual, a separate person within a community. The Germanic individual exists only as the representative, nay, as the personification of a whole. One might imagine that a supreme convulsion of the soul must tear the individual out from that whole, and let him feel him-self, speak as for himself. But actually, it is the opposite that takes place; the more the soul is moved, the more the individual personality is lost in the kin. At the very moment when man most passionately and unreservedly gives way to his own feelings, the clan takes possession of the individual fully and completely. Egil's lament is not the lament of a father for his son; it is the kin, that utters its lament through the person of the father. From this breadth of passion springs the overpowering pathos of the poem.

If we want a real understanding of such men as Egil, we are driven to ask: what is the hidden force that makes kinsmen inseparable? First we learn that they call each other "friend" (*frændi* in Icelandic, *freond* in Anglo-Saxon), and a linguistic analysis of this word will teach us, that it means those who love (each other); but this brings us no farther, for etymology tells us nothing of what it is to love. We can perhaps get a little nearer by noting the etymological connection between the word "friend" and two others that play a great part in the social life of those days: "free" and "frith". In "frith", peace, we have the old kinsmen's own definition of the fundamental idea in their inter-relationship. By frith they mean something in themselves, a power that makes them "friends" one towards another, and "free men" towards the rest of the world. Even here, of course, we cannot take the meaning of the word directly for granted, for the centuries have not passed unscathing over that little word. Words such as horse and cart and house and kettle may remain more or less unaltered throughout all vicissitudes of culture, but terms used to designate spiritual values necessarily undergo a radical change in the course of such spiritual transformations as have taken place in the souls of men in the North during the past thousand years. And the nearer such a word lies, in its origin, to the central part of the soul, the more sweeping changes it will undergo.

If ever word bore the mark of the transforming influence of Christianity and humanism, it is this word "frith". If we look closely into the older significance of the word, we shall find something sterner; a firmness that has now given place to weakness. The frith of earlier days was less passive than now, with less of submissiveness and more of will. It held also an element of passion which has now been submerged in quietism.

But the word tells us indisputably that the love which knit these kinsmen together is not to be taken in a modern, sentimental sense; the dominant note of kinsmanship is safety, security.

Frith is the state of things which exists between friends. And it means, first and foremost, reciprocal inviolability. However individual wills may clash in a conflict of kin against kin, however stubbornly individual heads may seek their own way according to their quota of wisdom, there can never be question of conflict save in the sense of thoughts and feelings working their way toward an equipoise in unity. We need have no doubt but that good kinsmen could disagree with



fervour, but however the matter might stand, there could – should, must inevitably – be but one ending to it all; a settlement peaceable and making for peace – frith.

A quarrel had no lethal point. Two kinsmen could not lift a hand one against the other.

The moment a man scented kinship, he lowered his arms.

The ending of Bjorn the Hitdale Warrior's saga has a touch of something heroic-comic about it, from this very fact. Bjorn fell, after a brave fight, by the hand of Thord Kolbeinson and his companions. The grounds of enmity between the two were numerous and various, but we may safely say that Bjorn had done all in his power to interfere with Thord's domestic bliss.

Among the opponents, Thord's young son, Kolli, takes a prominent part. Then says Bjorn – at the moment when he was beaten to his knee and at bay –: "You strike hard to-day, Kolli". "I do not know whom I should spare here", answers the youth. "True enough: for your mother has surely urged you not to spare me; but it seems to me that you are not wisest in the matter of knowing your kin". And Kolli answers: "It is late in the day you tell me of it, if we two are not free to fight". And with these words he withdraws from all further participation in the battle.

Even in the Icelandic sagas from the period of dissolution we find very few instances of men entering into combinations which might lead to family conflicts. The by no means lovable Faroe chieftain Thronð of Gata is offered money to take sides against his cousins; but before accepting, he pays tribute to the sense of what is right by saying to the tempter: "You cannot mean this in earnest". On another occasion, when we read that a certain man must have been sorely blind to take part in a fight where his own sons were on the other side, there rings through the words a mixture of wonder and repugnance, which speaks louder than the sharpest condemnation, for this wonder springs from the thought: how *can* he do such a thing?

It is hard to get at a true impression of the fundamental laws in human life that provide the very essence of a conscience; harder still to render such an impression living to others. They are not to be illustrated by noteworthy examples. In books of great and good deeds, a quality such as frith will never be represented in proportion to its importance; it goes too deep. It does not find direct expression in the laws; it underlies all accepted customs, but never appears in the light itself.

If we would seriously realise what is strongest in men, we must feel through their daily life, with all its inhibitions and restraints in little things. But once our eyes are opened to the unbroken chain of self-restraint and self-control that constitute the inner connection in the life of working human beings, we may find ourselves almost in fear of the power that sits innermost in ourselves and drives us according to its will. When one has worked through the spiritual remains of our forefathers, one must, I think, infallibly emerge with a constraining veneration for this frith. The Northmen are ever telling of war and strife, quarrels and bickerings – dispute now over a kingdom, now an ox; now some piece of arrogance on the part of an individual, now a merciless combination of



accidents by the hand of fate, leading men into a chaos of strife; – but we notice that even in the most violent turmoil of passion, all alike are ever amenable to one consideration; every single happening stands in some relation to frith.

And behind every law decree there is perceptible a fear – a sacred dread – of interfering with one particular thing, to wit, the ties of kinship. We feel, that all law paragraphs are based upon an underlying presumption that kinsmen will not and cannot act one against another, but must support one another.

When the church began to exercise its supervision in matters of legislation, it noticed first of all an essential failing in the ancient code: namely, that it knew no provision for cases of killing between kinsmen. This crime therefore came within the clerical jurisdiction; the church determined its penal code, just as it provided terms for the crime by adaptation of words from the Latin vocabulary.

When the lawgivers of the Middle Ages gradually found courage to come to grips with this ancient frith, in order to make room for modern principles of law, the attacks had first to be made in the form of indulgences: it was permitted to regard a kinsman's suit as irrelevant to oneself; it was declared lawful to refuse a contribution towards the fine imposed on any of one's kin. It took centuries of work to eradicate the tacit understanding of this ubiquitous frith principle from the law, and establish humanity openly as the foundation of equity.

Strangely enough, in the very period of transition, when frith was being ousted from its supremacy as conscience itself, it finds definite expression in laws, to wit, in the statutes of the mediæval guilds, a continuation, not precisely of the clan, but of what was identical with clanship, to wit, the old free societies of frith or communities of mutual support. The guild laws provide that members of the guild must have no quarrels between themselves; but in the regrettable event of such quarrel arising between two of the same guild, the parties are forbidden, under pain of exclusion in disgrace, to summon each other before any tribunal but that of the guild itself; not even in a foreign country may any member of a guild bring suit against a fellow-member before a magistrate or court.

The Frisian peasant laws of the Middle Ages also found it necessary to lay down hard and fast rules for the obligations of kin towards kin, and decree that persons within the closer degrees of relationship, as father, son, brother, father's or mother's brother, father's or mother's sister, may not bring suit one against another before the court – they must not sue or swear against one another; but in cases where they cannot agree in a matter of property or the like, one of their nearest of kin shall be appointed judge.

The guild statutes are as near to the unwritten law of kinship as any lifeless, extraneous provision can be to the conscience that has life in itself. And they give us, indeed, the absolute character of frith, its freedom from all reservation, in brief.

But they cannot give the very soul of it; for then, instead of insisting that no quarrel shall be suffered to arise between one brother and another, they would simply acknowledge that no such quarrel ever could by any possibility arise. In other words, instead of a prohibition, we should have the recognition of an impossibility. The characters in the Icelandic sagas are in this position still –

though we may feel that the cohesion of the clan is on the point of weakening. They have still, more or less unimpaired, the involuntary respect for all such interests as may affect the clan as a whole; an extreme of caution and foresight in regard to all such enterprise as cannot with certainty be regarded as unaffecting the interest of all its members.

Even the most reckless characters are chary of making promises or alliances if they see any possibility of prejudicing a kinsman's interest. They go in dread of such conflicts. The power of frith is apparent, in the fact that it does not count as a virtue, something in excess of what is demanded, but as an everyday necessity, the most obvious of all, alike for high and low, heroic and unheroic characters. And the exceptions, therefore, show as something abhorrent, uncanny.

Clanship was not the only form of relationship between individuals, and however wisely and cautiously a man might order his goings, he could never be sure of avoiding every painful dilemma. He may find himself in a position where, apparently, the power of frith in himself is put to the test.

Thus, for instance, with Gudrun. Her husband, Sigurd, has been slain by her own brothers, Gunnar and Hogni. She voices her resentment in stirring words. In the Lay of Gudrun we find it thus: "In bed and at board I lack my friend to speak with – this wrought Gjuki's sons. Gjuki's sons have brought me to this misery, brought about their sister's bitter weeping". The poems of the north also make her utter words of ill-omen; it sounds like a curse when she says: "Your heart, Hogni, should be torn by ravens in the wild places, where you should cry in vain for aid of man". But there is no place in the saga for even the least act on Gudrun's part to the prejudice of her brothers. She seeks by act and word to hinder Atli's plans for vengeance against Gunnar and Hogni, and when all her warnings are in vain, she makes Atli pay dearly for the deed. The northern poets, while laying stress on her sorrow, keep it throughout inactive – they do not even attempt to soften the contrast by any kind of inner conflict in her soul; there is no hesitation, no weighing this way or that. Frith was to them the one thing absolute. The poet lets Hogni answer Gudrun's passionate outburst with these deeply significant words: "If the ravens tore my heart, your sorrow would be the deeper".

The Sigurd poems are fashioned by northern hands dealing with ancient themes; they give us Germanic thoughts as lived again in Norse or Icelandic minds. Altogether Icelandic, both in theme and word, is the tragedy which leads to Gisli Surson's unhappy outlawry. The two brothers, Gisli and Thorkel, are depicted by the writer of the saga as widely deferent in character, and in their sympathies they take different sides. Thorkel is a close friend of Thorgrim, their sister's husband; Gisli is warmly attached to Vestein, brother to his own wife, Aud. Relations between the two half-brothers-in-law have evidently long been strained, and at last Vestein is slain by Thorgrim. Gisli takes vengeance secretly by entering Thorgrim's house at night and stabbing him as he lies in bed. Thorgrim's avengers, led by a natural suspicion, pay a visit to Gisli before he is up; Thorkel, who lives with his brother-in-law and is of the party, manages to enter first, and seeing Gisli's shoes, full of snow, on the floor, he thrusts them hurriedly under the bed. The party is obliged to go off again without having accomplished anything; later, however, Gisli, in reckless verse, declares himself

the culprit, and a party rides off to summon him to account. Thorkel is with them as before, but once more he manages to warn his brother. On the road the party comes to a homestead where he suddenly remembers there is money owing to him, and takes the opportunity of dunning his debtor. But while his horse stands saddled outside the house and his companions imagine him counting money within, he is riding on a borrowed mount up into the woods where his brother has hidden. And when at last he has settled his various money affairs and taken to the road again, he is overtaken by little accidents on the way, sufficient to delay the progress of the party considerably.

Gisli's blow was a serious matter for Thorkel. He says himself to Gisli: "You have done me no little wrong, I should say, in slaying Thorgrim, my brother-in-law and partner and close friend". The great obligations which use and custom laid upon friends one towards another are evidence of the seriousness with which such intimacy was regarded, and how deeply the parties engaged themselves and their will in the relationship. Thorkel's position is therefore more bitter than immediately appears. But friendship must give way to frith; it is not a matter of choice on Thorkel's part. Here again we have the same contrast as in the Gudrun poems. Thorkel's bitterness and his frith can have no dealings the one with the other; they cannot come within reach of each other so as to give rise to any conflict; for they belong to different strata of the soul. To us, perhaps, it may seem as if there was a link missing from the sober statement of the story; but the words as they stand are good Icelandic psychology.

This frith is something that underlies all else, deeper than all inclination. It is not a matter of will, in the sense that those who share it again and again choose to set their kinship before all other feelings. It is rather the will itself. It is identical with the actual feeling of kinship, and not a thing deriving from that source.

Thorkel has his sorrow, as Gudrun has hers; but the possibility which should make that sorrow double-edged, the mere thought that one could take sides here, is out of the question. Thus there can never be room for any problem. The fact of kin siding against kin is known to poetry only as a mystery, or a horror; as the outcome of a madness or as something dark, incomprehensible, something that is not even fate.

From early times, men's thoughts have hovered about this fact, that a man could come to slay his kinsman. In the picture of father and son, each unknown to the other, meeting in battle and shedding each other's blood, the sad possibility has even been treated poetically. A magnificent fragment – unfortunately but a torso – of these poems is found in the German Hildebrand Lay, where the father, returning home after long absence in foreign lands meets his son, who forces him, much against his will, to engage in single combat. We find the pair again in Saxo, as two brothers, Halfdan and Hildiger. In the Hildebrand Lay, it is the scepticism of the son in regard to the father's declaration of kinship, that brings about the disaster; the father *must* accept the challenge, or stand dishonoured. In Saxo, the inner force of the conflict is weakened by the fact that Hildiger, for no reason, keeps his knowledge of their kinship to himself until he lies mortally wounded. Saxo's story, however, is evidently derived from the same situation as that preserved in the German lay. Hildiger tries by craft to escape from fate, declaring in lordly fashion that he

cannot think of engaging in single combat with an unproved warrior; but when Halfdan, undismayed, repeats his challenge, and strikes down one set of antagonists after the other, Hildiger, who sees his own fame thus threatened by Halfdan's prowess, cannot endure any longer to refuse. An Icelandic version, preserved in the saga of Asmund Kappabani, agrees throughout so closely with Saxo's account that we are forced to presume a close relationship between the two; one of the brothers here has still the old name, Hildebrand, the other has been assimilated with Asmund, the hero of the saga. The difference between the more natural presentment in the Hildebrand Lay, and the dramatic artifice in the northern variants, is mainly due to the saga writers' anxiety to preserve as much effect as possible for the final plaint.

The story of the fatal meeting between two kinsmen is, as an epic theme, not specifically Germanic; we can follow it to the west, among the Celts, and to the southward, as far even as Asia. Possibly, or we might say probably, it has its origin, as a matter of literary history, in the south; but it is more important to note how the theme has been reborn again and again, among one clannish people after another; a proof that the same thoughts were everywhere a weight upon the mind. Men pondered and speculated over this mystery in the ordering of life, that a man could be driven against his will to harm his kin. In the Germanic, the case is clearly and simply stated; frith was inviolable; but honour too had its own absolute validity, so that the two could collide with such force as to destroy both on the impact, and the man with them. The close of the Hildebrand Lay is unfortunately lost, the very part which must have given us the united plaint of the two combatants over what had passed. The loss is the more serious, since this was the dominant point of the whole poem. Saxo's reproduction, and still more the modernised elegy of the Icelandic saga, give but a faint echo. But even in these later, imitative works we seem to find a pathos of an altogether different nature from the usual; not the merciless seriousness of death, but a wonder, rising to horror; not a confident appeal to fate with a sense of comfort in the conviction that there is reparation for everything, and that reparation will be made for this as well, if those that remain are of any worth; but only helplessness and hopelessness. And the same note is struck elsewhere, as in Hervor's saga, where Angantyr, finding his brother's body on the field of battle, says: "A curse is upon us, that I should be your bane; this thing will be ever remembered; ill is the doom of the Norns." The words express his sense of being a monster; so desperately meaningless is his fate that it will force the thoughts of posterity to hover about it, that "he will be a song for coming generations". The close of Hildebrand's complaint runs, in Saxo's paraphrase, approximately as follows: "An evil fate, loading years of misfortune on the happy, buries smile in sorrow and bruises fate. For it is a pitiful misery to drag on a life in suffering, to breathe under the pressure of sorrow-burdened days, and go in fear of the warning (*omen*). But all that is knit fast by the prophetic decree of the *Parcæ*, all that is planned in the council of high providence, all that has once by forevision been fixed in the chain of fates, is not to be torn from its place by any changing of worldly things."

There is nothing corresponding to these lines in the saga. The first part of the poem expresses the same as Saxo's paraphrase: "None knows beforehand what manner of death shall be his. You were born of Drot in Denmark, I in

Sweden. My shield lies sundered at my head; there is the tale of my killings; there" – presumably on the shield – "lies the son I begot and unwilling slew" – what this refers to we do not rightly know. And then the poem closes with a prayer to the survivor, to do "what few slayers have any mind to", namely, wrap the dead man in his own garments, a termination which sounds altogether foreign, in its romantic sentimentality, to the northern spirit. Saxo has here undoubtedly worked from another version, nearer the original. His portrayal of the evil days lived through in fear fits more or less accurately to the old thought: such a deed buries all hope for the future and spreads among the survivors an everlasting dread. How the words originally stood in the northern version it is futile to guess, but Saxo's *omen* in particular seems to hold a true northern idea, that such a deed forms an ill-boding warning. For the rest, fate rules; what is to come will come; but here is a thing breaking out beyond fate; one can, and could really, say that the fate of the kinsmen was burst asunder.

The same hopeless keynote rings through the description, in the *Beowulf*, of the old father's sorrow when one of his sons has by chance slain his brother. The poet compares him to an old man who sees his beloved son dangling, still young, in the gallows – a desperate illustration for a Germanic poet to use –: "Then he lifts up his voice in a song of anguish, as his son hangs at the ravens' pleasure, and he cannot help him; old and burdened with days, cannot save him. Always he remembers, morning after morning, his son's passing; an heir in his stead he cares not to wait in the castle... Sorrowing he sees his wine-hall waste, the chamber wind-swept, empty of joy, in his son's house. The gallows rider sleeps, the hero in his grave. No sound of harp, no pleasure now in the homestead, as there was once.

He takes his way to the couch, sings a sad chant, lonely over the lonely one; everywhere, in the fields as in the home, there is too wide a space. So raged sorrow in the prince of the Weders, sorrow for his son Herebeald; in no wise could he gain payment for that killing through the life of the slayer; nor by rewarding the young hero with bitter doings towards him; though he had no love for him. Misery held him fast, from the day that the wound was dealt him, until he passed out from the joyous world of men."

But frith demands more than that kinsmen should merely spare each other.

Thorkel Surson was a weak character. He was content to place himself in an equivocal position when he kept his place among his brother-in-law's avengers. He says to Gisli: "I will warn you if I come by news of any plans against you, but I will not render you any such help as might bring me into difficulties." Gisli evidently regards such caution as a dishonest compromise with conscience. "Such an answer as you have given me here I could never give to you, and I could never act in such a way," he retorts. A man will not ride in company with his kinsman's adversaries. A man will not lie idle while his kinsman's suit is in progress, and the fact that this same kinsman has nailed his brother-in-law fast to his bed by night is plainly of no weight in Gisli's judgement. A man does not sneak round by a back way to offer his kinsman a trifle of help – no, when the latter is finally outlawed he must at least be able to count on support – this seems in all seriousness to be Gisli's idea.

And Gisli is in the right. Frith is something active, not merely leading kinsmen to spare each other, but forcing them to support one another's cause, help and stand sponsor for one another, trust one another. Our words are too dependent for their strength on sentimental associations to bear out the full import of clan feeling; the responsibility is absolute, because kinsmen are literally the doers of one another's deeds.

The guild statutes provided as follows: "Should it so happen that any brother kills any man who is not a brother of the Guild of St. Canute (*i.e.* of our guild) then the brethren shall help him in his peril of life as best they can. If he be by the water, they shall help him with a boat, oars, dipper, tinder box and axe... Should he need a horse, they are to provide him with a horse..."

"Any brother able to help, and not helping...he shall go out of this guild as a niding."

"Every brother shall help his brother in all lawsuits."

That is to say, if one brother has a lawsuit, twelve brethren of the guild shall be chosen to go with him to its hearing and support him; – the brethren are also to form an armed guard about him, and escort him to and from the place where the court is held, if need be. And when a brother has to bring oath before the court, twelve members of the guild shall be chosen by lot to swear on his side, and those so chosen are to aid him in manly wise. A man failing to support his brother by oath, or bearing testimony against him, is subject to heavy fines.

There are two kinds of cases. Two kinds of killing, *e.g.* 1. a guild-brother kills a stranger, 2. a stranger kills a guild-brother. In the former case, the brethren of the guild see that the slayer gets away in safety on horseback or by ship. In the latter case, the rule runs as follows: No brother eats or drinks or has intercourse with his brother's slayer, whether on land or on ship. The guild brethren shall aid the dead man's heirs to vengeance or restitution.

It is difficult, perhaps, to realise that this double-valuation had its place in a community of citizens, and not in some free-booters' camp; it stands valid as the supreme law for decent, conservative, enlightened men; men who in those days represented, so to speak, progress in historic continuity. This partisan solidarity in frith is their strong attachment to the past, and the cultural worth of this partisan spirit is revealed by the fact that it lies behind the reform movements of the Middle Ages as their driving force. As the brethren here in the guilds, so kinsmen also were filled to such a degree with "love", so eager to help, that they could not well find any energy left for judging of right and wrong. They were not by nature and principle unjust, partisan; faith and the sense of justice can well thrive together; but they belong, to use a phrase already used before, to different strata of the soul and thus miss contact with each other.

The uncompromising character of frith is strikingly illustrated by the last appearance of grand old Egil at the moot-place. It happened one day, when Egil was grown old and somewhat set aside, that a quarrel arose between his son Thorstein and Onund Sjoni's son Steinar, about a piece of land. Steinar defiantly sent his herd to graze there; Thorstein faithfully cut down his herdsmen. Steinar summoned Thorstein, and now the parties were at the law-

thing. Then the assembly perceives a party riding up, led by a man in full amour; it is old Egil with a following of eighty men. He dismounts calmly by the booths, makes the needful arrangements, then goes up to the mound where the court is held and calls to his old friend Onund: "Is it your doing that my son is summoned for breaking the peace?" "No indeed," says Onund, "it was not by my will, I am more careful of our ancient friendship than to do so; it was well you came..." "Well, let us see now if you mean anything by what you say; let us two rather take the matter in hand than that those two fighting cocks should suffer themselves to be egged on against each other by their own youth and the counsels of other." And when then the matter is submitted to Egil's arbitration, he calmly decides that Steinar shall receive no indemnity for the slaves killed; his homestead is confiscated, and he himself shall leave the district before flitting day.

There is a touch of nobility about Egil's last public appearance, the nobility of a greatly simple character. He accepts the office of arbitrator, and decides the case – as we can see, against all reasonable, likely, justified expectation – as if only his own side existed, and does so with a cool superiority, which leaves no sort of doubt that he acts with the full approval of his conscience. Here again Egil stands as a monumental expression of a dying age.

The same naïveté is seen directly in another oldfashioned character, Hallfred, called the Wayward Scald. On one occasion, when his father with rare impartiality has judged against him, he says: "Whom can I trust, when my father fails me?"

The straightforward simplicity, taking one view as a matter of course, places Hallfred, as it does Egil, outside all comparison with great or small examples of selfishness or injustice, and makes them types; more than types of their age, they are types of a form of culture itself. So thought, so acted – not the exceptions, the marked individualities, not the men who were somewhat apart from the common – but men generally. The idea of frith is set so deeply beneath all personal marks of character and all individual inclination, that it affects them only from below, not as one inclination or one feeling may affect another. The characters may be widely different, but the breach in character does not reach down to this prime centre of the soul. Egil was a stiff-necked man, hard to deal with at home and abroad, he would be master in his house, and a treaty of peace in which he did not himself dictate the terms he would not be disposed to recognise. Another man might be more easy-going, peaceable, ready to find a settlement, quick to avoid collision, and eager to remove causes of conflict, – but he could never be so save on the basis of frith and kinship.

Askel, the right-minded, peace-making chieftain of the Reykdale, is perhaps rather too modern a character to go well in company with Egil; but his story, as we find it in the saga of the Reykdale men, gives us at any rate a graphic picture of the principles of reconciliation. Askel is so unfortunate as to have a sister's son whose character is such that strife seems a necessity to him, and Askel's task in life is to follow on the heels of this Vemund and put matters right again after him. He carries out his task faithfully, is ever on the spot as soon as Vemund has had one of his great days, to effect a reconciliation, and make good the damage done by his kinsman. Vemund's achievements in the greater style begin with his joining company with a wealthy but bad man, Hanef of



Othvegingstunga, whom he knits closer to himself by accepting an offer of fostering a child. Hanef naturally makes use of these good connections to carry on his rascally tricks to a greater extent than before. He steals cattle. In spite of earnest representations from Askel, Vemund takes up his friend's cause, and even craftily exploits his uncle's respected name to gather men on his side. The result is a battle in which Hanef and two good men fall on the one side, and on the other, a free man and a slave. Askel comes up and makes peace between the parties, judging Hanef and the slave as equal, likewise man for man of the others slain, leaving the opponents to pay a fine for the remaining one. Thus judges the most impartial man in Iceland, when it is a question of making good what his kinsman has done ill. Vemund's next achievement of note is cheating a Norwegian skipper to sell him a shipload of wood already sold to Steingrim of Eyja fiord. Steingrim retaliates by having Vemund's slaves killed, and his part of the wood brought home to himself. Askel has to go out and settle matters again, and when Vemund finds that this intervention has not procured him reparation for the slaves, Askel offers him full payment for them out of his own purse. This Vemund refuses to accept, tacitly reserving to himself the right to settle accounts in his own fashion when opportunity offers. He tries in vain to make things balance by stealing a couple of oxen Steingrim has bought – his disinterestedness in the affair is shown by his offering them to Askel as a gift – but he gets no real result out of this either, only a couple of killings and a settlement, the last, of course, being Askel's work. The only objection Vemund has to this settlement is, that Askel has once more left the killing of the slaves in the earlier affair out of consideration. He now tries another way, hiring a wretch to insult Steingrim in a peculiarly obnoxious fashion, and this time Askel's attempt at peacemaking fails owing to the bitter resentment of the other party; not until an attempt at vengeance has led to the killing of Vemund's brother, Herjolf does the right-minded chieftain succeed in effecting a settlement whereby – Herjolf is to be paid for, two of Steingrim's companions are to be exiled for ever, and two others for two years. Thus the game goes on, with acts of aggression on Vemund's part, – always as mischievous as ever – and intervention on the part of Askel – always in full agreement with the principles of frith, until at last the measure is full; and when Steingrim with his following place themselves in the way of Askel and Vemund and their men, Askel accepts the combat, without enthusiasm, but also without demur. And that was the end of Askel and Steingrim.

Smartness and diplomacy were not forbidden qualities according to the old usage. Any man was free to edge and elbow his way through the world, even in matters directly concerning his relationship to brothers and kin. He could take little liberties with the frith as long as he was careful not to effect any actual breach, however slight. But he must always be prepared to find it rising inflexibly before him. It was quite permissible to let one's kinsmen know that one personally preferred another way of life than that they had chosen to follow, and that one would be happier to see them adopt one's own principles – this at least could be done in Iceland at the period of the sagas, and I do not think this freedom was then of recent date – but frith stood firm as ever. As for disowning the action of one's kinsmen and taking up a personal, neutral standpoint, such a thing was out of the question.



A man is brought home, lifeless. The question of what he has done, of his antecedents generally, fades away into the dimmest background. There is the fact: he is our kinsman. The investigation has for its object: slain by the hand of man, or not? wounds? and of what sort? Who was the slayer? And thereupon the kinsmen choose their leader, or gather round the born avenger and promise him all assistance in prosecuting the case, whether by force of arms or at law. The kinsmen of the slayer, on their part, are well aware of what is now to be done; they know that vengeance is on their heels. So simple and straightforward is the idea of frith. It reckons with facts alone, taking no count of personal considerations and causes which led to this violent conclusion.

Throughout the whole of the old Nordic literature, with its countless killings, justified or not, there is not a single instance of men willingly refraining from attempts at vengeance on account of the character of their kinsman deceased. They may be forced to let him lie as he lies, they may realise the hopelessness of any endeavour to obtain reparation; but in every case, we can apply the utterance occasionally found: "I would spare nothing could I be sure that vengeance was to be gained." It is certainly saying a great deal to assert that there is not a single instance; there might be, and probably were, cases of homicide, the further course of which we do not know. The positive testimony lies in the fact that the saga writer rarely fails to emphasise the bitterness of despair which fell to the lot of men forced to relinquish their revenge. And the bitterness of this enforced self-denial is also apparent in the prohibitions which had occasionally to be issued in the southern as well as in the northern parts of Teutonic territory, against taking vengeance for an offender lawfully judged and lawfully hanged.

On the other hand, the slayer comes home and states, simply and briefly, that so-and-so has been killed "and his kinsmen will hardly judge me free of all blame in the matter." The immediate effect of these words is that his kinsmen prepare for defence, to safeguard themselves and their man. It in the course of their preparations, they let fall a word or so anent the undesirability of acting as he has just done, it is merely an aside, an utterance apart from the action, and without any tendency to affect it; it serves only to enhance the effect of determination.

An Icelander greets his kinsman in the doorway with the earnest wish that he would either turn over a new leaf and live decently, or else find some other place to stay – which said, the two go indoors and discuss what measures are now to be taken in regard to the visitor's latest killing. Or the offender may answer, as Thorvald Krok – who was guilty of simple murder – answers the reproach of his kinsman Thorarin: "It is little use to bewail what is now done; you will only bring further trouble on yourself if you refuse to help us; if you take up the matter, it will not be hard to find others who will aid." And Thorarin replies: "It is my counsel that you move hither with all of yours; and that we gather others to us...."

A crude, but not altogether unique instance of the compelling power of frith is found in the story of Hrolleif of the Vatsdoela. This ne'er-do-well ships to Iceland with his witch of a mother, makes his appearance at the farm of his uncle Sæmund and claims to be received there in accordance with the bond of

kinship between them. Sæmund shrewdly observes that he seems regrettably nearer in character to his mother than to his father's stock, but Hrolleif brushes the reproach away with the simple answer: "I cannot live on ill foretellings." When life with Hrolleif in the homestead becomes unendurable, and Sæmund's son Geirmund complains of him as intolerable, Hrolleif opines that it is shameful thus to rail over trifles, and discredit one's kin. He is given a holding, kills a man, for which killing Sæmund has to pay the fine, and when at last he has crowned his record by killing Ingimund, Sæmund's foster-brother, who on the strength of their friendship had given Hrolleif land of his own, he rides straight to Geirmund and forces the latter to protect him, by the words: "Here I will suffer myself to be slain, to your disgrace." We find it hardly remarkable that Sæmund, when a neighbour calls with well-founded complaints against his nephew's doings in the district, should give vent to a sigh: "It were but good if such men were put out of the world," – but what does the neighbour say: "You would very surely think otherwise if any should attempt it in earnest." Here lies the great difficulty: Sæmund is obliged to hold by Hrolleif as far as ever possible; not merely to cover him, but further, to maintain his cause in face of his opponents.

Here is a scene from Vallaljot's saga, where Ljot's words are particularly characteristic. There have been killing and other matters between Ljot and his kinsmen on the one hand, and the two sons of Sigmund, Hrolf and Halli, on the other. All dissension has now been buried by a fair reconciliation, thanks to the right-minded intervention of Gudmund the

Mighty. Bodvar, a third son of Sigmund, has been abroad during these doings; he now returns, and is forced to seek shelter during a storm in the house of Thorgrim, Ljot's brother. Against Thorgrim's will, and in spite of his endeavours to prevent any of the household from leaving the place while the guests are there, one man, Sigmund, slips away and hurries off to make trouble. Ljot will not kill an inoffending man and break the peace agreed on, nor will he raise hand against his brother's guests. But there are others who still bear a grudge, and Bodvar is killed as he goes on his way from Thorgrim's house. What can the eager avengers do now but come to Ljot, the best man of the family. "It may cost a few hard words, but we shall be safe with him," one of them suggests. "It was he who counselled against vengeance," another points out, but he meets with the retort: "The more we are in need of him, the more stoutly will he help." They then inform Ljot that they have taken vengeance for their kinsman, and the saga goes on: Ljot: "It is ill to have evil kinsmen who only lead one into trouble; what is now to be done?" They set out to find Thorgrim, – and of course the saga has no need to state that Ljot is one of the party. Ljot says: "Why did you house our unfriends, Thorgrim?" He answers: "What else could I do? I did my best, though it did not avail. Sigmund did his best; and when all is said and done, it fell out otherwise than I had wished." Ljot: "Better had it been if your plans had been followed, but... now it is best that we do not stay apart... it can hardly be otherwise now than that I should help, and I will take the lead; I have little wish for great undertakings, but I will not lose what is mine for any man." Thorgrim asks what is to become of Eyjolf, who of his own will had taken an eager part in the act of vengeance; Ljot will undertake to protect him, and get him away out of the country. "But Bjorn" says Ljot, "is to stay with me, and his fate shall be mine." Bjorn was Ljot's sister's son, and had been the leader of the party who had killed Bodvar.

There is a sounding echo of the active character of this frith in the old German's paraphrase of the Sermon on the Mount; in germanising Christ's command as to unreserved self-denial, "If thine eye offend thee, thy hand send thee, cast them from thee," he says, "Go not with the kinsman who leads to sin, to wrong, though he be never so closely thy kinsman; better to cast him aside, to abhor him, and lay waste love in the heart, that one may rise alone to the high heaven."

Personal sympathies and antipathies again, can of course never stand up against the authority of frith. Relations between Thorstein and his father had never been very cordial; to Egil's mind, this son of his was ever too soft, too easygoing a man. Egil could not thrive in his house, but went in his old age to live with a step-daughter; but his personal feelings towards his son could not make him stop a single moment to consider whether or not he should interfere.

The Bandamanna saga has a little story based on this theme, of a father and son who never could get along together, but are drawn together by their common feeling against all outsiders. The son is Odd, a wealthy man; Usvif, his father, is poor. Odd gets entangled in a lawsuit, which his ill-wishers take advantage of to squeeze him thoroughly. They have sworn together not to let him go free till they have stripped him. Then artful old Usvif comes along, and under cover of his notorious illwill towards his son, goes about among the conspirators, opening the eyes of a few of them to the hazardous nature of their undertaking. "As purely as my son has money in his chest, so surely also has he wit in his head to find a way when that is needed... do you properly know how much of the booty there will fall to each, when there are eight of you to share?... For you need not think my son will sit waiting at home for you; he has a ship, as you know, and save for homestead and land, a man's wealth will float on water, that much I know... nay, but what a man has gotten, that he has." And here the old man is near letting fall a fat purse hidden beneath his cloak, the price he had demanded of his son beforehand for his help. Thus he went unhesitatingly about the work of frith as he understood it, and took a hearty pride in his and his son's success in settling the matter.

All must give way to frith, all obligations, all considerations of self, everything, down to the regard for one's own personal dignity – if such a thing could be imagined as existing apart from the feeling of kinship.

The great heroic example of daughterly and sisterly fidelity is Signy. The Volsungasaga tells, presumably based throughout on older poems, how a disagreement between Volsung and his son-in-law, Siggeir, Signy's husband, leads to the slaying of the former. Volsung's only surviving son, Sigmund, has to take to the woods, and there he ponders on revenge for his father. Signy sends one after another of her sons out to aid him, and sacrifices them mercilessly when they show themselves craven and useless. At last she herself goes out, disguised and unrecognisable, to Sigmund's hiding place, and bears her own brother a son, an avenger of the true type, instinct with the feeling of clanship. "The war-skilled youth closed me in his arms; there was joy in his embrace, and yet it was hateful to me also," runs the stirring Old English monologue. And when at last the long-awaited vengeance comes, and the fire blazes up about King Siggeir, she throws herself into the flames with the words: "I have done all

that King Siggeir might be brought to his death; so much have I done to bring about vengeance that I will not in any wise live longer; I will die now with Siggeir as willingly as I lived unwillingly with him."

To such a length is she driven by frith. She cannot stop at any point, in face of any horror, so long as her sisterly love is still unsatisfied. She is carried irresistibly through motherly feeling and the dread of incest. For there is not the slightest suggestion in the saga that Signy is to be taken as one of those stern characters in whom one passion stifles all others from the root.

One is tempted to regard this episode as a study, a piece of problem writing, as a conscious attempt to work out the power of frith upon the character. The suggestion has, I think, something to justify it; the story as it stands has its idea. Consciously or unconsciously, the poet, and his hearers, were concerned to bring it about that the frith on one side and that on the other – a woman's relationship to her husband is also a sort of frith – were so forced one against the other that the two showed their power by crushing human beings between them. Signy *must* take vengeance on her husband for her father's death, in despite of humanity itself, and she *must* take vengeance on herself for her own act; her words : "So much have I done to bring about vengeance that I will not in any wise live longer," do not come as an empty phrase, they ring out as the theme of the poem. Gudrun may sorrow for her husband, but she cannot take action against her brothers; Signy must aid in furthering vengeance for her father, even though it cost her her husband, and her children, and something over.

The frith of the guild statutes, which requires the brethren to take up one another's cause, considering only the person, and not the matter itself, is thus no exaggeration. And the frith of kinship has one thing about it which can never find expression in a paragraph of laws: to wit, spontaneity, necessity, the unreflecting "we cannot do otherwise".

And whence comes this "We cannot do otherwise", but from depths that lie beneath all self-determination and self-comprehension. We can follow the idea of frith from its manifestation in man's self-consciousness, down through all his dispositions, until it disappears in the root of will. We dimly perceive that it is not he that wills frith, but frith that wills him. It lies at the bottom of his soul as the great fundamental element, with the blindness and the strength of nature.

Frith constitutes what we call the base of the soul. It is not a mighty feeling among other feelings in these people, but the very core of the soul, that gives birth to all thoughts and feelings, and provides them with the energy of life – or it is that centre in the self where thoughts and feelings receive the stamp of their humanity, and are inspired with will and direction. It answers to what we in ourselves call the human. Humanity in them bears always the mark of kinship. In our culture, a revolting misdeed is branded as inhuman, and conversely, we express our appreciation of noble behaviour by calling it genuinely human; by the Teutons, the former is condemned as destroying a man's kin-life, the latter praised for strengthening the sense of frith. Therefore the slaying of a kinsman is the supreme horror, shame and ill-fortune in one, whereas an ordinary killing is merely an act that may, or may not, be objectionable according to circumstances.

Down at this level of spontaneity there is no difference between me and thee, as far as kinship reaches. If frith constitutes the base of the soul, it is a base which all kinsmen have in common. There they adjoin one another, without any will or reflection between them as a buffer. Kinsmen strengthen one another; they are not as two or more individuals who add their respective strengths together, but they act in concert, because deep down in them all there is a thing in common which knows and thinks for them. Nay, more; they are so united that one can draw strength to himself from another.

This peculiarity of man is well known by the bear, according to a saying current in the North of Sweden. "Better to fight twelve men than two brothers" runs a proverb ascribed to the wise animal. Among twelve men, a bear can pick off one at a time in rational fashion; but the two cannot be taken one by one. And if the one falls, his strength is passed on to his brother.

This solidarity – as exemplified in the laws of revenge – rests on the natural fact of psychological unity. Through the channel of the soul, the action and the suffering of the individual flow on, spreading out to all who belong to the same stock, so that in the truest sense they are the doers of one another's acts. When they follow their man to the seat of justice and support him to the utmost of their power, they are not acting as if his deed were theirs, but because it is. As long as the matter is still unsettled, all the kinsmen concerned are in a state of permanent challenge. Not only the slayer stands in danger of perishing by the sword he has drawn; vengeance can equally well be attained by the killing of one of his kin, if the offended parties find such an one easier to reach, or judge him more "worthy", as an object of vengeance. Steingrim's words have a most natural ring, when he comes to Eyjolf Valgerdson and tells that he has been out in search of Vemund, but being prevented, took instead his brother Herjolf (who, from the saga, does not appear to have had any share in Vemund's doings). "Eyjolf was not well pleased that it had not been Vemund or Hals (another brother of Vemund's); but Steingrim said, they had not been able to reach Vemund – "though we had rather seen it had been him". And Eyjolf likewise had no objection to this." The ring of the words, the passionless, practical, matter-of-fact tone in which the speeches are uttered, tells us at once, better than much roundabout explanation, that we have here to deal with a matter of experience, and not a reflection or an arbitrary rule. In another saga a man has to pay with his life for the amorous escapades of his brother. Ingolf had caused offence to Ottar's daughter by his persistent visits to her home, and her father vindicated the honour of his daughter by having Ingolf's brother, Gudbrand, killed. Ingolf himself was too wary to give the girl's protectors a chance upon his life, and so they had no choice but to strike at him through the body of his kinsman.

Similarly, all those united by one bond of kinship suffer by any scathe to one of their clan: all feel the pain of the wound, all are equally apt to seek vengeance. If a fine be decreed, all will have their share.

Thus the kinsmen proclaim their oneness of soul and body, and this reciprocal identity is the foundation on which society and the laws of society must be based. In all relations between man and man, it is frith that is taken into account, not individuals. What a single man has done binds all who live in the same circle of frith. The kinsmen of a slain man appear *in pleno* as accusers. It is the clan of the slayer that promises indemnity; the clan that pays it. It is the

clan of the slain man that receives the fine, and the sum is again shared out in such wise as to reach every member of the group. The two families promise each other, as one corporation to another peace and security in future.

When a matter of blood or injury is brought before the tribunal of the law-thing, the decree must follow the line of demarcation drawn by kinship. The circle of frith amounts to an individual, which cannot be divided save by amputation, and its right constitutes a whole which no judgement can dissect.

Germanic jurisprudence knows no such valuation of an act as allows of distributive justice; it can only hold the one party entirely in the right, and the other entirely in the wrong. If a man has been slain, and his friends waive their immediate right of vengeance and bring their grievance before the law court instead, the community must either adjudge the complainants their right of frith and reparation, or doom them from their frith and declare them unworthy of seeking redress. In the first case, the community adds its authority to the aggrieved party's proceedings, thereby denying the accused all right to maintain their kinship or defend and aid the slayer: in the latter case, when the killing was done in self-defence or on provocation, the law-thing says to the complainants: "Your frith is worsted, you have no right to vengeance."

We have been taught from childhood to regard the story of the bundle of sticks as an illustration of the importance of unity. The Germanic attitude of mind starts from a different side altogether. Here, unity is not regarded as originating in addition; unity is first in existence. The thought of mutual support plays no leading part among these men; they do not see it in the light of one man after another coming with his strength and the whole then added together; but rather as if the force lay in that which unites them. For them, then, the entire community is broken, and the strength of its men therewith, as soon as even one of the individual parties to it is torn up. And thus they compare the group of kinsmen to a fence, stave set by stave, enclosing a sacred ground. When one is struck down, there is a breach in the clan, and the ground lies open to be trampled on.

Such then, is the frith which in ancient days united kinsmen one with another; a love which can only be characterized as a feeling of identity, so deeply rooted that neither sympathy nor antipathy, nor any humour or mood can make it ebb or flow.

No happening can be so powerful as to reach down and disturb this depth. Not even the strongest feelings and obligations towards non-kinsmen can penetrate so as to give rise to any inner tragedy, any conflict of the soul. Signy, to take her as a type, was driven to do what she would rather have left undone; the thrilling words: "there was joy in it; but it was hateful to me also," are undoubtedly applicable also to her state after the consummation of her revenge. So near can the Northmen approach to tragedy, that they depict a human being who suffers by taking action. But there is no question of any inner conflict, in the sense of her considering, in fear, what course she is to choose. The tragic element comes from without; she acts naturally and without hesitation, and her action whirls her to destruction. When first dissension between kinsfolk is consciously exploited as a poetic subject, as in the Laxdoela account of the two cousins

driven to feud for a woman's sake, we find ourselves on the threshold of a new world.

The Laxdoela plays about the tragic conflict in a man's mind, when he is whirled into enmity with his cousin by the ambition of a woman. The strong-minded Gudrun is never able to forget that once she loved Kjartan and was jilted, and when she marries Bolli, Kjartan's cousin, she makes him a tool of her revenge. At last the day of reckoning has arrived: Kjartan is reported to be on a solitary ride past Bolli's homestead. Gudrun was up at sundawn, says the saga, and woke her brothers. "Such mettle as you are, you should have been *daughters* of so-and-so the peasant – of the sort that serve neither for good nor ill. After all the shame Kjartan has put upon you, you sleep never the worse for that he rides past the place with a man or so..." The brothers dress and arm themselves. Gudrun bids Bolli go with them. He hesitates, alleging the question of kinship, but she answers: "Maybe; but you are not so lucky as to be able to please all in a matter; we will part, then, if you do not go with them." Thus urged, Bolli takes up his arms and goes out. The party placed themselves in ambush in the defile of Hafragil. Bolli was silent that day, and lay up at the edge of the ravine. But his brothers-in-law were not pleased to have him lying there keeping look-out; jestingly they caught him by the legs and dragged him down. When Kjartan came through the ravine, the fight began. Bolli stood idly by, his sword, Foot-bite, in his hand. "Well, kinsman, and what did you set out for to-day, since you stand there idly looking on?" Bolli made as though he had not heard Kjartan's words. At length the others wake him to action, and he places himself in Kjartan's way. Then said Kjartan: "Now you have made up your mind, it seems, to this cowardly work; but I had rather take my death from you than give you yours." With this he threw down his weapon, and Bolli, without a word, dealt him his death-blow. He sat down at once, supporting Kjartan, who died in his arms.

This: yes – no; I will – I will not, lies altogether outside the sphere of frith; in these chapters there is a touch of the mediæval interest in mental problems; but the old, heartsick, and therefore at bottom ignoble melancholy still rings through.

There is less of tragedy than of moral despair in Bolli's words to Gudrun when she congratulates him on his return home: "This ill fortune will be long in my mind, even though you do not remind me of it."

Frith, then, is nothing but the feeling of kinship itself; it is given, once and for all, at birth. The sympathy we regard as the result of an endeavour to attune ourselves to our neighbours, was a natural premise, a feature of character.

Compared with the love of our day, the old family feeling has a stamp of almost sober steadfastness. There is none of that high-pressure feeling which modern human beings seem to find vitally necessary to love, none of that pain of tenderness which seems to be the dominant note in our heart-felt sympathy, between man and man as well as between man and woman. The Christian hero of love is consumed by his ardour, he is in danger of being sundered himself by his own need of giving out and drawing up in himself. The people of old time



grew strong and healthy in the security of their friendships; frith is altogether balance and sobriety.

It is natural, then, that security should form the centre of meaning in the words which the Germanic people are most inclined to use of themselves, words such as *sib* and *frith*. Security, but with a distinct note of something active, something willing and acting, or something at least which is ever on the point of action. A word such as the Latin *pax* suggests first and foremost – if I am not in error – a laying down of arms, a state of equipoise due to the absence of disturbing elements; frith, on the other hand, indicates something armed, protection, defence – or else a power for peace which keeps men amicably inclined. Even when we find mention, in the Germanic, of "making peace", the fundamental idea is not that of removing disturbing elements and letting things settle down, but that of introducing a peace-power among the disputants.

The translator of Anglo-Saxon poetry is faced with innumerable difficulties, because no modern words will exhaust the meaning of terms like *freoðu* and *sib*, indicating "frith". If he content himself with repeating "peace" again and again in every context, he will thereby wipe out the very meaning which gives sense to the line; and if he attempt to vary by different interpretations, he can only give the upper end of the meaning; he pulls off a little tuft of the word, but he does not get the root. The energy of the word, its vital force, is lost. When in one place enemies or evildoers beg for frith, the word means fully: acceptance in a pardoning will, admission to inviolability; and when God promises the patriarch in Genesis frith, it bears the full meaning of grace, the earnest intention to be with him and protect him, fight for him, and if need be, commit a wrong for his advantage. And it is not only men, but also, for instance, places, strongholds, which can furnish those in need of frith.

And frith is the mutual will, the unanimity, gentleness, loyalty, in which men live within their circle. According to the writer of the Anglo-Saxon Genesis, the state in which the angels lived with their Lord, before they sinned, has frith; it was this frith that Cain broke by his fratricide "forfeiting love and frith." So also Mary says to Joseph, when he thinks of leaving her: "You will rive asunder our frith and forsake my love."

When Beowulf has killed both Grendel and his mother, the Danish King in grateful affection says: "I will give you my frith as we had before agreed," and he can give nothing higher than this. But there is the same entire sense of affection and obligation when the two arch-enemies Finn and Hengest, after a desperate fight, enter into a firm alliance in frith – even though the will gives way soon after.

But the sense of the words is not exhausted yet. They denote not only the honest, resolute will to find loyalty; implicit trust forms the core, but about it lies a wealth of tones of feeling, joy, delight, affection, love. A great part of the passages quoted above, if not all, are only half understood unless that tone is suffered to sound as well. In the Anglo-Saxon, *sib* – or peace – ranges from the meaning of relief, comfort – as in the saying: *sib* comes after sorrow – to love. And when the Northmen speak of woman's frith or love, the word glows with passion.

We need not doubt but that the feeling of frith included love, and that kinsmen loved one another, and that deeply and sincerely. It is love between one and another that has drawn the little Old-Scandinavian word *sváss*, Anglo-Saxon *svæs*, away from its original meaning. It means, probably, at the first, approximately "one's own, closely related" but in Anglo-Saxon poetry it shows a tendency to attach itself to designations for kinsmen, and at the same time its content has become more and more intense; intimate, dear, beloved, joyous. In the Scandinavian, it has concentrated entirely about this sense and is there, moreover, a very strong word for expressing dearness. From all we can see, the relation between brothers, and also between brothers and sisters, was among the Germanic people, as generally with all peoples of related culture, one of close intimacy. The brotherly and sisterly relationship has a power unlike any other to intensify will and thoughts and feelings. The kinship has possessed both depth and richness.

Besides love there is in frith a strong note of joy. The Anglo-Saxon word *liss* has a characteristic synthesis of tenderness and firmness that is due to its application to the feelings of kinship. It denotes the gentleness and consideration which friends feel for one another; it indicates the king's favour towards his retainers; in the mouths of Christian poets it lends itself readily to express God's grace. But then *liss* is also joy, delight, happiness; just that pleasure one feels in one's home, among one's faithful friends. These two notes – which were of course really one – rang through the words of Beowulf: "All *my/liss* is in thee, but few friends have I without thee;" thus he greets his uncle Hygelac as if to explain the offering of his trophies to his kinsman. "All frith is ruined by the fall of fearless Tryggvason," these simple words disclose the boundless grief which Hallfred felt at the death of his beloved king.

Gladness was a characteristic feature in a man, nothing less than the mark of freedom. "Glad-man" – a man of happy mind – a man must be called, if the judgement were to be altogether laudatory. The verse in the *Hávamál*, "Glad shall a man be at home, generous to the guest, and gentle," indicates what is expected of a man, and this agrees with the spirit of the following verse from the Beowulf: "Be glad towards the Geats, and forget not gifts for them," as the Queen adjures the King of the Geats. In fact, just as bold or well-armed are standing epithets of the man, glad must be added to indicate that nothing is wanted in his full humanity; so when the Beowulf tells us, that Freawaru "was betrothed to Froda's glad son", the poet does not intend to explain the disposition of the prince, but simply describes him as the perfect knight.

Gladness was an essential feature in humanity, and thus a quality of frith. The connection between joy and friendly feeling is so intimate that the two cannot be found apart. All joy is bound up with frith; outside it, there is not and cannot be anything answering to that name. When the poet of the Genesis lets the rebellious angels fall away from joy and frith and gladness, he gives, in this combination of words, not a parallel reckoning up of the two or three most important values lost to them by their revolt, but the expression in a formula of life itself seen from its two sides.

Our forefathers were very sociable in their gladness. Intercourse and well-being were synonymous with them. When they sit about the board, or round the hearth. whatever it may be, they grow boisterous and quick to laughter – they

feel pleasure. Pleasure, of course, is a word of wide scope of meaning in their mode of speech, extending far beyond the pleasures of the table and of converse, but pleasure is properly society; in other words, it is the feeling of community that forms the basis of their happiness. *Mandream*, delight in man's society, is the Anglo-Saxon expression for life, existence, and to go hence is called to "give up joy", the joy in mankind, joy of life, joy of the hall; it is to forsake delight in kinsmen, in honour, in the earth, one's inheritance, the joyful site of home.

Now we are in a position to understand, that gladness or joy is not a pleasure derived from social intercourse; it draws its exhilarating strength from being identical with frith. The contents of joy are a family privilege, an heirloom. The Anglo-Saxon word *feasceaft* means literally: he who has no part or lot with others, the outlaw who has no kin, but the word implies the meaning of unhappy, joyless; not, as we might believe, because one so driven out must come to lead a miserable existence, but because he turned his back upon gladness when he went away. "Gladness" must be taken in an individualizing sense, as of a sum of gladness pertaining to the house, and which the man must leave behind him in the house when he goes out into the void. There is no joy lying about loose in the wilds. He who is cast out from gladness of his own and those about him has lost all possibility of feeling the well-being of fullness in himself. He is empty.

Kinship is an indispensable condition to the living of life as a human being; and it is this which makes the suffering occasioned by any breach in a man's frith so terrible, without parallel in all experience; so intolerable and brutal, devoid of all lofty ideal elements. To us, a conflict such as that which arises in Gudrun when she sees her "speech-friend" slain, and her brothers as the slayers, might seem to present the highest degree of bitterness; a thing to rend the soul asunder. But the Germanic mind knew that which was worse than tearing asunder, to wit, dissolution. A breach of frith gives rise to a suffering beneath all passion; it is kinship itself, a man's very humanity, that is stifled, and thence follows the dying out of all human qualities. What the wretch suffers and what he enjoys can no longer produce any real feeling in him. His very power of joy is dead. The power of action is killed. Energy is replaced by that state which the Northmen feared most of all, and most of all despised: redelessness.

"Bootless struggle, an overarching sin, falling like darkness over Hrethel's soul" says the *Beowulf* of the fratricide; in these words is summed up the helpless, powerless fear that follows on the breaking of frith.

This places a new task before us. Joy is a thing essential to humanity. It is inseparably attached to frith; a sum and an inheritance. But this joy, then, contained something in itself.

In the *Beowulf*, the hero's return from strife and toil is sung as follows: "Thence he sought his way to his dear home, loved by his people, home to the fair frith-hall, where he had his battle-fellows, his castle, his treasures." What did these lines mean to the original listeners? What feelings did the words "dear", "loved" and "fair" call forth in them? What we have seen up to now teaches us approximately but the strength of these words – and what we are *not* to understand thereby.

What were the ideas attaching to this joy?

The answer is contained in the old word honour.

## CHAPTER II

# HONOUR

Frith and honour, these are the sum of life, the essence of what a man needs to live fully and happily.

"Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth," says God, in the Genesis, to Noah on his leaving the Ark; and the Anglo-Saxon poet of the Genesis gives it as follows: "Be fruitful and increase; live in honour and in frith with pleasure."

Once on a time, there lived in Iceland, near the Isfiord, an old man by name Havard. He had been a bold man in his day; but he was not rich, and had not great influence. His only son, Olaf, was envied for his prowess and popularity by the local chieftain residing at Laugabol, the powerful and intractable Thorbjorn. Thorbjorn sought to be more than first, he would be the only man of note in the place, and this end he attained by killing Olaf. When the news was brought to Havard he sank down with a deep groan and kept his bed a whole year. And indeed there was no one who really believed that a solitary old man would be able to exact reparation from the domineering men of Laugabol. Havard's grave wife kept the homestead going, went fishing with the manservant by day and did the rest of her work by night; then, at the end of the year she persuaded the old man to pull himself together and set off to demand payment of a fine. He was met with great scorn. His demand was not even refused; he was told to look outside the enclosure, he would find there a creature just as old and lame and halt as himself; the horse had lain kicking for a long while past, but now, after some scrapings, might perhaps manage to get on its legs again; this poor beast he was welcome to keep, if he wanted consolation for the death of his son. Havard staggers home and goes to bed for another year.

Once again he humours his wife and makes the attempt; he is loth to go, but "if I knew there should be vengeance for my son Olaf, I would never reck how dearly I might have to buy it". So he rides to the law-thing. Thorbjorn, when first he sees the old man enter the booth, cannot at once recollect what is his errand. "This," says Havard, "the slaying of my son Olaf is ever in my mind as if it were but newly done; and therefore it is my errand now to crave payment of you." He gains nothing for his pains but new scorn, bloody scorn. So downcast is he now as he leaves the booth, that he scarcely notices when one and another man of some standing pass him a kindly word. And his third year in bed is rendered heavier to bear by reason of aching joints. Bjargny, his wife, still manages the work of the place, and finds time between whiles to persuade her kinsfolk to render aid, and to gain knowledge of Thorbjorn's journeys and the way he goes. Then one day she comes to the bedside again, when the third summer was come: "Now you have slept long enough; to-night your son Olaf is

to be avenged; afterwards, it will be too late." This was something different from the comfortless task of riding out to ask for reparation. Havard sprang from this bed, secured his revenge before daybreak, and came the next morning to Steinthor of Eyri to report the killing of four men, and remind him of his words at the last Al-thing: "For methinks you said then, that if I should need a trifle of help, I might as well come to you as to other chieftains." "Help you shall have," answered Steinthor, "but I should like to know what you would reckon a great help, if this you now crave is but a trifle." And thereupon Havard seated himself squarely and at ease in the second high seat at Eyri, laughed at the future with its troubles, and jested with all he met: "for now there was an end to all fretting and misery."

Havard had suffered a shame, a loss of honour. It shakes him in every limb. The evil grips him, aged man as he is, so that he sinks down in a palsy. And there he lies, while a single thought gnaws so insistently at his mind that he thinks he has not slept all those three years. At the law-thing he walks, as a looker-on describes him, "a man unlike others, large of growth and something stricken in years; he drags himself along, and yet he looks manly enough; he seems filled with sorrow and unrest."

But when at last reparation comes, honour flows once more through his veins, honour newly born and giving new birth again. His limbs are straightened, his lungs are filled. With a sigh of awakening the man feels life once more pour through and from him. His strength wells up. His mind grows young, so young that it must learn anew the meaning of danger, the meaning of difficulty; it is filled with restive joy of life, the true rejoicing in life that cares nothing for death.

Paulus Diaconus tells of an aged Lombard, Sigvalde, who, like Havard, was sorely tried, and like Havard, reaped joy in many fold for his sorrow. He had lost two sons in battle with the invading Slavs. In two battles he avenged them with great eagerness, and when a third battle was about to take place he insisted on going out to fight, in spite of all protestations, "for", he declared, "I have now gained full restitution for my sons; now I can meet death gladly if need be." And so he went to his death out of sheer abundance of vitality.

Honour at once brings up the thought of vengeance. It must be so; he who thinks of honour must say vengeance, not only because the two are always found together in the stories, but more because it is only through vengeance that we can see the depth and breadth of honour. Vengeance contains the illumination and the explanation of life; life as it is seen in the avenger is life at its truest and most beautiful, life in its innermost nature.

Life is known by its ecstasy. There is a sort of delight in which men go beyond themselves and forget themselves, to sink down into the infinite, the timeless. But then too, there is an ecstasy wherein men go beyond themselves without losing foothold in time, a delight in which they live through the highest and deepest - their highest and deepest - as in a feeling of power, so that they stand a while in enjoyment of the growth of their strength, and then storm on, stronger and bolder.

It is by this life-filled delight that life must be known. In it, culture reveals its essence and its value. In order to attain to a just estimate of a strange age, we

must ourselves participate in its ecstasy. Living through that one moment gives more than many years' experience, because a culture's whole complement of thought and feeling lies close-packed there in its highest power. In this great moment of experience the refracted rays of daily life must be made clear; the joy of life, its sorrow, its beauty, its truth, its right, reveal to us here their innermost being. What is the substance of a people's joy and of its sorrow - the answer to this question forces us far into the culture of that people. But it is equally important to measure the degree of strength in joy; what is the measure of height for these people: jubilation, delight, refreshment of the soul, shouts of laughter, smiles, or what? And what is sorrow to them? A thing they can enjoy, if only in the ennobling form of poetry, or a pestilence, a thing terrible and despicable in itself?

What Christianity was, in the days when Christianity constituted a culture, a spiritual atmosphere, life-giving and necessary to life, we feel by trying to realise in our own minds as nearly as possible the experience of a father when he praises God because his children have been found worthy to suffer for the sake of Jesu name. The Jew reveals himself in the moment he places a newborn son on his knee and by his blessing consecrates him to be the upholder of his race. Hellas must be experienced through the aged Diagoras, as he sits on the shoulders of his sons after their victory at the games, surrounded by a jubilant throng, and "accounted happy in his children". The Germanic ecstasy is reached in the moment of vengeance.

Havard and Sigvalde tread holy ground. However far we may be from understanding their motives and reasonings, their presence inspires us with awe. It is not their manhood, their violence, their humour, their quickness of wit that arouses our interest; we feel dimly, that vengeance is the supreme expression of their humanity, and are urged on by the need of converting our veneration into a sympathetic understanding of the ideals guiding their acts.

Vengeance makes them great, because it develops every possibility in them, not merely a few bloodthirsty attributes. It strains their power of achievement, almost beyond its reach, makes them feel stronger and bolder. But it teaches them, also, to wait, and bear in mind, and calculate; year after year a man can wait and watch, arranging all his plans and actions so as to grasp the most fleeting opportunity of satisfying his honour; ay, even to his daily work about the homestead, looking to his hay and his cattle, it is so disposed that he can watch the roads and see at any moment if the wanted man should ride that way. Vengeance teaches him to reckon time and space as trifles. One may come through time by remembering, and one can be driven over sea and land, when one has an object in view. A boy of six, seeing his father slain before his eyes, can at once find the right word: "Not weep, but remember the better."

Vengeance raises him up and transfigures him. It does not merely raise him, but holds him suspended, thrusts him into a higher plane. And this can happen, because the desire of redress is not only the loftiest of all sentiments, but also the most ordinary, most generally human. Whatever differences there might be between human beings otherwise, in one thing they met; they must and should and could not but seek restitution.

What then was vengeance?

It was *not* the outcome of a sense of justice. There are peoples who see in justice the vital principle of existence, whereby the world is held together and kept going. For them, there is a kind of direct relationship between the behaviour of human beings and the motion of the planets, so that a crime unpunished hangs brooding like a peril over mankind. In order to avoid famine, defeat, or disturbances of the order of the world generally, one must, in case of need, execute the sons for the crimes of their fathers, and *vice versa*. The Germanic people are not of this sort. Justice demands an altogether different type of conscience from that with which our forefathers were equipped.

Neither did these barbarians understand the symmetrical morality, that which restores the balance by striking out an eye for an eye. The Germanic mind had as little conception of the word retaliation as of the word punishment.

If the thirst for vengeance is understood as meaning the wish to see one's desire upon one's enemies, then the word does not accord with the Germanic idea. Vengeance was planned with every care, and carried out in the most cold-blooded fashion; one is tempted to say with a business-like *sang-froid*. The avenger plants his axe in his opponent's head, wipes off the blood in the grass, covers the body according to custom, and rides on his way. He has no lust for further dealings with the fallen man; mutilation of the dead is, in the history of the Northmen, a thing so unique as to mark the doer of such a deed as an exception, that is to say, as an inferior man. Ugly memories can on rare occasions lead a man to forget himself. Havard dealt Thorbjorn a further wound across the face after he had given him his death-blow; for Thorbjorn had once struck him in the face with a pouch in which Olaf Havardson's teeth had been kept since the day they were loosened by the blow that killed him. But Havard's deed at once calls forth the question from his companion: "Why do you deal so by a dead man?" Even if the man were not dead, it was counted unmanly to strike him once he lay mortally wounded. The act would be that of a niding.

There is little of exultation over the fallen; and even when it occurs, it is plainly only a casual attendant circumstance, not the main point in the feeling of satisfaction. Behind the outward calmness of vengeance, the mind is in a turmoil of rejoicing and pride; the accomplishment of the deed serves better than anything else to call forth enthusiastic words in praise of the act, in praise of him who wrought it, and of him for whose sake it was done, of the race to which both parties belonged. But these outbursts come from the depths, they are the outcome of life's ecstasy.

For the punisher, as for the man of vindictive nature, all thoughts circle about that other one, what is to be done with him, whether he can be properly and feelingly struck. The avenger has the centre of his thoughts in himself. All depends on what he does, not on what the other suffers. The avenger procures something; he *takes* vengeance.

Two things are requisite for right vengeance; that the offender should fall by stroke of weapon, and that the weapon should be wielded by the one offended. If the slayer, before the matter could be settled, perished in some other wise — either died a natural death, or was killed by accident — then the offended



parties had none the less their vengeance due to them; they must then look to the offender's kin, just as in case of his escaping alive out of their hands, e. g. by choosing that season to travel and see the world, and learn good customs of the kings in other lands. Nor would the injured family regard it as any restitution that the offender should fall by the hand of a third party unconcerned in the affair; their vengeance was yet to come, for they had not yet "gotten honour over their kinsman."

But then also, the other party must necessarily have an honour, if the injury was to be wiped out. The most unfortunate death a man could die was to be killed by slaves, and more particularly when these were acting on their own behalf, without any man of distinction as instigator; for there was no vengeance to be gained from bondmen. One of the earliest settlers in Iceland, Hjorleif, was set upon and slain by his slaves. When his foster-brother Ingolf found the body later, he cried out in distress: "This was a wretched fate for a brave man, that thralls should be his bane." Havard, when taking vengeance for the killing of his son, suffered the slaves to go free; the deed would not be "more avenged" by his taking their worthless lives as well. Almost as wretched as death by the hand of slaves was his lot who died by the hand of a vagabond, a man having no companions in honour, no foster-brother or comrades in arms in the world. Not only was there the risk of vengeance being lost, since it vested in a single individual; but the honour to be gained from such an one was in itself but slight.

Even among true kinsmen, however, there might be degrees of value in revenge. If the family felt the injury very deeply, either because the member slain was one of their best men, or because his kinsmen generally set a high price upon their honour, then they might prefer to aim immediately at a better man among the offender's kin. This tendency to take vengeance on a kinsman of the offender who was counted "worthier" as an object of revenge dies late in the North.

In the introduction to the Norwegian law-book of the Frostathing, we find "Hakon the King, son of King Hakon, son's son of King Sverri" still mournfully bewailing "the ill mis-custom, which long hath been in the land, that where a man hath been put to death, his kinsmen will take such of the slayer's kin as is counted best, even though the killing were done without his knowledge, will, or nearness to the deed, and will not take vengeance upon the slayer, even though it might be easily come by," whence evil men flourish, and the good have no reward of their peaceable life; "and we see ourselves robbed of our best subjects in the land", sighs this father of his country.

The bitterness of tone is in itself a token that comfort is yet far to seek. True, the peasant freeholders would gladly live in safety in the country, and if the king could help them to such peace, then an edict or so were welcome enough; but sure as it was that peace might be furthered by refraining from killing of men, it was no less sure that man could not live by not being killed. And when a man now suffered need, what could the king do for him? The surplus of healing for a wounded honour which the king's good subjects gained for themselves in ancient wise was not to be replaced by anything the king had to offer in new ways of law. And as long as honour stood as a fundamental factor in the moral self-estimation of the people, stood, indeed, as the very aim of justice, there

could be no lopping an end off by a sharp rescript. Prohibitions and law reforms from above are at best only the precursors, heralds of a change of mind that takes centuries to effect; and as long as “law” and “right” had not found one another in a new unity, so long would the “abuse” among the people, their misunderstanding of their own good, be stronger than both kingly power and prudence. “No man in all the land had such brave vengeance taken for him as this one; for no other man were so many taken in payment” — this was, and continued to be the best proof that the fallen man had been among the greatest of his time.

Vengeance, then, consists in taking something from the other party. One procures honour from him. One will have one's honour back.

An injury done occasions a loss to the sufferer. He has been bereft of some part of his honour. But this honour is not a thing he can do without in case of need, not a thing he requires only for luxury, and which the frugal mind can manage without. He cannot even console himself with the part that remains; for the injury he has suffered may be likened to a wound which will never close up of itself, but bleed unceasingly until his life runs out. If he cannot fill the empty space, he will never be himself again. The emptiness may be called shame; it is a suffering, a painful state of sickness.

Njal, peaceable, peace-making Njal, has not many words about the matter; but the human feelings are as unspoiled in him as in the doughty warrior Egil. He looked at his aged body and said: “I cannot avenge my sons, and in shame I will not live” and thereupon laid himself down on his bed in the midst of the flames. In a character such as Kveldulf, the suffering displayed itself in violent convulsions. His son Thorolf had fallen in something approaching open feud with no less a man than King Harald himself; it seemed hopeless for a simple yeoman to crave honourable amends from the mighty King of Norway. He himself was old and past his time; but the hunger for honour turned in his body to a stimulant, calling up the last remains of strength to strike down a man or so “whom Harald will count it ill to lose”. Different as the two men are by nature — representing, one might say, the two opposite poles of Icelandic culture — they yet think and feel alike, and act on the same principle: that honour is a thing indispensable, and vengeance inevitable. As long as men still lived the old life, irrespective of whether the outward forms were pagan or Christian, a man could not, under any circumstances, let his vengeance lie; there was no ignoring the claims of honour, for this was a thing that came from within, manifesting itself as a painful sense of fear.

There was once an Icelander who did a great thing, all but superhuman. After the general battle at the Al-thing in the year 1012 when the prospects of reconciliation were dark, and everything pointed to a fatal breaking up of the free state itself, the great chieftain Hall of Sida stood up and said: “All men know what sorrow has stricken me in that my son Ljot is fallen. One or another of you may perhaps think that he would be among the dearest of those fallen here” (*i. e.* one of those whose death would cost most in reparation). “But this I will do, that men may be agreed again; I will let my son lie unavenged, and yet give my enemies full peace and accord. Therefore I ask of you, Snorri Godi, and with you the best of those here, that you bring about peace between us.” Thereupon

Hall sat down. And at his words rose a loud murmur of approval, all greatly praising his goodwill. "And of this, that Hall was willing to leave his son unavenged, and did so much to bring about peace, it is now to be said that all those present at the law-thing laid money together for payment to him. And the count of it all together was not less than eight hundred in silver; but that was four times the fine for killing of one man."

But blood need not be shed to endanger life. Honour might ooze out as fatally from the wound made by a blow from a stick, or by a sharp word, or even by a scornful neglect. And the medicine is in all cases the same.

When a man sits talking among others, and emphasises his words with a stick in such fashion that he chances to strike his neighbour's nose, the neighbour ought perhaps to take into consideration the fact that the striker was short-sighted, and had talked himself into a state of excitement. Nor can it be called quite good manners to jump up on the instant and endeavour to drive one's axe into the nose of the other; but should the eager and short-sighted speaker chance to be found dead in his bed a few months after, it would be understood that someone had been there "to avenge that blow from a stick". No one would on principle deny the name of vengeance to the deed. And if the man so struck were a man of honour, no outsider would deny his right to act as he had done; on the contrary, they would immediately realise that the blow to his nose might prove as fatal to him as the loss of an arm or a leg. Unless honour were taken for the injury, the little sore would, so to speak, lead to blood-poisoning.

It happened thus with the Icelander Thorleif Kimbi. While voyaging abroad on a Norwegian ship, he had the misfortune to act in a somewhat hot-headed fashion towards his countryman Arnbjorn, while they were preparing a meal. Arnbjorn started up and dealt Thorleif a blow on the neck with his hot spoon. Thorleif swallowed the insult: "Nay, the Norsemen shall not make game of us two Icelanders, and haul us apart hike a couple of curs; but I will remember this when we meet in Iceland." Thorleif's memory, however, seems to have been weak. But when one day he sets out to ask the hand of a girl in marriage, her brother answers him as follows: "I will tell you my mind: before I give you my sister in marriage, you must find healing for those gruel-scars on your neck, that you got three years ago in Norway". And that blow of a spoon and the refusal based on the scars brought two whole districts into feud, and led to deep and lasting dissension between the families concerned. From the point of view of the age, there is nothing disproportionate in the cause and its effects.

If a man were called thief or coward — which he was not — or beardless — which perhaps the fact forbade him to deny — he would in any case have to win full and complete indemnity for the assertion, if he wished to retain his dignity. Njal had the disability that no hair grew on his face. Gunnar's wife, Hallgerd, saw it, and was not silent about the matter. "So wise a man, that knows a way for everything; that he should not have hit upon the plan of carting manure where it was most needed; he shall be called the beardless old man, and his sons be hight Muckbeards. And you, Sigmund, you ought to put that into verse; come, let us have some gain of your art." Sigmund does all in his power to win fair Hallgerd's admiration and her applause: "You are a pearl, to pleasure me so." The insults have power, not only over the young, hot-blooded sons, but

equally so over Njal himself. The verses come to Bergthora's ears. And when they were sitting at meat, she said: "You have been honoured with gifts, both you, father, and your sons; there will be little fame for you if you give nothing in return." "What gifts are these?" asked Skarphedin. "You, boys, have one gift to share between you, you have been called Muckbeards, and the master here is called the beardless old man." "We are not womanly minded, to be angered at everything" said Skarphedin. "Then Gunnar was angered on your behalf, and if you do not seek your right here, you will never avenge any shame." "The old woman takes pleasure, it seems, in baiting us," said Skarphedin, and smiled; but the sweat stood out on his forehead, and red spots showed in his cheeks, and this was an unusual thing. Grim was silent, and bit his lip; and Helgi showed no sign. Hoskuld followed Bergthora when she went out. She came in again, foaming with rage. Njal says: "There, there, wife, it can be managed well enough, even though one takes one's time. And it is thus with many matters, however trying they may be, that even though vengeance be taken, it is not sure that all mouths can be made to say alike." But in the evening, Njal heard an axe rattle against the wall. "Who has taken down our shields?" "Your sons went out with them" said Bergthora. Njal thrust his feet into a pair of shoes, and went out, round the house; there he saw them on their way up over the slope. "Whither away?" "After sheep" answered Skarphedin. "You need no weapons for them; it would seem you were going on some other errand." "Then we will fish for salmon, father, if we do not come across the sheep." "If that is so, it is to be hoped that you do not miss your catch." When he came in to bed, he said to Bergthora: "All your sons have gone out armed; it would seem that your sharp words have given them something to go out for." "I will give them my best thanks if they come and tell me of Sigmund's fall." — They come home with the good news and tell Njal. And — he answers: "Well done!"

For everything there is but one form of vengeance; vengeance in blood. If it were only a question of retribution or self-assertion, payment could no doubt be made in the same coin. When men have such faith in the power of scornful words over honour, one might think they would also regard their own taunts as of some effect. But to give ill words for ill words did not win honour back; the sting of the other's words remained, and one might lose one's revenge. A man would hardly dare to take his enemy prisoner and put him to scorn, instead of putting him to death at once; there was the fear of bringing degradation on oneself, instead of restitution, and thus it was reckoned unmanly to humiliate an enemy instead of killing him. Vengeance was too costly a matter to jest with.

Honour was a thing which forced men to take vengeance, not merely something that enabled them to do so. The guilds lived, like the old circles of kinsmen, in frith and honour, and in their statutes the principles underlying ancient society are reduced to paragraphs. A man is thrust out of the guild and pronounced a niding, if he break peace with his brother in any dispute arising between them, wherever they may meet, whether in the guild hall, in the streets of their town, or out in the world. He incurs the same sentence, if he fail to take up the cause of his brother, when he is in need of assistance in dealings with people outside the brotherhood. But no less does a brother sin, if he suffer dishonour without calling in the aid of his brethren; and if he do not thereafter avenge the wrong

with the aid of his guild brethren, he is cast out from the brotherhood as a niding.

Though frith is not directly expressed in the codes of law, it was nevertheless manifest; its authority is so obvious, that the lawyers do not become conscious of it until they begin to find themselves in opposition. Honour, on the other hand, is amply recognised in the codices of the law-makers.

For partners in frith, vengeance is a *duty*; the law sanctions this duty as a *right*. The laws of Iceland allow of killing on the spot in return for attack or for a blow, even though they may leave no mark on the skin. In the case of more serious blows and wounds, and of insults of a graver character, the offender may be freely struck down when and where he is found before the next assembly of the Al-thing. Thus far, vengeance is valid.

But if a man goes home with the little insult still upon him, or lets autumn, winter, spring go by without settling up accounts for the greater offence, then he has forfeited his right to settle by his own hand, and can only bring suit against his opponent in law. — Thus runs a law divided against itself. The line of development tends towards a restriction of the right to vengeance; but so long as the necessity of vengeance is admitted in principle, the limits are drawn in purely external fashion. No wonder then, that these loosely built barriers prove too weak to hold back the pursuer.

In the laws of Norway, the process of restriction is carried a step farther. Vengeance is for the most part only recognised in cases of the very gravest injury. Authority must of necessity countenance the vengeance taken by a man for the killing of his kinsman or the dishonouring of his womenfolk; to include such vengeance under the head of crime, though it were of the mildest order, was, even in the early Middle Ages, out of the question. But here also, the laws of the Norwegian kings would seek to draw the limit for personal action. There is some hesitation, perhaps, in regard to abuse of the very worst kind; — can one deny a man's right to answer with the axe when addressed in such words as: "You old woman, you bitch, a jade like you, a slave that you are!"? — but a wound or a blow, a nudge, a jeer, a man should be able to carry to court.

Nevertheless, a stronger sub-stratum shows clearly through. Hakon Hakonson, in his great Novel from the middle of the thirteenth century, which serves as an introduction to the Frostathing's Law, cannot say otherwise than that vengeance for wounds and genuine insults must stand valid, when it is taken before the opposite party has offered to pay a fine. The vague arbitrariness of the addition: "save where the king and other men of judgement deem otherwise" is characteristic of all helpless reformatory movement from above; it is giving the old régime one's blessing, and tacking on an empty phrase to stand in the name of reform. And if the offender, trusting to his wealth and power, or to influential kinsmen, repeated his insolence, then the offended party had the right to choose whether he would accept settlement or not.

Half-humorous is an improvement which at one time seems to have been regarded with great hopes; that a man taking vengeance shall be held guilty of no crime as long as his vengeance does not exceed in magnitude the wrong for which it is taken. Any surplus is to be duly assessed at its proper value on

settlement, and indemnity paid accordingly. A well-meant idea, if only it were possible to agree as to what punishment fitted the crime, and what the surplus, if any, might be worth. The thought looks better in the form of a gentle exhortation, as put forward to guide the conscience of the king's retainers: Do not take vengeance too suddenly, and let not the vengeance taken be over-great. Thus run the words in King Magnus' court-law of 1274.

All these interferences bear the stamp of weakness and lukewarmness; the improvements themselves show us how clearly and simply the old régime is imprinted on the mind: that injury, whether of this sort or that, demands its cure, and that the cure is certainly to be found in vengeance. True, new ideas are beginning to germinate; but for the present, the reformers have nothing wherewith to lay a new foundation, and are thus obliged to build upon the old, basing their edicts against vengeance upon the fact that vengeance is a thing no man can do without.

Surely enough, a contrast may be noted between law and life. The man of law appears to have had a keen eye for shades and degrees of offence, which practical men never recognised, or recognised only while in company with the jurists. These Norsemen, good souls, sat at the law-thing and listened 'with interest when those versed in law expatiated on the distinction between a wound laying bare the bone, but closing entirely on proper treatment; and the legally graver case where a piece of flesh of such and such a size was shorn away and fell to the ground. The hearers would make a mental note of how much was to be paid for the first sort, and how much for the second. Or they would be given a classification of the various terms of abuse. "Full fine shall be paid, firstly, when a man reviles another as having lain in childbed; secondly, if he declare that the other is possessed of unnatural lusts; thirdly, if he compare him with a mare, or a troll, or a harlot;" likewise full fine if he be called slave, or whore, or witch; and for the rest, there are only words of abuse for which a minor fine can be claimed, or which can be avenged by saying: you are another. — Then the assembly dispersed, and the good men went back to their homes, and took vengeance in blood as well for great injuries as for small insults, as if no such scale had ever been. Or the Icelanders, those hard-bitten champions, who quarrelled and fought and took their revenge in all the simplicity of honour, they went to their Al-thing and heard the lawman recite the chapter on killing, in all its artificial complexity, with conditions, possibilities and circumstances endlessly tangled and woven in and out. Never a man laughed; on the contrary, all listened with the deepest interest.

This picture has a magnificent humour of its own. If we did not know better, we might be led to imagine a schism in the community. But no. In Iceland, at any rate, there is no trace of any distinction between a law-giving caste and a lawless mob. The same headstrong yeomen who fought with one another in their own districts, were jurists to a degree, with a fondness and a gift for the intricacies of law. It is these peasants, indeed, who have made Icelandic law the fine-patterned web of casuistry it is. Law, in the saga isle, has its own particular stamp of almost refined systematism, that we find in Iceland and nowhere else, built up by constant lawsuits and constant legislation. Something similar applies in the case of Norway. Even though there were everywhere men learned in law, in the narrower sense, to be found beside the unlearned, the distinction is only

valid as a matter of actual knowledge, and does not apply to the interest displayed.

Another and more likely explanation may be advanced. Men do not remain always at the same stage; but they move only with part of their soul at a time. The same individual contains a progressive self, which asserts itself triumphantly when the man appears in some public function or in co-operation with other kindred soul-halves; and an old-fashioned, conservative self, which takes the lead at home in daily life, and manages altogether to take advantage of any disturbance of balance in the soul to surprise and depose its rival. The laws of Norway and of Iceland do not represent any primeval law; on the contrary, both are phenomena of progress. It is the progressive self that speaks through them. And strangely enough, while the Norsemen have a scale of values for wounds, according to whether they penetrate to a cavity (which costs 1/2 mark) or do not go beyond the skin (price 1 ounce), according as the breach heals without a scar (price 1 ounce) or with a scar (6 ounces), the Icelanders, on the other hand, have plainly not advanced beyond the stage of calling a wound a wound. If we could follow the course of the laws back century by century, we should see how the forms became simpler and simpler, see them more and more nearly approaching the simplicity of everyday thought.

This, however, does not by any means imply that the forefathers of those Norsemen and Icelanders had no idea of distinction. A valuation of the injury done lies, after all, so deep in the character of the law, that it must be supposed to have its roots in the attitude of mind among the people. Even though we find, in the Icelandic law-book, the Grágás, the limit for right to vengeance set very far down, so that a simple blow is included, the mere presence of such a limit still denotes that certain injuries were counted too slight to be paid for in blood. Undoubtedly our forefathers must, at an early stage of their existence, have made the discovery that a man might sometimes do another harm on purpose, and sometimes by accident. Or they have been led to observe that certain epithets in their vocabulary were stronger than others; and the difference was recognised in their intercourse of everyday.

The interest in shades of difference was strong and deep, and undoubtedly of ancient date; men knew and recognised well enough the possibility of a difference between small injuries and great. There is no reason to doubt but that men were from the first more inclined to come to a peaceable settlement in the case of slight wounds than in the case of wounds more serious. Whether it were possible would depend on the individual character of the case; what had led up to the injury, how it had been dealt, and not least, who the offender was; whether he and his kin were of such standing that a peaceable settlement with them meant honour. But one thing was certain; the will to reconciliation was not based on any inclination to let the insignificant blow pass unheeded; if the culprit would not or could not make good the damaged honour, then vengeance must be taken, no less than in matters of life and death.

On this point law was as stiff and uncompromising as any private feeling enjoining unconditional restitution. That the offender is not in a condition to pay, or that he no longer exists, does not dispose of the fact that the other party stands there in need of payment. The slightness of an offence does not diminish



the necessity of its being made good. And in face of this basic principle, all attempts at progress come to a standstill. The law reformers of Norway thrust vengeance as far as possible into the background. They urge, that the courts are ready for those who need them, and in addition there will now be royal officials, whose task in life will be to give men the restitution they had before to get for themselves as best they could. But they cannot refrain from adding, that if the opponent will not give way, and the will of the official is not enough, then the man who takes vengeance himself for his dishonour shall be regarded with all possible consideration; ay, if the vengeance taken does not exceed desert, he shall be held not guilty. "If payment of the fine for killing a man be not made, then the dead man's kinsmen may take vengeance, and they are to be no wise hindered by the fact that the King hath given the slayer peace and leave to be in the country," — these are the very words of King Hakon's great reform edict, which prefaces the Frosta-thing's Law.

In this ideal of justice the apparent conflict between the theories of law and the practice of everyday life is accounted for. The Teutons had a strong inclination for peaceable settlement of disputes, but mediation stood outside trying to effect a reconciliation by mutual agreement without in the least prejudicing the right of frith. Later law reflects an original Teutonic sense of justice insofar as it works up two separate tendencies into one system. The lawyers of the transition age tried to make mediation an integral part of the judicial proceedings and thus tend towards a legal system built up on the weighing and valuation of the offence at the same time as they worked for the abolishing of the ancient right of private revenge. By this harmonising process, Teutonic jurisprudence was gradually led into correspondence with Roman law, but it was slow in abandoning the idea of absolute reparation as the paramount condition of right and justice.

The demand for personal restitution, indeed, is not a thing that life and society merely acknowledge, it is the very innermost secret, the sustaining power itself, in the legislation of the North. When the Gula-thing's Law breaks out with its: "Then it is well that vengeance be taken" or when it says: "None can demand payment for injury more than three times without taking vengeance between them," then it is not defiance of law, mischievously putting on the legal wig and uttering cynicisms with comic seriousness. These sentences are nothing but the direct expression of that law-craving energy which has built up and maintained the entire network of ordinances from which they emerge.

The spirit of the law may be characterised as a juridical sympathy with the offended party and his sufferings. The law-thing is the place whither he comes to seek healing. In other words, any attack is regarded from the point of view of personal wrong. It matters not whether a man comes bearing the body of his slain kinsman, or leading in a thief caught in the act and bound, or with the odium of a scornful word to be wiped out, the cry is the same: "Give me restitution, give me back my honour."

A deed can never be a crime in itself, it only becomes a crime, if we will use the word, by its effect upon a person. If it falls upon a man sound and whole, it is equivalent to damage done, and he must have it made good. The fine society takes upon itself to procure for him, if he appeals to it, is, according to ancient terminology, his "right" — which means, approximately, his value. And if there

be "no right in him", *i. e.* if he is a man without honour, then there can be no crime.

The law-maintaining energy which goes out to the complainant from the seat of justice is by no means less than elsewhere where the judge sits to punish and protect. On the contrary. It is the stronger, inasmuch as it is inspired by the fundamental idea: that restitution must and shall be made, since the well-being of the complainant stands in jeopardy; he is a marked, a fallen man, if we cannot procure him "honour". If the culprit is out of reach, his kinsmen must come forward; it is not a question of finding any offender, but of finding someone to make restitution.

Among the southern tribes of Teutonic stock, the right to vengeance is everywhere on the decline during historical times.

The extreme standpoint is represented by the Burgundians' law, which decrees capital punishment for killing, and thus aims at abolishing altogether the taking of the law into one's own hands. But the good Burgundians were not yet farther on the road to perfection than that the lawgiver finds it necessary in the same breath to point out that no other than the guilty person is to be prosecuted. The remaining peoples had evidently not advanced beyond the stage of restrictions when they began to write down their ordinances. Unfortunately, owing to the casual nature of the laws, we are only able to follow the movement by occasional glimpses here and there. The law of the Alamanni seems inclined to distinguish between satisfaction of the impulse to revenge arising at the moment and vengeance planned and carried out in cold blood; a man who, with such helpers as may be at hand, sets off immediately in pursuit of a slayer and strikes him down in his own house, is fined the simple price of a man's life; but if he procures assistance first, the fine is raised to nine times that sum. Among the Franks, it is the Carolingians who first set about reforms in earnest. In the earlier periods, vengeance is still fully recognised, at any rate for more serious injuries. The Salic Law mentions punishment for anyone independently taking down the head set up by an avenger on a pole to advertise his deed. We happen to learn of a good man, Gundhartus, that he was obliged to remain at home by reason of vengeance threatening. In his need he has applied to Eginhard, who now (presumably about the year 830) writes a feeling letter to Hraban, urging this servant of Christ to release the man from his military service, as his coming to the army would infallibly throw him into the power of his enemies. The kings' attempts at reform amount for the most part to earnest and cordial exhortations to the parties concerned, to compel people to be reconciled and give up taking vengeance.

Most instructive are the limitations to which vengeance is subjected in the law of the Saxons. In the first place, it is banned in every case where damage has been done by a domestic animal, or by an implement slipping from the hand of the person using it; the owner shall pay a fine, but shall be secure against vengeance. Furthermore, a man innocent himself is not to be held responsible for acts of his people; if the deed be of his secret devising, then of course, he must be mulcted or suffer vengeance, but if the person actually guilty have acted on his own initiative, it is permissible to disown him, and let him, with seven of his nearest kinsmen, bear the blame, that is, serve as the objects of

vengeance. Finally, when a question of murder, the family, in its wider sense, is entitled to purchase immunity from vengeance by payment of the third part of the simple fine for killing; the entire remainder of the enormous indemnity (nine times the fine simple) falls upon the murderer and his sons, and they alone are open to vengeance if payment be not made.

In the brief Frisian law we find the following: He who incites another to homicide — here again the relation of master and servant is probably in mind — can only escape vengeance if the offender has fled; he then pays a third part of the fine. If the slayer remains in the country, then it must be left to the judgement of the offended parties whether they will relinquish their vengeance on the instigator and accept a settlement. And where a man can swear himself free of all participation in his servant's act, he also escapes vengeance; but he must pay the fine all the same.

The Lombard legislators are greatly occupied with the question of vengeance, and much concerned about the problem of how to force it back within somewhat narrower bounds. The decrees accordingly provide an interesting picture of the position of vengeance, both in law proper, and where the injured parties take the law into their own hands. In cases of accidental homicide, mishaps in the course of work where several are together, etc.; as also in cases of damage caused by cattle, etc. not under control, vengeance is barred. According to the edict of Rothari, personal vengeance must not be taken for an insult or a blow; a fine must here suffice; in return, the king puts up the price: "For which reason we have for every kind of wound and blow set payment higher than our forefathers knew, to the end that the fine may thrust aside vengeance, and all suits be made amenable to complete reconciliation."

There is a passage in King Liutprand's edict which gives us an accidental glimpse into the life of the Lombards, and shows how vengeance once let loose is flung backward and forward between the parties. The King has recently learned of a distressing episode; a man had taken the clothes of a woman bathing, and hidden them. Liutprand hastens to decree a very heavy fine for such misdemeanour; the culprit in such a case should be rightly mulcted in a sum equal to that paid for a killing; "for", says Liutprand in explanation, "supposing that the woman's father, or brother, or husband, or other kinsman were come by, then there would have been a fight. Is it not better, then, that the sinner should pay the price of a man's life, and live, than that vengeance should arise over his body between the families and greater fines thence arise?"

The Lombard lawgivers appeal, for the rest, to the good sense of their subjects; it is a question of smuggling a higher standard of morality into the old-fashioned minds, and gradually expelling vengeance from the sphere of what is legal and fitting. The Lombard maids appear to have grown beyond the good old custom of remaining virtuously content with the husband chosen for them by their family. There are constant instances of a betrothed maiden running off with her own chosen swain, and the elopement naturally gives rise to regular vengeance and feud. Liutprand now tries whether the prospect of losing all her dowry might not induce a maiden to respect her betrothal. She is to lose her lot, and go naked and empty-handed from her home. He sternly forbids father or brother to give way to leniency here, ". . . that strife may cease, and vengeance be done away with".

Among the peoples to the northward, the Danes — and the Anglo-Saxons — stand more or less worthily beside the Burgundians. Nominally, all vengeance is disowned. But the lawgivers cannot make their own language conform to the new ideas. When they endeavour to give reasons for the inability of women and churchmen to take or pay fines, the matter falls of itself into the old words: “for they take vengeance upon no man, and no man upon them”. Or an expression such as this slips in: “If the person wounded choose not to declare the deed, but to take vengeance. . .” In the edict of Valdemar II regarding homicide, there is also the most remarkable contrast between subject and language. The purpose of the edict is to free kinsmen from liability to pay a share of the fine: “While the slayer is in the country, no vengeance shall be taken upon any other man.” If he takes to flight — when the injured parties, of course, stand empty-handed — then his kinsmen shall offer payment, and if they do not, and one of them should be killed by the avenger, then they have only themselves to thank, for not offering to pay. Naturally, however, the avenger is not exempt from paying for his kill; he has, so to speak, to pay for his right, just as the Burgundian who commits his act of homicide when “driven by pain and anger” to retaliate on the spot. The old régime is thus nominally broken off at the root.

The Swedes were hardly as far advanced as their southern neighbours. The Swedish laws lay particular stress on the point that vengeance is only to be taken on the actual offender, not on his kin. A breach of this principle comes under the heading of “unrightful vengeance”, an idea also known in Denmark, as for instance where Valdemar II’s ordinance abolishing the ordeal by fire distinguishes between the killing of an innocent man and killing “in rightful vengeance”.

In Gothland, where the progress of development was in no wise behind the times, but in many respects followed a peculiar course, they had their own fashion of avoiding vengeance. The precepts of the Law of Gothland as to what is to be done in cases where “the devil hath wrought that a man should take a man’s life” are doubly interesting, emphasising on the one hand the difficulties in the way of abolishing vengeance, and on the other, offering a solution by making use of old-fashioned means. It is laid down that the slayer shall flee with his father and son and brother, or, if these do not exist, then with his nearest kinsmen, and remain forty nights in one of the three church sanctuaries of the island. Thence they proceed to find themselves a dwelling place, away from their home; they are free to choose an area of three villages and the forest surrounding, as far as half way to the nearest inhabited district always provided, however, that there lie no law-thing nor market town, nor more than one church, in the district. There they remain. And for three successive years, they are to offer payment; and even though the offended party accept the fine on its first offering, no blame shall attach to him. If he refuse the fine on its third offering, then the people are to dispose of the money, and the offender shall go free.

Vengeance is in process of restriction everywhere. First of all, it was made conditional upon the intent to harm, then it was limited to the case of more serious injuries only, such as homicide and adultery; and finally, it is reduced to a sort of retaliation upon the culprit himself, his family being free from all liability to share the blame.

Restriction, limitation everywhere. And these very subtractions open up perspectives to a time when the necessity of restitution threw all consideration of malice prepense completely into the shade; when for instance every wound had to be traced back to someone responsible, even in cases where the weapon itself had acted against the will of its owner. But the palliatives chosen suggest a time when the sufferer stood more in need of spiritual than of bodily healing, and a time when vengeance was the universal medicine.

But there is more than this in these remains of kingly and clerical efforts to suppress individual vengeance; it is openly recognised that revenge was a necessity, for which the reformers must provide some substitute. Restrictions are made solely on the condition that restitution be secured by other means, and under the supposition that in case the new and lawful way should lead to nothing, then the kinsmen are to have the right of seeking their honour rather than risk its loss. This, as we have seen, was the final note in Valdemar's edict against kinsmen's help; they have only themselves to thank for having brought down vengeance upon themselves by neglecting to offer indemnity. Even the Anglo-Saxons are forced, no less than the Lombards and the Norsemen, to leave the right to vengeance open as a last resource, when the offender will not or cannot make restitution in any other way.

In some entirely isolated instance, we may find the conception of law as existing for the purpose of punishment as a warning to evildoers and a protection for the good; thus in the preface to the Law of Jutland, in the Burgundian Law, and here and there in some royal rescript. It stands there as a lesson learned and repeated, altogether isolated, without any effect upon the laws themselves; set there, as it were, to show how incommensurable is the principle with all Germanic thought. As long as the reformers cannot demolish the fact that injury poisons a man, they are forced now and again to contradict themselves. They were too much men of their world to fancy that a suffering could be abolished by abolishing the principal means of curing it.

In Denmark, the fine for homicide was divided into three parts; one falling to the dead man's heir, one to his kinsmen on the father's side, and one to those on the mother's. But even where there are no kin on the mother's side, says Eric's Law, and even though "his descendant be slave-born, and thus not capable of inheriting, or out of the kingdom, so that it is not known where are his kin, then the kinsmen on the father's side, even though they have already taken both first and second parts, shall also take the third; for their kinsman shall not be slain without his death being paid for, if a free man; but full payment shall be made." So firmly is the ancient principle still rooted in these comparatively progressive men of law. Honour is the central thing in a man's being. Restitution is a share of honour which the offended party shall and must have for his life's sake. And it is this healing of the soul which courts of justice are to procure for the complainant.

In the Law of Gothland, we find, in reference to a man in holy orders, who has an injury to avenge, but is refused payment for the same; he is to appear at the law-thing before all the people, and make his complaint, saying: "I am a learned

man, and ordained into the service of God; I must not fight or strike a blow; I would accept payment if it were offered, but shame I am loth to bear.”

We have here a picture in brief of the essence of Germanic sense of right. Shame we are loth to bear. And from the seat of justice comes a ringing answer to the cry, for the law is in reality something more than a recognition of the necessity of vengeance to a man's welfare. The court must take up the cause of the injured party and throw in its weight and authority on his side, for by disallowing his claim to restitution it would place him outside the pale of society. Law is based upon the principle that an individual who suffers shame to fasten on him no longer counts among men; he cannot in future claim the protection of the law. If a man be called craven, and fail to clear himself by challenge and victory, then he is craven, and devoid of right — thus runs the sentence, both in the south and in the north. It is true enough that the injury is a private matter, inasmuch as it is a private distress for which a man must himself seek healing; the community takes no initiative in respect of pursuing the offender. But no less true is it that public opinion would place the sufferer beyond the pale if he did not rehabilitate himself. And the sufferer can, in a way, transfer his distress to the community by making complaint; he makes the people participators in the shame and its consequences. The law-thing must procure him restitution, as far as can be done with the means at its disposal, it must declare itself at one with the injured person, and renounce his opponent — unless a reconciliation can be effected. If the people cannot do this, then the people will perhaps be infected by his feebleness. The complainant has, so to speak, power over the people and its conscience, but not in virtue of a common justice, not in virtue of a constitutional principle that says: you must not, and demands punishment; not in virtue of anything but this: if nothing be done, I must perish, and I can drag you with me.

A man who fails to avenge an insult is a *niding*, and is deprived of the protection of the law.

The cry for honour comes so piercingly from the lips of kinsmen because it is forced out by fear. It was no doubt largely a matter of form, when in Friesland, one of the slain man's kin took his sword and struck three blows on the grave, calling out in presence of the whole family his “Vengeance, vengeance, vengeance!” A matter of form, too, is the ritual whereby the complainants draw their swords and utter the first cry, carry the body up to the law-thing and after two more cries, sheathe their swords again. But the forms are not more violent than feeling justifies. There was tension enough in the men to let the cry ring out far and wide. The law knows no such unrestrained violence. It speaks advisedly, weighing its words, but earnestly, as one who sees a human being in peril of life; and when all is said and done, the law's insistence on the indispensability of honour is just as emphatic as the cries of the kinsmen. The distinct and form-bound utterance of the man of law does not permit the demand to leap out upon us as in the wild cry of the relatives: “vengeance, vengeance”. And yet perhaps, if our ears are properly opened to what it is the man of law sets forth in his brief, rhymed sentences, we may by that indirect testimony itself gain the most overwhelming impression of honour's energy, an impression the more powerful from the fact that we here see the energy transmuted into a supporting power of society.

The process of Germanic law rests on the principle that an accusation — brought forward in due form, of course — is enough to compel a man to defend himself at law. Anyone must be ready to nullify the mere unfounded charge by his own oath and that of his compurgators. If not, he succumbs to the accusation; according to the old mode of thought, the matter is as fully decided as if he had publicly declared himself guilty. The fear of a man's being sentenced though innocent, by this method, was unknown, because silence was really not regarded as a mute confession; rather, the charge itself was considered as a way of introducing guilt into a man. He who fails to fling back the charge lets it, so to speak, sink into him and mark him. The accused does not prove himself clean; he cleanses himself.

This is the dominant principle in the Germanic law process, the bond that holds the people united in a community of law. In everyday life also, it seems as if one man had power over another by virtue of his mere word. One can egg on a man to show his strength, his courage, his foolhardiness in the way one suggests. One can force him, by expressing a doubt of his manhood. The Northmen have a special term for such compelling words: *frýjuorð* they are called; words whereby one indicates one's belief in another man's lack of manly qualities. For instance, there was a man called Már. This Már certain persons desired to be rid of for good. Accordingly, one day a suspicious-looking person comes up to his homestead, and tells him that one of his oxen is lying out in the bog. Már knows very well where his oxen are, but when the other lets fall a word to the effect that it is strange that a man should be afraid to go and look to his cattle, the yeoman must go out into the bog, and there he meets his death.

“You dare not” is enough to make a man stake his life. Gregorius Dagson lost his case and his life because he could not resist the power of a taunt. When he and Hakon met, there was a stream between them; the ice was doubtful, Hakon had had holes cut in it, and covered up with snow. Gregorius did not like the look of the ice; better, he thought, to go round by the bridge. But the peasants could not understand that he should be afraid of going against so small a party on good ice. Gregorius answered: “I have not often needed that any should taunt me with lack of courage, and it shall not be needed now; see only that you follow when I go on ahead; it is you who have wished to make trial of bad ice, I have no great wish myself, but I will not bear with your gibes. Forward the banner!” Altogether a score of men followed him, the rest turned back as soon as they felt the ice underfoot. There Gregorius fell. And this was as late as the year 1161.

A man has power over his neighbour by the use of *frýjuorð*, because the taunting words place the honour of his opponent in danger. If honour fails to rise and show its strength in answer, paralysis steals over it. The man sinks down to a niding. When an Icelander or a Norseman shouts at his opponent: “Be you every man's niding if you will not fight 'with me”, his words act as the strongest magic formula; for if the other will not take up the challenge, he becomes in fact a niding all his days. In the Hildebrand Lay, the father utters his anguished cry of woe to fate: “Now must mine own child strike me with the sword, give me my death with his axe, or I must be his bane.” But what is to be done? “He shall be most craven of all the Easterlings, who would now refuse you battle, since you



are so eager for it..." So irresistible is the power of the taunt that it can force upon a man the deadliest of all misfortunes, the killing of his kinsman.

An insult, or an accusation, no less than blow or stroke of weapon, bends something within the man, something that is called honour, something which constitutes the very backbone of his humanity. In this wise, a man could make his fellow an inferior in law and right. The Upland Law gives us a fragment of an old legal form from pagan times, in regard to an accusation of cowardice. The one party says: "You are not a man, you have no courage!" the other says: "I am as good a man as you!" Then they are to meet with weapons at a cross-roads; he who fails to appear is a niding and devoid of right. Or as the Lombards said: If one call another craven, then he must be able to maintain his assertion in trial by combat; if he succumb, then he should rightly pay for his falseness. If any call a woman witch or whore, her kin must clear her by combat at law, or she must bear the punishment for witchcraft or whoredom. Here, the insulting party infuses cowardice or whoredom into the other by his assertion. Similarly, the complainant puts robbery or other mischief into his opponent before the law, and forces him to cleanse himself.

The honour which has been bent within the party accused must be raised up again, and given back its power to rule the man. The insult can be regarded as a kind of poison, which must be cast out and flung back upon the sender. And thereafter, the sufferer must get back honour again from the offender, for the full and complete strengthening of his humanity. Mere self-preservation forces one to seek restitution for any injury; for a man cannot carry on life in shame. It is of this feeling that the constitution of society is born, a fundamental law hard enough to hold hard natures together in an ordered community under the guardianship of law.

If a man were slack in revenging an injury, his friends would step in, saying: "We will amend it, if you dare not; for there is shame for us all in this." But even when reparation had been exacted from the enemy, the matter was not wholly mended. The bitterest part of the shame stuck, because one of the kinsmen had suffered an insult to lie upon him, instead of shaking it off at once, and thus drawn the shame down over himself and his kin. This wound was not healed by the shedding of blood, and what was worse, there was no restitution possible.

The insult, the injury, might come from within, by the fact of a kinsman showing cowardice or slackness, in letting slip an opportunity of showing himself, of accentuating his existence in honour. Or he stamped himself as a son of dishonour by committing an act that could not be defended; let us say, by "murdering" a man. Finally, the family could be stricken by a bloody stroke that was in itself irreparable; when the slayer was one of its own members.

Then, the kinsmen may utter such words as these: Better gone than craven; better an empty place in the clan where he stands. We know something of what it must have cost to say such a thing; to utter these words a man must do violence to his feeling of frith; he must be filled with a dread that overshadows his natural fear of seeing the number of his kinsmen diminished and the prospect of a rich coming generation narrowed down; he must be driven so far as to forget what pain it meant to each one personally in the circle, when a

string, a close-twisted string, was riven out of it. If we have realised what frith meant: the very joy of living and the assurance of life in future, and if we can transmute this understanding into sympathy, we cannot but tremble at the words: better a breach where he stands.

When shame comes from within in such a way as to preclude all restitution, it produces paralysing despair.

In the *Gylfaginning*, we read of Balder's death as follows: "When Balder was fallen, speech failed the gods, and their hands had no power to grasp him; one looked at another; all had but one mind towards him who had done the deed; but none could avenge it; the peace of the place was too strong. But when the gods found speech again, then burst their weeping forth at first, so that none could say any word to the others of his sorrow. But Odin felt the ill fortune heaviest, for he best knew how great a loss the gods suffered in Balder's going. -But when the gods came to themselves, then Frigg asked if there were any among the gods who would gain all her love by riding out along the Hel-road, to see if he might find Balder and offer ransom to Hel for suffering him to return home to Asgard."

The reader can hardly doubt but that the author has drawn this vivid description from actual experience. The myth itself was undoubtedly handed down from earlier times; but whatever it may have held in its popular form, whatever its centre may have been before it gained its final shape, it must have touched and released a fear in the poet himself that lay awaiting the opportunity to burst forth. With the weight of an inner experience, the single moment is made a fatal turning-point. The gods are standing, young and happy, rejoicing in their strength and well-being, and then, suddenly as a hasty shiver comes, grey autumn is upon them. They have no power to determine, no strength to act. And while we watch, the shadows draw out, longer and longer, till they fuse, at the farthest point, into inavertible darkness. By its inner pathos the scene announces itself as a turning-point in the history of gods and men; we are made to feel that the killing of Balder ushers in the decline of the gods and the end of the world.

A man might actually come to live through a catastrophe which brought irreparable ruin upon a whole circle; and from some such experience — of the feeling of frith in the moment before its dissolution — the myth has drawn all its life. I am not in any way presupposing that the poet should himself have seen such a disaster in his own family; the overwhelming force of the deepest, most elementary feelings can so easily transform itself into a premonition of what the loss would mean, that an apparently very slight impulse may raise them in tragic form. Out of this collision between subject and experience, this inspiration as we call it, rose the generally recognisable picture of frith violating itself. Thus the kinsmen stand in their need. Their hands sink down, they look timidly at one another, fearing to look straight before them and yet afraid to meet one another's glance; none can utter a word. In a moment all vital force is broken. No one knows anything, all sway from side to side between two possibilities, as the *Beowulf* aptly paints it in the line about King Hrethel: "He could not let the doer of that deed hear ill words, and yet he could not love him." In place of the old determination, which never paused to consider anything but the means, we have blind fumbling. The gods can find no other way but to send a messenger

to Hel, and even go on a beggar's errand afterwards to all living and all dead things imploring them to raise Balder from the realm of death by their crying. This is no exaggeration transposed to human conditions. The kinsmen who bear the shame between themselves have no power for vengeance or defence. Insult from without is too strong for them. They bow their heads involuntarily, where they would otherwise stand firm. They fight without hope, with the despairing consciousness that the disaster will not cease. This misery is properly speaking what the ancients called *redelessness*, the inability to find a way.

And with this the downfall of the family is certain. When Beowulf's retainers had forsaken their king in his fight with the dragon, the consequences of their cowardice are depicted in the following words: "None of your kin shall ever now reach gladly for gold, see sword outstretched in gift; waste is the dwelling of the fathers, waste is life. Every man of your race shall go empty-handed away, and leave his land of heritage behind, as soon as brave men far and wide hear of your flight, your craven deed. Better is death than life in shame."

This passage in the Old English poem leads us first and foremost to think of the disaster as a civic death; we can imagine the family driven into exile by a weight of sentence openly expressed or mutely understood. In this we are right to some degree; but the sentence is not the primary fact, it is only the outcome of deeper causes. For the trouble lies not merely in the scorn of men. Shame does not merely render the kinsmen unworthy of participating in human existence, but also, and most strictly, incapable of so doing. There is something wrong within. If it were not that the cowardice of individuals infected their companions and rendered them incapable of showing manhood, the race would not to such a degree become as a rotten bush, that could be torn up at a grasp and flung out into the field. Lack of frith is in its innermost essence a sickness, and identical with lack of honour. Such a condition is called by the Northmen *nidinghood*, the state of being a *niding*, whereby they understand a dissolution of that inner quality which makes the individual at once a man and a kinsman.

We encounter the word *niding* now at every step. In it lies the whole fear of a loss of honour not made good. And at every encounter, the word has a deeper and more ill-boding ring. To be a *niding* means that a man has lost his humanity. He is no longer reckoned as a human being, and the reason is, that he has ceased to be so in fact.

The state in which Hrethel and his fellow-sufferers find themselves forms a diametrical opposite to Havard's fulness of life. In men without honour, a dissolution of all human qualities takes place. First and foremost, the frith of kinship is destroyed. The strong coherence which alone enables the members of a family, not only to act unanimously, but to act at all, fades away. The lack of honour eats through the frith, so that the kinsmen wither and rush all different ways, as a mob of solitary units, that is to say, a mob of *nidings*.

In the house where a kinsman lies unavenged, there is no full and true frith. The family lives in a state of interregnum, a miserable and dangerous pause, in which all life lies as it were prostrate, waiting its renewal. The high seat is empty; none may sit there until honour is restored. The men shun their neighbours, they do not go to any meetings of men. Their avoidance of others is

due to the fact that they have no place to sit where people are gathered together. Wherever they go, they must submit to be regarded as shadows. Nidinghood is in process of growth, encroaching over a new stratum of the soul for every opportunity of vengeance suffered to go by. Joy there is none. What is told of an Icelander; that he did not laugh from the day his brother was slain till the day he was avenged, applies in a wider sense, inasmuch as the power of joy itself was frozen.

The intermediate state is dangerous; for if restitution be too long in coming, it may end with loss of the power to take revenge. Then anticipation and determination give place to helplessness and despair, to self-effacement.

The course of events is alike in all matters of honour. Whether the injury be a killing, a slander or anything else, it brings about an emptiness in those who suffer it. And if they do not gain their right before the seat of justice, either by laying the offender low, or by clearing themselves of the charge, — and obtaining restitution, — then they must perish, and it is immaterial whether the defeat be due to lack of will or of power or of good fortune. The great terror lies in the fact that certain acts exclude beforehand the possibility of any restitution, so that the sufferer was cut off from all hope of acquiring new strength and getting rid of the feeling of emptiness. In a case of kin slaying kin, the helplessness is increased, for here something is to be done which cannot be done. The kinsman's arms fall down if they move to touch the one responsible. And even if the slayer's kinsmen could bring themselves to attack him, there is no restitution for them in shedding his blood. It cannot be used to sprinkle their honour and give it new life.

We should probably feel this helplessness in ourselves as a strife of the soul, where the will itself is consumed in an inner conflict. Thus we can undoubtedly come to experience something of the dread our forefathers felt for nidinghood, but the question is if we can penetrate into the centre of suffering by so doing. The thing that weighed most heavily upon them was their powerlessness; the issue in their soul was between the will to act and the inability to act; the symptoms of nidinghood thus consist at once of fear and dulness. For the soul torn by inner strife, helplessness can be a relief, but for the Germanic character, the culmination of despair was reached when action was impossible because it had no aim. It was impossible to take vengeance on a kinsman. But what difference did it make if the slayer were kinsman or stranger, when the latter, for instance, was a slave without honour, or a vagabond without kin? When one could not reach beyond the slave to a master, or beyond the beast to its owner, or beyond the solitary individual to a group of warriors, one was left to bear the wound, and the wound meant emptiness in any case.

Any breach in the frith raised the same feeling of dread. In effect, there was no such thing as a "natural" death: however the breach were made, it was felt as a peril, a horror and an offence. Egil's despairing cry against the "ale-maker" sounds indeed to a certain extent modern — it is man asserting his right in face of everyone, though it be a god. In point of form, his challenge also seems rather to belong to a transition age, when gods and men had somewhat lost touch with one another. But Egil's challenge really contains a highly primitive element. Beneath the late form lies an old feeling of death, primeval fear and primeval defiance. Death was an anomaly, a thing unnatural and

incomprehensible; one peers around to find who has brought it about, and if no slayer is to be found in the light, one seeks him in the dark. One seeks, perhaps, for the worker of this "witchcraft". The oppression of natural death has, in the Germanic mind, been lost in care for the future of the dead; but again and again the old despair can rise up again in a feeling of injury to frith. Egil here shows himself as the most original, the most ancient of the northern characters. His exclamation: "If I could pursue my cause..." has in it quite as much of hopelessness and helplessness as of defiance. It is a sense of nidinghood lying in wait that gives his words their bitterness. But Egil is strong enough to conquer helplessness; he rises, through the feeling of solitude, up to the defiance of resignation. The downfall of frith forces his spiritual individuality forward in self-defence. He boasts of what his poetry and his will can achieve over men, even though they may be powerless to move the god; he will now sit and wait till Hel comes, unshakably the same as he has always been. In this assertion of his personality, Egil reaches far ahead of the culture in which he is spiritually set. As long as frith was the indispensable foundation for all human life, such trials could never lift a man up. Then, sorrow was merely a poison, that ate its way through frith, sundered the family, and set nidinghood in place of humanity. From the moment kinsmen declared themselves unable to find anyone to serve as the object of their vengeance, they sealed their death-warrant spiritually as well as socially.

If the shame be due to spiritual suicide, then there is no restitution to be found in all the universe. The loss remains irreparable. Only one possibility remains, as the only way of saving the family; the extirpation of the evil-doer. The dishonour can be burned away before it poisons the whole body, but it needs a terrible effort to break through the frith and lay violent hands upon oneself.

The Balder poem gives us here once more a poetical expression of the feelings at issue among the kinsmen. Or here we should perhaps say: one of the Balder poems; for from all appearances there were two. On the one hand, we have the version followed by the author of the *Gylfaginning*, where the slaying of Balder is linked up with the sending of Hermod to the underworld. The other form seems to have connected Balder's death with the myth of Odin's and Rind's son, Vali. Unfortunately, we never get the connection in full, but are forced to make do with our own conclusions, drawn from scattered hints in ancient literature. The poet of the *Voluspá*, in his allusive manner, compresses the entire episode into the following lines: "Of that tree which seemed so slender came a fateful arrow of sorrow; Hod loosed it from the bow. Balder's brother was born in haste, he, that son of Odin, wrought night-old his slaying. He washed not his hands, combed not his head, ere he bore to the flames him who had shot at Balder." And in another Eddic poem, *Balder's Dreams*, the avenging of Balder is prophesied as follows: "Rind gives birth to Vali in the Western Halls. That son of Odin wreaks night-old his slaying; washes not hand, combs not head, ere he bears to flames the shooter of Balder." Saxo has heard the story in this form. He lets Odin, who "like all imperfect deities often needs aid of men" learn from a Laplander that in order to provide an avenger for Balder, he must beget a son with Rind, a Ruthenian princess. He gives us, further, a detailed description of Odin's difficulties as a suitor in the Western Halls, where he tried his luck as a hero, as a goldsmith, and when neither heroic deeds nor golden

rings made any impression on the maiden, as a leech, who both produced and cured the sickness. But whether these calamities properly belong here, where the question is only of an avenger for Balder's death, we do not know. Unfortunately, we are left without any indication as to how and where this myth was fused into the legend of Balder, but it certainly looks as if the poet who worked up the story was playing upon primitive notions. He felt the need of an avenger who was a kinsman and yet not a kinsman. The young hero carries out the deed before he has washed or combed himself — i.e. before he has become a human being. In any case, even though we cannot arrive at any certainty regarding the feeling of the viking age in connecting the two items, we may take the story as a symbol of the helplessness of kinsmen when their honour has been injured by one of their own; their feeling of helplessness in themselves and the sense that the trouble must be got rid of.

One thing we can say for certain: when it was a question of wiping out the shame, of extirpating the author of the shame, the kinsmen would hardly in any case have called in human help; they have opened the way out into annihilation, or the way to the forest. They have not, properly speaking, cut him off from themselves, but rather indirectly forced him to cut himself off, and not until the evil-doer had torn himself away from the family did they lift their hands and declare him solemnly as outside the pale of frith and humanity, and his place empty.

As long as there was the slightest possibility of preserving the vitality of the family without violence to its organism, the painful amputation would probably be postponed. In the case of members who by cowardice and inactivity were gradually bringing dishonour upon their kin, the others would probably first make trial of all goading and inciting words. This was the women's great task, and from all we know, they proved themselves equal to it. We have illustrations enough to make plain the influence of Germanic women over their husbands and brothers and fathers. They could etch in the details of an injury, stroke by stroke, as when Gudrun says to her sons: "Your sister — Svanhild was her name - Earmanric had her trodden underfoot by horses, white horses and black, along the road of war, grey horses, broken to the rein, horses of the Goths." They could use living illustrations, more striking than those of any Jewish prophet, as did the fiery Icelandic widow Thurid, who set a joint of beef on the table, carved into three pieces only, and let the sons themselves call forth the interpretation: "Your brother was hacked to larger pieces." After the meat, she had a stone to follow as an after-dish; this was to mean that they were as fitted to be in the world as stones on the table for food, "since you have not dared to avenge your brother Hall, such a man as he was; ye are fallen far from the men of your race . Sigrid, sister of Erling Skjalgson, accompanied her brother-in-law, Thorir Hund, to his ship after having showed him the body of her son, Asbjorn, who had perished in all but open revolt against King Olaf, and before Thorir went onboard, she spoke her mind: "Ay, Thorir, so my son Asbjorn followed your kind counsel. He did not live long enough to repay you after your deserts, but if I cannot do so as well as he would have done, it shall not be for lack of will. I have a gift here I would give you, and glad should I be if it might be of use to you. Here is the spear that went in and out of his body the blood is on it still. It fits the wound Asbjorn bore, you can surely see. . ."

Thorgerd, wife of Olaf the Peacock, was a daughter of Egil, and had her father's pride of race. One day she bade her sons go with her on a journey to the westward, and when the party arrived outside the homestead of Tunga, she turned her horse and said: "What is the name of that place?" The sons answer:

"That you surely know, it is called Tunga." "Who lives there?" "Do you not know that, mother?" "Ay," answers Thorgerd with a deep breath, "I know it full well; there lives he who was your brother's bane. You are little like your brave kinsmen, you who will not avenge such a brother as Kjartan. Egil, your mother's father, would not have acted thus; it is ill to have deedless Sons — ay, such as you are, you should have been your father's daughters and given in marriage. What says the proverb, Halldor, there is a dullard in every family; one misfortune Olaf had, it is not to be denied, his sons turned out badly. And now we can turn back; it was my errand to remind you of this, if you did not remember." Halldor is right when he says: "We shall not hold it any fault of yours, Mother, if it pass from our mind."

Nor were the women afraid of using eloquent and easily interpreted gestures. Procopius relates how the Goth women, seeing what little fellows their husbands had surrendered to, spat in their husbands' faces, and pointed with scorn at the triumphant enemies.

These examples form a mighty responsory to all the foregoing, explained by and explaining it. Through the words and actions of these women there speaks a feeling of the enormous tension which the life of honour produced in men, and therefore the words have a meaning beyond the individual situation to which they are applied in the saga. They give us the certainty that such honour's need could drive men to their utmost. There is in them an indirect suggestion of what might happen if the incitement failed of its effect.

In one case we know for certain that the party concerned speedily proceeded to forcible amputation, and wiped the shame off the earth. When a woman had been dishonoured, her kinsmen's endeavours were directed first and foremost toward obtaining honour from the offender. But this was not as a rule the end of the matter. The dishonoured woman was reckoned a shame to her kin; she was a burden upon the race, and brought its honour into the same danger as did a craven among the men. Even after a woman was married, her kinsmen were responsible for her. The husband would lay the dishonour upon them, and bid them cleanse themselves and her. Gregory of Tours gives an instance of how such a matter was dealt with in those days — an example typical in all essentials of Germanic thought and action. A woman was said to have deceived her husband. Then his kinsmen went to the woman's father and said: "You must cleanse your daughter, or she must die, lest her fault should smirch our race." The father declared himself convinced of her innocence, and in order to stop the accusation, offered to clear her by oath.

If the kinsmen cannot clear themselves, then they must bear the shame with her; they must let themselves be made nidings or else put her out of the way. There was a family, says Gregory, which learned that one of their womenfolk had been seduced by a priest; all the men hurried to avenge the blot upon their race, by capturing the priest and burning the girl alive.



The family undertook this uprooting for its own welfare, from the instinct of self-preservation. The necessity for the deed has left its mark in the laws, and we even find traces indicating that the right was once a duty. Rothari's edict to the effect that the authorities shall intervene if kinsmen do not avail themselves of their right to take action against a kinswoman who has misconducted herself with a man, is doubtless an emphasising of an ancient sense of right. Swedish laws refer to the right of parents to drive their daughter away.

If a woman has dishonoured her father's or her husband's house, she is whipped from house to house, or forced to take her own life — thus Boniface describes the domestic rule of the Saxons in pagan times. The latter alternative points back from the judgement of society to what we have called racial amputation; the shame is wiped out, without any direct violation of frith on the part of the kinsmen.

The reason why the family took such extremely harsh measures against their womenfolk was not that the Germanic standard regarded woman's frith and inviolability as inferior. On the contrary, since woman occupied, so to speak, the very innermost place in their frith, the danger arising from a decay of her honour was the greater. Therefore the misfortune caused by a wife or a girl must be checked at once and effectively. But we have indications sufficient to show that men with fatal shortcomings were cut off too with the same rude hand, but also with the same wariness, lest any guilt of blood should attach to the survivors.

### CHAPTER III

## HONOUR THE SOUL OF THE CLAN

Without honour, life is impossible, not only worthless, but impossible to maintain. A man cannot live with shame; which in the old sense means far more than now, — the “can not” is equal to “is not able to”. As the life is in the blood, so actually the life is in honour; if the wound be left open, and honour suffered to be constantly oozing out, then follows a pining away, a discomfort rising to despair, that is nothing but the beginning of the death struggle itself.

Humanity itself is dependent on the pulsing in the veins of a frith-honour. Without it, human nature fades away, and in the void there grows a beast nature, which at last takes possession of the whole body. The niding is a wolf-man.

There was no difference. All human life (human life of course did not include slaves and suchlike creatures) was subject to the same necessity. All agreed that shame must be wiped out, honour upheld. And yet, on coming to the question of what constituted shame, what was the honour which it was kinsmen's duty to maintain, there would at once be differences manifest between men. An injury was an injury, and produced the same effect in peasant and chieftain. But men of high birth were more tender on the point, more sensitive than common folk, as for instance in regard to being indirectly slighted. And the people respected their right, or rather their duty to feel so. The

difference lay not so much in the fact that they regarded certain things as constituting insult, where baser natures might ignore them, but rather in that their natures were finer, their skin more delicate; they felt an insult where the coarser breed would feel nothing. Still more sharply, perhaps, is the dissimilarity apparent on the positive side of honour. Men of standing were expected to have a keener sense of what was fitting; those of inferior degree might edge their way through life with little lapses here and there, and be none the worse for that. But to formulate the difference correctly, we must enter on a close examination of the nature and contents of honour.

The first part of Egil's saga is built up over the contrast between Thorolf Kveldulfson, the chieftain at Torgar, and the sons of Hilderid, wealthy yeomen, but of no great standing, from Leka. In Thorolf, the saga writer has drawn the northern ideal of a well-to-do freeman: active, courageous, fond of magnificence; affectionate in friendship; true and frank towards those to whom he has promised loyalty, but stiff with those towards whom he feels no obligation. In face of intrigues and calumny he is almost blind, that is to say, he sees but little, and that little he does not care to see. If the king will not be persuaded of his open dealing, he exhibits a nonchalant defiance and obstinacy: when his fiefs are taken from him by the king, he manages to live his life as a man of position, by trading voyages and viking expeditions, answering the king's confiscations by harrying along the shores, and holding on his course undeviatingly full into combat with the king of Norway. Hilderid's sons are named after their mother, and this gives an indication of their story. Their mother, the beautiful but lowborn Hilderid, once found favour in the eyes of the old Bjorgulf; he married her, but the wedding took place in such careless fashion that the family found pretext therein to deprive the late arrivals of their birthright. In vain the young men endeavour to obtain recognition and claim their inheritance from Bard, grandson of Bjorgulf and their coeval kinsman. After Bard's death, Thorolf, having married his widow, becomes the representative of Bjorgulf's inheritance. He, too, scornfully dismisses the "bastards", offspring of a "ravished woman". Then they decide to make their way at court; they arouse Harald's suspicions in regard to the splendour of Thorolf's household, and cunningly obtain a transfer of Thorolf's fiefs to themselves, under the pretext that the lands can be made to yield more revenue to the king's coffers; lay the blame on Thorolf when their fine promises fail, and finally bring about the fall of the rebel himself. But the miserable wretches have no time to enjoy their hard-won victory before retribution is upon them. Thorolf's friends take a very thorough vengeance.

Calmly and objectively the saga writer tells these happenings, but through his sober words judgement is passed with surety upon these men. Thorolf could not act otherwise, for he was of high birth; he could serve the king as long as his service brought him nothing but honour, but he could not allow anyone, even a king, to dictate to him how he should spend his honour, how many housecarles he might have about him, how splendidly he might equip himself and his retainers; he could not bow so low as to stand on a level with an accusation, a calumny, and offer his defence; he could see no better than that the king's interference with his affairs was an insult which justified him in taking his own measures accordingly. The king has seized his trading vessel — well and good: "We cannot lack for anything now, since we share goods with King Harald", and

he promptly falls to harrying the coast of Norway. The craftiness of Hilderid's sons, their lies and calumnies, their time-serving and power of accomodation were natural and inevitable traits of character in men descended, on their mother's side, from the sly, wealthy, lowborn Hogni of Leka, who had "raised himself by his own wits".

The contest between Thorolf and his lowborn brothers-in-law discovers a fundamental principle in Teutonic psychology: high birth and nobility of character mean one and the same thing. But though these words are a fair translation of Teutonic wisdom, the sentence has lost its precise import by being transferred into modern surroundings; the play of colour and shade in the words is changed, because our modern culture sees them in a different light.

When the story is rendered into our tongue, it treats of a hero, who stumbles over his own nobility, whom fate, so to speak, masters by his own virtues; his noble frankness is changed to blinkers that blind him to calumny, his fondness for the straight road becomes a bit in his mouth, his independence a rein he must answer, and thus fate drives him proudly straight on, straight down, to his fall. On the other hand, we have two ignoble strugglers, who, when once the disaster has been sufficiently established, are trodden out on the ground as a sacrifice to justice. One is loth to find oneself giving way to this sort of æsthetic indulgence. But can the reading be otherwise? Our interest in these intriguing parvenus ends, in reality, with their part as villains of the piece.

We are here face to face with an essential difference between "ancient" epic and "modern" reproduction of the conflicts of human life in poetic form. Our epic is based on an arbitrary judgement disguised as morality, or as an idea, or an artistic principle; before ever any of the characters have entered the world, the author's ordering mind has twined their fate, predestined some to being glorified in the idea, and others to glorifying the idea by their downfall. So thoroughly has it become our nature to demand this sense of a poetic providence in, or rather over, the subject matter, that we unconsciously arrange the old poetry accordingly for our enjoyment. We put all the interest on one side of the conflict, and thereby break off what was the point of the story for the original hearers. The ancient poetry knows nothing of a higher point of view, an absolute, predetermined result only worked out in the story to prove it. The balance lies always much nearer the middle between the two parties than our æsthetic and moral sense will allow of. The "moral" does not appear until the collision and reckoning between the two factors. It is often impossible to say on which side the poet's sympathy lies, in a narrative of family feuds, because the interest of the story is not sifted into sympathies and antipathies. Anyone who has read Icelandic sagas with a fairly unprejudiced mind, will again and again have noticed in himself an after-effect of this equilibrium --perhaps with a certain surprise, or even dissatisfaction. The Icelandic sagas are poor, desperately poor, in villains — Njal's saga, sentimentally overdone as it is, may be left out of the question; as a whole, it belongs to another world. But just because the epos gives a contest between men, and not a mere exhibition with its end planned beforehand, the triumph comes still more crushingly and brutally. It follows on a combat, a victory, where the right of the one strikes down the right of the other and shatters it to fragments. However difficult it may be for us to understand;

the old poetry was for its hearers a piece of reality, of the same tangible reality as that which took place under their personal participation.

The contrast, then, between Thorolf and Hilderid's sons becomes a real conflict. The character of the former is predetermined by his honour; his nobility sets definite bounds to his freedom of action; he cannot lie, cannot choose a crooked way, cannot be a time-server. If he were to reduce his magnificence and dismiss the half of his retainers, to let them go about telling that Thorolf of Torgar no longer dared to maintain as many men as before, if he would bring his disputes with men of lower rank before a court, with the obligation to submit to its decision, if he, trusting in the justice of his cause, would face his petty accusers, humbly offering proofs of his honesty — then he would have fallen away from his nobility and be subject to the condemnation of honour.

The character and behaviour of the two brothers are equally a necessary consequence of their birth, whence it follows, that they have the right to be as they are. They are fighting for their — and their mother's — honour; their actions are dictated solely by a sense of human dignity. They have no other means of achieving their righteous vengeance than the means they employ, and the saga writer cannot deny them the share of appreciation they deserve in face of their high-born, highminded opponent, who from the constitution of his blood, fights and must fight with other weapons. Nevertheless, the saga describing their doings contains a condemnation of the baseness they display. Necessity does not imply justification; on the contrary. They are in the right, but in and by the conflict to which honour forces them they become villains by their right.

We have here a dilemma which forces us to look far and wide when seeking to estimate a people's honour and its ethics. Our task is not accomplished until we have reached so deep down that this contrast ceases to be a contradiction.

A high-born, high-minded man must show his nobility, not only in the way he deals with an injury, and in care for his behaviour, but also by taking up the affairs of others. A man in difficulties would turn confidently for help to the great man of his district. An Icelander who had lost his son, and 'could not see his way to take vengeance, or win his case at law, by himself, went to the headman of his district and said: "I want your help to gain my right in this matter", and he gave grounds for his demands as follows: "It touches your honour also, that men of violence should not have their will in these parts." The headman had then to take up the matter himself. If there was wizardry abroad, then the chieftain must "see to the matter", otherwise he could ill "hold his honour". Nay more, apart from having to deal with living miscreants, a man who aspired to leadership over his fellows might be called upon to exorcise a ghost, on the ground that here was a task his honour required him to undertake. The man would be obliged to meet any claim so made on him, and that out of regard to his own weal or woe. An applicant for aid could, if needed, threaten to let himself be cut down where he stood, with consequent dishonour to the man whose door was closed against him.

It touched the chieftain's personal honour, his honour as a man, if he failed to devote all his energies to the fulfilment of such obligations as went with his position. He had not an official honour to spend first; if he failed to live up to his

duties as a leader of men, his chieftainship sank at once to nidinghood, without stopping on the way at the stage of ordinary respectability. A man born to chieftainship and looked up to as a chieftain must needs keep open house for all who sought protection. He had no right to enquire into the worthiness of the applicant and his cause; the fact that the man had sought refuge with him was enough to bind his honour in the eyes of the world. If the great man gave up the fugitive, instead of undertaking the intricate and complicated business which a guest of this sort often brought with him, his action would be stamped, not merely as weak, but as dishonourable.

This oneness throughout is a true characteristic of the old honour; it knows no shades of distinction, no more or less vulnerable points, no circles each with its relatively independent life — it is itself throughout, from the very innermost core of manly feeling to the very outermost periphery of a man's social influence. There is not a grain of difference between what a man owes to his ordinary human dignity and what his position as one of high standing adds of further obligations. He cannot, then, throw away his social prestige without perishing morally as well.

A nobleman's reputation is a great, well-grown honour. There lies in the appeal to a man's chieftainship nothing less than an appeal to "honour", rendered more poignant by the suggestion of a more than common sensitiveness in his particular honour. "Be you every man's niding, if you will not take up my cause", says the applicant for help, with the same weight as when another says: "Go your way as a niding, if you do not take vengeance"

The word virtue contains in brief a history of culture. It meant in ancient times as much as "to be good enough, to be what one should be"; in Anglo-Saxon, *duguth*, "virtue", is a derivative of the verb *dugan*, "to avail, to be able to". Virtue in the modern sense presupposes a liberation of moral forces for an æsthetic purpose, so to speak. Against the background of an average morality, which any man can attain, and any may find worth his while, the superior form unfolds its full magnificence. The barbarians know no virtues, because they have no minimum of morality. However high a man may rise above the common level, he never gets beyond his duty; for his duty grows with him. In the Icelandic, we may read of a hospitable yeoman: "He was so gallant a man, such a *þegnskaparmaðr*, that he gave any free man food as long as he would eat"; but curiously enough, the word here used in his praise, *þegnskapr* — thaneship — means simply that manly honour, or conscience, invoked by every man on taking oath before a court of law. And just as naturally, without any symbolical extension of the word, the man who can afford to feed his fellows and shuts his store against them is called a food-niding — a niding in regard to food. He was a niding, fully as much as the man who committed perjury. The King was generous — and so men are loud in his praises: he flung the gold about him, one could see from his men and women, with their gold-gleaming arms and breasts, how splendid a king they had; never was born such a king under the sun. But woe to the prince whom generosity forsook. Niggardliness was a sign among other signs that he was nearing his downfall. There is an ill-boding ring in the Beowulf's words about Heremod: "Bloodfierce thoughts grew in Heremod's soul; he gave not rings to his Danes, as was due. Joyless he bided the time when he gathered the harvest of his deeds: long-lasting war in

the land." A mysterious curse brooded over him, withering his will to give: Niding.

These barbarians can admire the extraordinary, as we see already here. Their words of praise leap high in the air. But the very passion of their acclaim has an oppressive effect on us. They raise a cheer for the king, as they would for the sworddancer who comes nearer and nearer to death the wilder and more skilful his dancing; a slip, and he will lie there under a mass of scorn and contempt. Through poems and sagas runs a murmur of applause, expressed or indicated in masterly wise, for the true hero's scorn of death; but anyone who is at all familiar with the spirit of these poems knows also that there is but one contrast to this praise, and feels instinctively what the verdict would have been if the hero had not laughed the pain to death. The poet of the *Atlakvida*, describing Hogni's defiant scorn when the heart is cut out of him, places the hero's contempt of death in relief by letting the executioners first show his brother the bloody heart of a slave as if it were Hogni's; but "then said Gunnar, king of men: "Here lies the heart of Hjalli the craven, unlike the heart of Hogni the brave; it quivers here, lying on the platter, but half that it quivered in the breast . . . "Here lies the heart of Hogni the brave, unlike the heart of Hjalli the craven; little as it quivers now lying on the platter, it quivered less in Hogni's breast". A modern reader is at first moved by the poignancy of the scene, but at a second reading his admiration is likely to give way to a musing wonder at the manner in which the poet points the intrepidity of the hero by contrasting it with the abject fear of a slave. So poor in shades of distinction is the old valuation of men and manhood.

The Germanic morality cannot be arranged in a hierarchy of good qualities. There is not the slightest approach among the Teutons to a system in which one virtue is vaulted above another like a series of heavens. Such an order of precedence presupposes centralisation; all men must be united under the same condemnation before they can be classified. Neither has the Germanic mind any conception of a common moral Gehenna. Strictly speaking, evil, nidinghood, has no reality at all, but must be interpreted as a negative, a total lack of human qualities. Nidinghood is the shadow every "honour" casts according to its nature. Therefore the boundary line between admiration and contempt stands sharply, without transition stages, without any neutral grey. And therefore the boundary lies differently for different people. What makes a man a niding, a criminal and a wretch, depends on what made him a man of honour.

For the man of kingly birth, the limit was set very high. His honour consisted in having at his disposal as many men as his father had had, or more; to be called the greatest, the bravest, the quickest of wit, the most generous, within the horizon that had formed his family's sphere of power. And immediately outside that honour stood the death of a niding. This is the secret thought which sets its mark on all Germanic chieftains, determines their fate and predestines them to a certain way of life, and it has found typical expression in the Icelandic saga's description of that famous family council at Westfold, when Olaf — who later on was called the Saint — declared his intention of claiming Norway.

There are three persons present at the council. On one side of Olaf sits his stepfather, Sigurd Syr, the peasant king. He listens to the impetuous words of the young pretender, following in a long glance the bold plan as it rolls over Norway, measuring the breadth of the road, the hardness of obstacles the enterprise must meet, and asking where are the hands to force it through the narrows. Sigurd cannot but feel that there is more youthful eagerness than foresight in the plan, but he sums up his considerations in these words: "I can well understand that a yeoman king such as I am has his way, and that yours must be another; for when you were yet but half a child you were already full of emulation and would be foremost in all you could... I know now that you are so set upon this that it will be fruitless to argue against it, and little wonder that such counsels should thrust aside all others in the hearts of daring men, when they see Harald's race and kingdom about to fall." On Olaf's other hand sits the king's mother, Asta. She is now the dutiful wife of the peasant king, but she cannot forget that she is the mother of a descendant of Harald Fairhair. For so many years she has been forced to curb her ambition; now, her son loosens all bonds, and her pride of race stiffens and straightens her. Standing midmost in that honour which Sigurd surveys from without, she finds other words: "It is thus with me, my son, that I am happy in you and would be happiest to see your power the greatest; to that end, I will spare nothing that I can do; but there is little help to be had from me here. Better to be king over all Norway a little while, as Olaf Tryggvason, than live life to its end in easy ways, as can the petty kings here about." And from the innermost of the race come Olaf's words: "You will not be so far from rising up to avenge this shame upon our kin, but that you will do your utmost to strengthen him who takes the lead in raising it." Shame upon our kin, that, to the saga writer, is the salient point in Olaf's history. His race had been first in all Norway, and the honour of the family demands that he should maintain this position above all the clans of the country.

Having now considered the highest forms of honour, it is natural then to seek out the lowest degree. What was the scantiest amount of honour men could live on? In a way, the answer is given in the common denominator of what is human as expressed in the laws; we could reckon up a man's value from the sum of those things he was declared justified in seeking reparation for; and indirectly, we have done something of the sort. To arrive at the right proportion, however, we must make the active side of honour somewhat stronger than is directly made out in the formalities of legal paragraphs. The Norse laws, as we have seen, will here and there set a man outside the law for lack of manhood, whether the weakness display itself in his failing to accept a challenge, or in his coming out second best; and they show that it is not a mere phrase of etiquette when a man holds it "better to die than be held a niding for having given way without fight." In such case, pacifism eats as deeply into its man as does the dishonour he incurs by leaving his brother unavenged. But in ambitious races, or indeed in any healthy stock, honour could not content itself with standing still under cover of a shield — a man could not wait until the test was forced upon him, but must seek out an opportunity of showing himself off. There is a characteristic phrase in Old Norse for a young man who has shown himself a worthy descendant of worthy ancestors; he is said to have vindicated his kinship or, literally, "led himself into his kin". When Glum the Icelander on his first voyage abroad came to the house of his grandfather Vigfus, and made towards



the high seat where his kinsman sat "big and stout, playing with a gold-inlaid spear" to greet him and declare his kinship, he met with a very cool reception; the youth was given a seat at the far end of the lowest bench and had little attention paid him. The young man waited patiently, until one day an opportunity offered of distinguishing himself by killing a man. Then Vigfus suddenly thawed. "Now you have given proof that you are of our kin; I was but waiting until you should lead yourself into your kin by a show of manhood."

The same expression is used by Earl Hakon to Sigmund Brestison, son of the Faroe chief, when, after the killing of his father, he seeks refuge among his father's friends in Norway. "I will not be sparing of food for you, but you must lead yourself into your kin by your own strength," by healing the mortal wound dealt to your frith and your honour. When Vigfus uses the word, there is thus something more behind it than the mere manifestation of ability; it means nothing less than entering into frith, the transition from the dangerous shadow-existence to life duly fortified in honour. And the saga is undoubtedly right in letting Vigfus express himself so solemnly.

The Icelanders have a characteristic term for a youth who has not shown that he feels his father's life as his spur and standard. They call him *averrfeðrungr*, i. e. one who is worse than his father. The famous explorer Leif commenced his career with the vow that he would not be *averrfeðrungr*. And in this lies a suggestion of the point of view for the bringing up of youth. The young man was drawn as early as possible into the common life of honour of the family, and led to feel himself as sharing in its responsibility. And the older members will hardly have lacked effective words wherewith to spur on a dullard. The opening chapters of the *Vatsdoela* picture how old Ketil Raum went looking at his son, shaking his head in increasing disapproval, until one day he could no longer keep silence, but began moralising: "Young men nowadays behave differently from what was their wont when I was young. Then, they were eager to do something for their own renown, either by going a-viking, or gaining goods and honour elsewhere in dangerous undertakings; but now they care only to sit with their backs to the fire and cool themselves with ale, and there is little manliness or hardihood to be looked for that way. . . . You have certainly nothing much either of strength or height, and the inner part answers no doubt to the outer, so you will hardly come to tread in your fathers' footsteps. In olden time, it was the custom for folk of our sort to go out on warlike expeditions, gaining wealth and honour; and that wealth was not handed down from father to son, — no, they took it with them to the burial mound, wherefore their sons must need find theirs by the same road . . ." and so on for a long while. Unfortunately, the saga writer here seems to have something of that hectic admiration for the good old days which generally indicates that the good old days are irrevocably past. This goes naturally enough with his showing of old Ketil as something more rhetorically gifted and more inclined to historical moralising than was usual in the chieftains of the ninth century. In the good old days, such a waking up would have been delivered in words less learned, but a great deal sharper. Nor is it probably quite good history when the saga lets a thoroughly romantic robber lie hidden in the woods so near to Ketil's homestead that Thor-stein, the son, can prepare a grand surprise for his father without giving himself away by lengthy and numerous preliminaries.

Later on in the Vatsdoela there is an everyday scene showing how a youth actually claimed his right to recognition, in the days when life had no romantic robbers to offer, but only its own brutal prose. The Vatsdoela clan, represented first and foremost by Thorgrim of Karnsá, is in danger of losing the headmanship of the district, and with it the traditional supremacy of the family. At the assembly convened to elect the headman, Thor-grim sits in the high seat, and in front of him, on the floor among the slave children, is the twelve-year-old Thorkel, his illegitimate son, whom he has never been willing to acknowledge. Thorkel comes up and stands looking at him, and at the axe he carries in his hand. Thorgrim asks whether he finds the axe so much to his liking that he would care to strike a blow with it; there was a man present in whose head it would fit nicely, and "then I should reckon you had yourself won your place among us Vatsdoela folk." The boy loses no time in fitting the axe as suggested, and Thorgrim keeps his word, seeing that "the lad has led himself into his kin."

The compiler of the opening chapters of the Vatsdoela is far inferior, both in understanding of the past and in point of art, to the master spirit who reconstructed the family council at Westfold. Fortunately, tradition in Iceland was strong, and it shows willingly through in the tirades of the saga writer. This father, waiting and waiting for some manifestation of his son's true kinship with the old stock, is a genuine figure. He is historically right in demanding that the son shall win his place for himself. There must come a time in the life of every young man when he placed himself among the older members. And the older ones waited, letting example work; but when the proof failed to appear, the youngsters must be given to understand that there was danger in such an intermediate state as that of one who has not yet vindicated his kinship. And when the author lets his hero dwell on the obligation involved by the deeds and ways of one's forefathers, the authority of tradition speaks even through his flowery phrasing.

A curious point of etiquette among the Lombards, noted in Paulus Diaconus, seems also based upon the presumption that the young son of a princely house, before being seized of the privileges that were his due by birth, had to win his place by a certain demonstrative ambition. We read, that when the Lombard prince, Album, had distinguished himself in a battle against the Gepidæ, the warriors earnestly entreated his father to honour him with a seat at the royal table; but the king answered by referring them to the established custom which forbade a king's son to sit at his father's table before he had received arms from the prince of a foreign people. The scenes in the Beowulf appear almost as a pendant to this little story. There, the hero sets out to a foreign court, achieves great things, receives with delight the costly weapons and jewels as his reward, and returns with honour to his ancestral hall, to recount his doings to his kinsman in the high seat and lay his gifts of honour at his feet. And despite the fact that Beowulf, according to the first part of the poem, was already a hero of renown when he made his expedition to the hall of the Danish king, the words that close the description of his youth sound indisputably as if this act of prowess formed a turning-point in the hero's story: "Long he bore with slighting; the youth of the Geats counted him not good; and thus the king of men would not himself account him worthy to a place on the ale-bench; they surely thought that he was without courage, a feeble atheling; but the distress of the brave one was turned about." And then his kinsman takes

the opportunity of making him grants of land: "seven thousand, hall and ruler's seat, both had right by birth to the land, seat and inheritance, but the one before the other; to him, the better man, fell the kingdom." This can, to my mind, only be taken as indicating that there was in the poet's mind a marked association of ideas between achievements of youth, winning one's place in the family, and taking up one's inheritance.

It is perhaps not unlikely that the Germanic people, like so many others at a corresponding stage of civilization, demanded a proof of manhood in some sort or other, before receiving their youths into the circle of the men. What applies to the sons of princes must also have applied to free men of lower rank. Cassiodorus' epigram: "To the Goths valour makes full age" has perhaps more of truth in it than one is predisposed to think of anything coming from the pen of such a deft phrasemaker.

The games of children reveal the manner in which adults regarded one another; little Thorgils had attained the age of five without having struck down any living thing, and had to steal aside and redden his spear upon a horse, because his companions had decided not to accept as their playfellow anyone who had not shed blood. The men took care that none should enter their company with virgin weapons. Naturally, the baptism of blood takes a prominent place in a community such as the Germanic, where battle and war stand in the foreground as a man's proper trade. The deed of arms, the test of arms is, by the forcefulness wherewith it reveals ambition in a flash, well suited to form a sacrament of initiation; cognomens such as Helgi Hunding's bane, Hygelac Ongentheow's bane compress the whole epic into a name. In the old conception of blood as a powerful dew of life, lie harsh materialism and heroic idealism naturally and inseparably interwoven.

Vengeance for a father slain, or vengeance for a kinsman in the wider sense, was often enough in those unruly times the means whereby youth showed its right to a seat in the home. But to regard honour as solely and exclusively in the sign of slaughter leads after all to a too restricted estimate of life. More was demanded of a well-born youth than merely to be a slayer of men. He claimed his place, and held his place in the family by his generosity, hospitality, helpfulness or readiness to take up the cause of kinsmen and fugitives, by nobility of manner, and magnificence. And eyes were watching from every side to see that he filled his place in every respect. The place he had to fill was the broad, spacious *seat* which his fathers had judged necessary for themselves. Ancestral ways, ancestral measures constitute the standard; on this point, Ketil Raum speaks as the man of experience. Olaf could find no better way of expressing his sense of duty than by saying: Harald Fairhair's inheritance. And men of lower rank could find no other way of determining what was good for them, than by saying: "Thus our kinsmen of old would never do" — or — "Thus our kinsmen of old were wont to do."

Family tradition constitutes the entire ethical standard. A fixed line of demarcation, separating evil from good, was not known. There was, of course, a broad average, as among all peoples. The Germanic people knew that certain acts, stealing first and foremost, murder, and some few others, brought dishonour upon a man, whoever the culprit might be; just as they knew that

killing was killing, injury injury; but that did not mean that any one keeping himself free from such dishonest acts was to be regarded as an honourable man. His tradition told him what was evil for himself and what was good — this distinction taken in full and complete moral adaptation. To accept blood-money, for instance, was for most people honourable and decent enough; but if one came of a stock that boasted of never having carried its kinsmen in a purse, or always having demanded double fine for a kinsman slain, a breach of such tradition was actual meanness. The constitutional honour of the race could not bear such a departure. The Icelandic *verr feðrungr* comes gradually to mean a scoundrel, an immoral person, in other words, a niding. This transition has doubtless its deep motives, or may at any rate have such; it stands in complete agreement with the spirit which inspires clan morality. The ethical standard is not based on what is generally applicable to all; the indisputable, that all agree to call right or wrong, is only a crude average formed by the individual “honours” in juxtaposition. Each circle has its own honour, an heirloom, that must be preserved in the very state in which it is handed down, and maintained according to its nature. Honour is the patch of land on which I and mine were born, which we own, and on which we depend; such as it is, broad and rich, well stocked with cattle and corn, or poor and sandy, such is our honour. Honour is a spiritual counterpart of earth and its possession, wherein all cows and sheep, all horses and weapons are represented, and that not as a number, or a value, but in their individuality.

And as the individual items of the property have each their counterpart in honour, so, naturally, are the kinsmen themselves personally represented. Honour forms a mirror, which retains the images of those it has reflected. There stand all the kinsmen, in their finest array and with their finest weapons, and the more costly their armour, the more precious is the honour. There are all the happenings within the family as far back as man's memory can reach; all great deeds, all costly entertainments, every magnificent piece of hospitality — they stand there, and demand their rights. There too, everything degrading will appear, and woe to him who shall look therein without finding relief for the eye in mighty deeds of restitution. “Woe,” said the Swedish peasants, “to the race that sees one of its own buried without the churchyard wall.” This was the greatest misfortune that could fall upon a house; even when the dead man lay buried outside in unhallowed soil on account of his sins, his kinsmen would not rest until they had bought him a place within the churchyard. And this not alone, or even principally, out of regard to his future rest in peace, but in order not to hand down a shame to posterity. Thus the peasants of the North, even in late centuries, felt kin-shame as an intolerable burden, a thing that had to be lived through again day after day.

Honour is so far from being something ideal and indeterminate, that it can be actually reckoned up and felt. Honour is the property of the family, its influence; it is the history of the race, composed of actual traditions from the nearest generations and of legends of the forefathers.

Honour is the cattle and the ancestors of the clan, because both live just as much in the kinsmen as outside them. Livestock, like weapons and jewels, exists in the kinsman's soul not merely as an item of this or that value; it does not hang on externally by a sense of proprietary interest, but lies embedded in

feelings of a far more intense character. The ancestors fill the living; their history is not sensed as a series of events following one on the heels of another; all history lay unfolded in its breadth as a present Now, so that all that had once happened was happening again and again. Every kinsman felt himself as living all that one of his kin had once lived into the world, and he did not merely feel himself as possessing the deeds of old, he renewed them actually in his own doings. Any interference with what had been acquired and handed down, such as raiding and robbery of cattle or property, had to be met with vengeance, because a field of the picture of honour was crushed by the blow. But an openly expressed doubt as to whether that old grandfather really had done what he was said to have done, is just as fatal to life, because it tears something out of his living kin; the taunt touches not only the dead man of old, but still more him who now lives through the former's achievements. The insult is a cut into the man himself, it tears a piece out of his brain, making a hole which is gradually filled with ideas of madness.

By an injury a piece of the soul is torn out, with the thoughts and feelings attaching to it. And the wound produces the same vertigo as a mother feels when robbed of a piece of her soul by the death of her child; a whole portion of her thoughts and feelings becomes superfluous, her instinctive movements become useless; she reaches out at night into the dark, grasping at something, and her hands are filled with emptiness. The void in the soul produces a constant uncertainty, as one might imagine if one's natural adjustment were disturbed, so that the hand misses its mark every time it reaches out for an object. Such a void in the soul wakes fear in its wildest form. If the mother imagine to herself that someone has killed her child, or that she herself has taken its life, or if she fears that the world is about to crumble to pieces, we know that these feelings are only the food with which her head is trying to sate her fear. She must grasp at all sorts of dreadful imaginings to appease for a moment this craving of dread; and there is, from a psychological point of view, no disproportion between her feeling and the thought of the world coming to an end. If the breach is not closed, the soul dies of that intolerable hunger, and her sorrow ends in madness.

This comparison between the clansmen's loss of honour and the mother's loss of her child is exactly to the point, because it illustrates an identical psychological state manifesting itself under different conditions. The bereaved mother is on the point of becoming a *niding* in the old sense of the word; in fact, she would be a *niding* in the old days, if she did not obtain restitution; and that which takes place in one whose honour is wounded, is just such a displacement of the entire soul, a spiritual earthquake shattering a man's self-esteem and moral carriage, and rendering him not responsible for his actions, as we should say.

Only in the very extreme cases of our civilization can we find anything that covers the experiences of the ancients. For the innate depravity of shame lies in the fact that spiritual life was then dependent upon a certain number and a certain sort of ideas. Good breeding was a family treasure, possibly not differing greatly to our eyes as regards the different families, but in reality distinctively marked from earliest youth, stamped by traditions, determined by environment, and consequently not easily changed. Personality was far less mobile than now,

and was far less capable of recuperation. If a kinsman lost an idea, he could not make good the loss by taking up ideas from the other side; as he is bound to the family circle in which he grew up, so he is dependent upon the soul-constituents fostered in him. The traditions and reminiscences of his people, the enjoyment of ancient heirlooms and family property, the consciousness of purpose, the pride of authority and good repute in the judgement of neighbours found in his circle, make up his world, and there is no spiritual treasury outside on which he can draw for his intellectual and moral life. A man nowadays may be excluded from his family, whether this consist of father, mother, brothers and sisters, or a whole section of society; and he need not perish on that account, because no family, however large, can absorb the entire contents of a reasonably well-equipped human being's soul. He has parts of himself placed about here and there; even nature is in spiritual correspondence with him. But man as a member of a clan has a void about him; it need not mean that his kinsmen lack all wider interest, it does not mean that he is unable to feel himself as member of a larger political and religious community; but these associations are, in the first place, disproportionately weak, so that they cannot assert themselves side by side with frith, and further, they are only participated in through the medium of kinship or frith, so that they can have no independent existence of their own. A man cast off from his kin cannot appeal to nature for comfort, for its dominant attribute is hostility, save in the form where it faces him as inspired by humankind, cultivated and inhabited; and in the broad, fair fields it is only the land of his inheritance that meets him fully and entirely with friendly feelings. It will also be found that in cases where a niding is saved to the world by being received into a new circle, a family or a company of warriors, he does not then proceed by degrees from his former state over to the new; he leaps across a channel, and becomes a new man altogether.

Honour is identical with humanity. Without honour, one cannot be a living being; losing honour, one loses the vital element that makes man a thinking and feeling creature. The niding is empty, and haunted for ever by the all-embracing dread that springs from emptiness. The despairing words of Cain have a bitterness of their own in the Anglo-Saxon, steeped as they are in the Teuton's horror of loneliness: "I dare not look for honour in the world, seeing I have forfeited thy favour, thy love, thy peace." He goes full of sorrow from his country, and from now onward there is no happiness for him, being without honour and goodwill (*árleas*). His emptiness means, in a modern phrase, that he has nothing to live for. The pains he is to suffer will cut deeper than before, seeing they are now all heaped up-in himself alone, and they will produce more dangerous wounds, since there is no medicine to be found against them. Thus it is literally true, that no one can be a human being without being a kinsman, or that kinsman means the same as human being; there is not a grain of metaphor in the words. Frith and honour together constitute the soul. Of these two constituents frith seems to lie deeper. Frith is the base of the soul, honour is all the restless matter above it. But there is no separation between them. The force of honour is the feeling of kinship, and the contents of frith is honour. So it is natural that a wound to honour is felt on one hand as an inner decline, and on the other as a paralysis of love. By the import of honour we learn to know the character of the gladness which kinsmen felt when they sat together by the fire warming themselves in frith.

This interpenetration of frith and honour makes itself apparent, for instance, in the use of the Anglo-Saxon word *ár*. When an exile comes to a king to sue for *ár*, the word may be translated by favour or protection; but we must bear in mind that the acceptance by the king, the *ár* given him by the king, procures for him peace and human dignity. In Christian language, God is the giver of *ár*, grace, making the lives of men prosper. *Ar* thus embraces luck and honour and mutual goodwill, and the translator of Old English poetry is constantly brought to a standstill for want of a comprehensive term in his own language. Thus says Hrothgar's queen of her Sons' cousin, Hrothulf: "I know my Hrothulf the happy, know that he will hold the youths in honour(*ár*), if you, king of the Scyldings, go out of the world before him. I think he will return good to our sons, when he remembers how we gave him *ár* when he was small, to his joy and his exaltation." When there was strife between Abraham's and Lot's men, the patriarch's love of peace is expressed by the Anglo-Saxon poet in the following words: "We two are kinsmen, there shall be no strife between us," and the Englishman adds by way of explanation: "*ár* dwelt in his mind".

Insight into the nature of honour opens a way to the understanding of the character of gladness. The sentences which have been quoted, referring to men's living in happiness and honour, when they sit in a circle round the fire with happy, fearless thoughts, have now obtained their full meaning, which cannot be exhausted in modern words.

Honour implies vengeance in ancient society, but honour, as we have seen it up to this, does not elucidate what made the shedding of blood so powerful a medicine for spiritual suffering. Honour contains much which points out beyond the limits here drawn, and which can only find its explanation in a still wider view of the spiritual life of these men.

## CHAPTER IV

### LUCK

Besides honour, man needs something which in the ancient language is called luck; our translation, however, which draws the sense of chance into the foreground, fails altogether to indicate the true force of the word. The associations of the modern term, stressing the sense of chance or fortune, all run counter to the spirit of ancient culture, and there is no other way of reaching a full understanding than by patient and unprejudiced reconstruction of Teutonic psychology.

Whichever way we turn, we find the power of luck. It determines all progress. Where it fails, life sickens. It seems to be the strongest power, the vital principle indeed, of the world.

When a man's fields yielded rich harvest, when his lands were rarely visited by frost or drought, he was said to be *ársæll*, *i. e.* he possessed the luck of fertility.



When his cattle thrived and multiplied, always returning safe and undepleted from their summer grazing grounds, then he was *fésæll*, i. e. he had the luck of cattle.

The dweller on a barren strip of coast had little use for luck in the fields, but would on the other hand probably be lucky with his fishing, or he would be *byrsæll*, that is, he would always have the wind in his favour. There was a famous family in the north of Norway, the men of Hrafnista, of whom it is related that as soon as they hoisted sail, a wind sprang up, even though it had been perfectly calm a moment before. Hading, too, had, according to Saxo, a peculiar power of making best use of a wind, for though his pursuers were running before the same wind and had not fewer sails, they could not overtake him. This trait is in the North not a fairy tale motive, nor the invention of an imaginative saga writer; the Olafs of Norway likewise had the reputation of being favoured by the weather, and this undoubtedly with full historical justification. Olaf Tryggvason was so much more *byrsæll* than other men, that he sailed in one day as much as others in three. In the list of the kings of Sweden there is one Eric Weatherhat, so called from his having, as it were, the wind in his hat; he could change it by turning his headgear about.

This particular form of luck was not lost when the coast-dwellers of the Northern Sea moved over to Iceland. It is told of an Icelander that he was so *byrsæll*, he could always determine 'which harbour he would make; and of another, that he sailed in one day as much as others in three.

Other men, again, had as their dominant attribute luck of battle. When professional warriors, like Arnijot Gellini, seek to express their faith in a few words, they can find nothing to say but that they trust in their strength and their *sigrsælli*, their gift of victory. Among the chieftains, this gift of victory shows in its full splendour. We find men of military genius, who bring victory in their train wherever they go. All the Norwegian kings of Harald Fairhair's race had this great gift of victory. And when Earl Hakon was able for a time to fill the place as ruler over Norway, it was due not least to his luck in winning victories, in pursuing and killing. It kept the people on his side, for they held that no one could be like him in respect of this particular gift. A like tone is apparent in the opening of the story in the Beowulf, about Hrothgar's kingdom; unto him was given war-speed, and battle-honour, so that his kinsmen followed him until the younglings were waxen and gathered about him in their host.

"Winner of battles" the king is often called in Anglo-Saxon, and the name expresses what the Germanic people asked of, and trusted to, in a ruler, both in the great leader of the land, the king himself, and the minor leaders, local princelings as well as freebooter kings without land. The presence of the chieftain was a guarantee to the people of victory in the fight. The Anglo-Saxons gathered boldly to oppose the foreign vikings, if only they had a man of chieftain's rank to take the lead and call the local forces together; as long as he was standing, they would fight with scorn of death, for hearth and home. But when word went round to assemble in mutual aid, without the inspiration of a born leader, they would remain at home, or they would run off to the woods and leave the invaders to work their will in the village.

Once, when the East Anglians were attacked by Penda, the victorious and generally feared king of Mercia, they found no other resource in their need than to go to their old king, Sigebert, who, out of love for the heavenly light, had renounced the throne and shut himself up in a monastery. They begged him and implored him to come out and lead the host, and though he thrust aside the weapons, with uplifted hands calling to witness his monk's vow to God in Heaven, they forced him into the battle. This picture of the king in monk's cowl, dragged into the fight with a willow-stick in his hand and there slain, is the more touching for its deep historical significance.

“And when they saw that their leader was fallen, they fled every man” — this sentence occurs again and again in the sagas, and its truth is confirmed again and again by history. If the great man's war-luck failed, what could the lesser luck of lesser men avail? Gregory relates that Chlodevech won the decisive battle against the Alamanni by vowing himself to Christ when things were at their worst; hardly had he turned his mind in the right direction when his enemies took to flight. “And when they saw their king was fallen, they surrendered and begged for mercy.” The opening of the narrative agrees but poorly with the sequel. The fact is, that the pious tendency of the historian has had its way at the first, and that required only Chlodevech and Christ; in return, history has its way with the clerk in the after-sentence, and gives the king of the Alamanni his due. But even admitting that the myth of Christ as the giver of victory is but ill grafted, the pious author is intrinsically right in making Christ manifest his glory in displacing the power that had been strongest among the heathen, *viz*, the king's luck.

These little pictures from life transfer us at a stroke to another world. Luck is working before our eyes with all the power it had over men's minds, to strengthen and to strike with numbness. In its foremost representative, the king, its peculiar character is properly revealed. The king's war-luck can prevail against an army. When the king comes, surrounded by his little host, the peasants are scattered like lambs at scent of a wolf. This happened constantly in an age when every man was a warrior from his youth up. It is not very likely that the king's retainers should be very far ahead of the well-to-do yeomen of the country in respect of courage and skill at arms, for the king's body-guard was in Norway, and as far as regards the earliest times, among the other Germanic peoples as well, composed for the most part of young volunteers, each of whom served a number of years till he had attained such a degree of training and renown as he considered fitting for his position in society. Throughout the first two centuries of Norwegian history, that is to say, the childhood of the kingdom of greater Norway, when the sovereignty was literally speaking never left ten years undisputed, tradition records hardly a single battle wherein a peasant army succeeded in offering effective resistance to the body-guard, led by the king himself. The victory at Stiklestad, where the yeomen won the day over the king's men, is a triumph almost unique in history; the victors fled from the field in panic terror, and the conquered prince went out of the battle as a demigod. When Olaf showed himself amid his array, the peasants' arms “fell down”, their minds were confused in a moment, and they were on the point of running away every man; strenuous urging and incitement, with reminders of Olaf's hated rule, were needed to keep them in their places. And if we may believe the saga's description of the fight, the courage of the peasants

was rather a sort of desperate convulsion in 'which their fear found vent, because their legs refused to carry them from the field. Olaf's fall let loose a panic in the peasants' army; the men scattered and ran to seek cover in their homes, and six months later, the king was adjudged a saint.

Whether the saga men are to be taken as recorders of fact or as imaginative poets, the value of their sketches as psychological documents remains unimpaired. In the minds of the North-men, the battle of Stiklestad, and the days preceding it, were clothed with a mystic spell, and the memories were condensed into a picture, at once soberly realistic in details and mythic as a whole. In Olaf, the ancient king's luck was transfigured; in the strength of his luck he was exalted to martyr's glory, and his saintship bridges over the gap between the old faith and the new creed. The Christian poets praise the king saint for giving all men harvest and peace.

To get a comprehensive view of the king's luck, we have to ask: what was demanded, in the old days, to make a man a true king? War-speed, the power of victory, is but one of the distinguishing marks which place the leader in a class apart from everyday characters. His constitution is marked throughout by greater strength and hardihood. Life is more firmly seated in him, whether it be that he is proof against weapons, or that they seem, perhaps, to turn aside from the spot where he stands. The first time Olaf Tryggvason misses his mark is when he aims his bow at Earl Eric. "Truly, this earl's luck is great", he exclaims. In the ancient wise, it is said of Harald Hilditonn, that Odin had granted him immunity from wounds, so that no cutting edge could scathe him. And even though perhaps such a degree of hardiness was only found among the very few particularly favoured, we must presume that the king had this advantage over ordinary warriors, that his wounds healed more easily and more completely. At any rate, he possessed a healing power which could be communicated to others. The Germanic chief had here at least one qualification for saintly rank, and one that counted for much in the early Middle Ages, when Christianity justified itself to a great extent by its power over sickness. There is no doubt but that these germs of saintliness in the kingship were eagerly fostered, we may perhaps venture to say, with unconscious purpose; the miracles and legends of southern Europe cling easily to Olaf, and it came natural for people to seek healing at the king's resting place.

At the time when Olaf's brother Harald Hardrada and his son Magnus reigned jointly over Norway, a mother came with her son, who had lost his memory, to ask advice of King Harald; the king opined that the patient suffered from dreamlessness, and counselled her to let the boy drink of Magnus' washing water, and thereafter sleep on Magnus' couch. The effect was instantaneous: both kings appeared to him in a dream, and said: the one: "Have health," and the other: "Have quickness and memory," and then the boy woke laughing, having recovered the power of remembering. The kings of the Franks had not less of this healing power: a mother cured her son with a decoction from the fringe of King Gunntbram's cloak. In earlier times, it was presumably a common belief that the king had "hands of healing", as we find in the invocation of Sigdrifa: "Give us two athelings (herself and Sigurd) speech and wit and hands of healing, while we live."

The most violent attacks of nature, too, fell scatheless upon the king's luck. "Kings never drown," said William Rufus when he put out into the Channel in a boat during a gale, to quell a revolt in Normandy on its first outbreak. Olaf the Saint, on his crossing to Norway, was in great danger during a storm, but "the good men with him, and his own luck, brought him unscathed to land".

With equal right, an Olaf might have said that kings were never weather-bound. At any rate, it was one of a chieftain's natural attributes, that his luck always gave him a favouring wind. The waters, too, carried shoals of fish in to the ruler's lands, we may suppose; it is said of Earl Hakon, that in his time, fish came up into all the fords. Luck of fertility prevailed over his fields, giving close ears of corn and good weight in the ear. Lucky in seasons and in procuring peace are the titles given to the mythical kingly ideal of the Swedes, Fjölfnir Yngvifreyson, and if we add *sigrsæll* — victorious — we have the triple chord that embraces all life. A king without wars might be an exception; but he must be *fríðsæll* — mighty for peace — in the sense of keeping the war outside his own frontiers, or at least preventing it from harrying the fields. War is to throw up a flood of honour and renown about him, heap up jewels and spoil, but not fail destructively upon the lands swelling with corn, and the cattle heavy with fat.

"It is hard to fight against the king's luck," and "Much avails the king's luck"; thus old saws sum up the hardness and the massiveness of the chieftain's gift, and the wisdom implied in these sayings amounts to such sage counsels as this: One must not set oneself athwart the great man's luck, but let oneself be borne on by it. When a man entered the king's ranks and let his own war-luck be inspired by the higher, he became, in the most literal sense, worth more himself. The king was so full of luck that he could radiate it out to all those near him and could even send it away to act at a distance. If one could get a chieftain to approve an enterprise by his words:

"I will add my luck", then one had his war-luck in one's weapons, his weather-luck in one's sails. Of such a man it can simply be said: "He goes not alone, for king's luck goes with him." And a request to undertake a desperate enterprise on the king's behalf was often granted with the words: "I will attempt it with your luck". A man in the king's favour, as for instance Hallfred the Wayward Scald, lived all his life in the shadow of the king's luck. When on one occasion he was attacked from behind, he prayed to Christ for aid, and succeeded "with God's help and by Olaf's luck" in beating off the attack. His opponents knew him for a man protected by special favour, and were cautious in attacking him; his bitter foe, Gris, whom he had injured most bloodily by ravishing his wife, was glad of a chance to avoid meeting him in single combat, and declared that he was "loth to fight against the king's luck".

The belief in the king's power to put his luck into others and their undertakings is worked up by the Icelanders into an amusing tale about a poor man, Hroi, his failing and success. Hroi was a skilful smith and an enterprising merchant, brave and "born with wits"; but somehow Fortune declined to favour his plans. However much gold he might amass, it went to the bottom as soon as he put to sea, and when he had forged his way up again by skill at his trade, he lost all his savings in his business deals. Then he bethought himself of going to King Swein Forkbeard and proposing partnership. When he appeared before King Swein with his plans for trading, the king's men spoke strongly against the idea

of entering into partnership with a man so notoriously unlucky in his dealings; but Hroi retorted confidently: "The king's luck is more powerful than my ill-fortune", and the king himself was too far-seeing not to give this argument more weight than all objections. From that day forward, wealth sought out Hroi: on peaceable trading expeditions he harried the coasts of the Baltic for gold, and never once lost a cargo at sea; he shared his spoils with the king, thus turning his friendship into affection. And to crown all, he won the princess, for though his bride was of no higher birth than the daughter of a Swedish grandee, she was at any rate as good as the average princess.

It is the criterion, in fact, of the king's luck, that it overflows and fills others with its abundance. On the field of battle, the king's luck sweeps like a storm out over the enemy; opens a road for those who follow after him, and whirls them on to victory; but beneath this stormy power there runs a quiet, unbroken stream of luck that can bear, and actually does bear, the people up, inspiring its work with blessing, and making it thrive. We chance upon a piece of information from the Burgundians, to the effect that they gave their kings the credit for good harvests in the land, and in return, made them suffer when the harvest failed. The Northmen judged in precisely the same fashion. According to mythical history, the Swedes even went to the point of "sacrificing" their king, Domaldi, "for good harvest", a persistent famine having occurred during his reign. At the introduction to Norway's history stands Halfdan *ársælli*, the greatest harvest-giver the people had known, as a kind of prototype of Harald Fairhair's dynasty. For a long time, it looked as if the luck of the Halfdan family were broken; in the time of the sons of Eric, there were years of great dearth, and the longer they ruled over the country, the harder grew the general distress, and we are expressly told, that the people "laid the bad harvests to the charge of these kings". Then arose a new race of rulers, in whom the blessing was full and whole. During the reign of Earl Hakon, such a change took place in the harvests, that not only "did the corn grow up wherever it had been sown, but the herring came up all round the land". But with the other branches of the old stock Halfdan the Harvest giver rose up again, and in Olaf the Saint his heritage was canonised: "God's man gives all men harvest and peace," thus sings the poet Thorarin Loftung in honour of the sainted king.

We must not, however, rush to the conclusion that Teutonic kingship rested upon certain persons' magic power of styling themselves magicians. From a modern point of view, a king might seem sufficiently tasked in having to govern sun and moon and an element or so besides, and any demand beyond such meteorological aptitude would be thought excessive; still, other qualities were needed to raise a man to chieftainship under the old conditions. To appreciate the genius of the Teuton king, we must walk round and look at him from the social point of view as well, and our understanding will depend on our ability to combine the knowledge gained on these two sides.

We need not seek far and wide to ascertain what the king looked like; both ideal pictures and actual portraits have been handed down to us. In Harald Fairhair's race, the type appears as follows: Tall (taller than the most of men), strong, handsome (the handsomest of all men), forward in the fight; skilful above all others in the use of weapons; an all-round athlete, archer, swimmer. Among the kings of Norway Olaf Tryggvason is the perfect realisation of the ideal; he could

strike equally well with both bands, throw two spears at once, and walk on the oars while the men were rowing, juggling with three swords in the air.

Ambitious and ever watchful that none should in any respect outstep him; never content with the honour gained as long as there was more to gain.

Deep and far-seeing in his plans; clever to use all means that could further the end in view; eloquent and persuasive, so that men wished no other thing than what he proposed.

Glad, cheerful, generous to his men, winning, so that all young brave men were drawn to him.

Rich in counsel and faithful; stern towards his enemies and those of his friends; a perfect friend to him who was his friend.

This is the Germanic type of king that inspires the innumerable encomiums in Teutonic literature. It is reflected in the description of Offa by the poet of the *Beowulf*: "the spear-bold man, praised far and 'wide for gifts and war; wisely ruling the land of his heritage". It is elaborated over and over in the Nordic songs and sagas. Tall, handsome, brave, skilful, generous, these words indicate the totality of virtues which no king could do without; lacking one quality he would lack all.

The praises really indicate a demand, a formulation of what was required of the king. Not only the king who ruled over wide lands must fulfil the requirements of the ideal, but even the chieftain, whose sphere was restricted to a small district, had to possess a certain, not insignificant portion of all these qualities. This comprehensive perfection, moral and physical, belonged to the nature of chieftainship. Even a petty village leader was expected to stand firmly by the rights of his friends, and see that none encroached on them; he must be so respected that outsiders were loth to interfere with them. Any man in the village had the right to bring an injury he was unable himself to repair to the door of the chief, and if it were left there unavenged, it brought down infallibly nidinghood upon the chieftain's whole race. It needed strength to take up such an heritage. And when disputes arose within the district itself, the chieftain was the proper person to put matters right, to solve the difficulty, so that "all were content with his decision". When we call to mind that the king, in such a case, found himself placed between two "honours", both equally susceptible and equally indispensable, we may presume that he would need to be gifted with a very high degree of craft and ingenuity — and generosity withal, so that he was not afraid of sacrificing something of his own in order to heal a wounded honour. We can provide a background for our supposition by considering how an Icelandic chieftain, Thorkel Krafla, behaved on one occasion, when a man had been killed at the law-thing. With a party ready for vengeance he went to the booth where the slayer was. In the doorway he was encountered by the man's mother, who had a claim on Thorkel, having once saved his life; she tried to make her influence felt, but he met her intervention with the words: "Matters stand differently now than when we last spoke together; but go you out, that you need not see your son stricken down." She immediately acted on the hint, dressed her son in her own clothes and sent him out with the women, and when Thorkel had seen him safely out, he placed himself in the doorway and talked

sense: "It is not fitting that we should kill our own neighbours and thing-fellows, it were better at least to come to an agreement." This is an episode from the late saga times, but an episode of the sort that occurs frequently enough on the steppes and in the mountains, where the tribe still lives in ancient fashion under the rule of a chief.

It was no sinecure to inherit royal dignity. Kingship required genius and great gifts, but these qualities were included in the royal character. That the born leader could achieve such great things, could procure his subjects right and honour and, what was still more difficult, maintain their honours in their proper relation one to another, is due to the very depth and might of his luck. It was easier for him than for others to bring men to agree, and get men to follow him; the young men looked up to him, wished naught but what he willed, the older men brought their difficulties to him, — because he was *vinsæll*, i. e. had the luck or gift of friendship, because he had *mannheill*, the gift of dealing with men. It can also be said in explanation of his popularity, that he gained affection early "by his beauty and his gentleness in speech" (*blidlæti*). Of another king it is spoken, that he won the love of his men for being mighty and wise and a great harvest-giver; the word translated by "wise" is a very expressive term denoting craft, quickness of wit, adroitness, in other words, diplomacy. His friend-luck depended on various factors. Not the least part of it was due to his power of strewing gold about him; youth did not flock to the court of a niggardly king. But all these gifts enter into the king's luck, diplomacy as well as generosity, and beauty as well as eloquence. There is no separating the qualities which we should call natural, from the gifts of healing and fertility.

It would be foolish to regard the superiority of the king's body-guard over the peasant army as due to a superstitious panic for the king's person, and deny that the fatal significance of his fall to the outcome of the battle stood in natural relation to his importance as leader of the fight. And this was well known: such words as "leader of the host", "ranger of battles" were often used as epithets for a chieftain.

There is not the least reason to regard these honourable titles as of late origin, and accuse the other Germanic peoples of lacking insight as to the king's generalship. Surely as the king could and should bring about victory, radiating strength and courage into those who came near him, and darkening the eyes of his enemies till they stumbled over their own plans, so surely was it also of great importance to him to possess a well disciplined army, and be able himself to take advantage of the tactical opportunities with a corps that in a way hung together of itself. All these: the discipline of the army, the generalship of its leader, the force of his blow, his power of compelling victory, are part of the king's luck. Whether we say: the king had luck in learning the use of weapons and the art of war, to remain unwounded in the midst of the fight, — or we credit him with a gift for the profession of arms, a gift which made lethal weapons fall harmlessly from him, it comes to the same thing. The king was the luckiest, that is to say, *inter alia*, the bravest, most skilful, wisest and most ingenious of warriors.

To sum up, luck, in the view of the Teutons, is not a thing that comes from without, setting the seal upon abilities and enterprises.



Every day we encounter instances of the great differences between men's fortunes. Poor folk have "but one luck, and that a slender one"; they may strive and struggle as much as they will, they gain no more than the minimum reward for their pains. With others, "luck hangs about them like dirt", as the proverb runs in Jutland; they simply cannot get rid of it. But the Teuton did not draw the inference from this experience that will and result, ability and luck come from different sides of existence and play blind-man's-buff with one another. He did not lay down inefficiency as the prime principle in human life and appoint fate or gods to keep all the strength and bear all the blame for evil results.

A man's luck of harvest is the power that inspires him to watchfulness, restless work, letting his arms wield the pick with good effect, which sets pace and force in his actions; it leads his pick so that he does not strike vainly in a stubborn, defiant soil, but opens pores for fruitfulness; it sends the corn up out of the ground, sharpens the young shoot to pierce the earth above it, saves the naked, helpless plant from freezing to death, and the grown corn from standing unsusceptible to sun and rain and turning to nothing out of sheer helplessness; it follows the crops home, stays with them through threshing and crushing, and gives the bread or the gruel power of nourishment when the food is set on the board.

The luck of harvesting and sailing and conquering are equally two-sided according to our notions. A man is blessed in his cattle when the animals grow fat and heavy with what they eat, when their udders swell full with milk, when they multiply, when they go to their summer grazing without scathe of wolf or bear, when they come home full tale in the autumn; but his luck is equally apparent in his power to seek them out and find them, should they stray, in places where no other would think to look.

Sailing implies manoeuvring, conquering implies valour and shrewdness, luck in wisdom implies skill "in making plans when needed". The sons of Ingimund, before referred to, were men of great luck: "It is hard to stand against the luck of the sons of Ingimund"; men feared Jokul's courage and baresark violence, but not less the "wit and luck" of his elder brother, Thorstein. This luck displays itself in his always knowing or guessing beforehand what his opponents had in mind; he saw through every artifice of war, even when wrought by witchcraft, so that it was never possible to take him and his brothers by surprise. Their luck shows itself in the fact that they could wait, let time go on, make preparations, or strike on the instant without hesitation; the blow always fell at the right moment for them. When their father had been killed in their absence, and the slayer, Hrolleif, had got away safely to his kin, Thorstein restrains his brother by saying: "We must seek him out by craft, and not rush wildly on." He then pays a visit to the man who had concealed Hrolleif, and by dexterous handling gets him to give up the unlucky one and send him away from the homestead. "It matters nothing what you may say", Thorstein quietly argues, "he is undoubtedly here; it is more to your good that he should be rendered harmless, such ill as he does against your will; it is not only for my father's sake that I am after him, he has wrought too much mischief that we can sit still now; we can take him outside your boundaries, so that no shame falls to you in the matter; only tell him yourself that he is not safe here; and a hundred in silver I can well spare." And as calmly as Thorstein has argued his case here, so too he stays on as a guest

till the following day, and on the way back from the homestead, informs his brothers that Hrolleif must surely have gone home to his mother, the witch-wife, and must be taken there before she has time to work her arts over him. By hard riding they were able to surprise the party in the midst of their preparations for the black magic by which the old hag intended to make her son hard against perils; they managed things so cleverly that she did not acquire power over them by catching sight of them before they had seen her. They saw through all dazzlement, and recognised the old woman herself in spite of all her tricks, and she was indeed right when she said: "I was near to having revenged my son; but these sons of Ingimund are men of great luck."

Thus it fell out with all who had matters outstanding with Thorstein; however they might set their plans, whether they had recourse to witchcraft or simple cunning, they always found him ready for them. He saw through everything from a distance; and when he arrived on the spot no optical illusions "could avail, for he saw all things as they were"; in their true nature, as another saga has it.

Naturally, a chieftain could not be suspicious and always go about scenting danger, for such a craven caution would be an infallible sign that he had not the luck of wisdom, but fumbled ever in the dark. The king simply saw through the shell of things, and knew what lay hidden behind pretended friendliness, and could therefore sit calm and secure where all was well, without letting his comfort be encroached upon by forebodings. When Harald Fairhair had been to Thorolf's splendid feast at Torgar, the two sons of Hilderid came up and wished him joy of his lucky journey, adding: "It fell out as was to be thought; you were after all the wisest and luckiest (*hamingjumestr*), for you saw at once that all was not so fairly meant as it seemed and we can also tell you now that it was planned that you should be slain there; but the peasants felt a catch in their breasts when they saw you," they add. It must be admitted that the pair of them knew how to flatter a king.

And if we would see an instance of what lack of luck (*gæfuleysi*) is, we find an illustration in the saga which treats of the dealings between Hrafnkel and his antagonist Sam. By dint of courage and a great deal of friendly assistance, Sam got the upper band of the powerful and overbearing chieftain Hrafnkel; but when he had got his enemy underfoot, he contented himself, despite all well-meaning advice, with humbling him and forcing him to leave his homestead and the district. Hrafnkel raised a new farm and quietly worked his way up again. When six years had passed, he was strong enough to begin thinking of bygone things, and learning one day that Sam's brother had come home from an illustrious career abroad, he lays wait for him on his very first ride from the landing-place and slays him. Sam seeks out his old friends and helpers, but they meet him with cold words: "We once made all things ready for you so that you could easily be uppermost. But it fell out as we knew it would, when you gave Hrafnkel his life, that you would come to mourn it bitterly. We counselled you to kill him, but you would have your way. No need to look closely to see the difference in wisdom between you two, Hrafnkel and you; he left you in peace and used his strength first to make away with the man he deemed of most account. We will not let your want of luck bring us to our downfall."

The Norwegian pretender Olaf Ugæfa — the Unlucky — gained his name from the half-heartedness of his plans when a night attack on Erling Skakki failed. Erling had fewer men, was taken by surprise, and suffered great loss; but the darkness covered him, and under shelter of a fence he slipped away down to his ships. “And this men said: that Olaf and his followers had shown but little luck in the fight, so surely as Erling's party were given into their hands, if they had but acted with more wisdom.”

There is all the difference of luck between *rede*, good, prudent and successful plans, and *unrede*, bad plans which may look sound enough, but are wanting in foundation. A wise man prepares his enterprises according to the time and circumstances they are to fit in with. He is capable of looking about him and interpreting what he sees. He does not let himself be confused by possibilities, but with strict logic discerns the actual state of things. When Thorstein judged that the time had come for avenging his father's death, he rode straight to the very homestead where the slayer lay concealed, and called upon his protector to deliver up the wretch; on the yeoman's making a show of innocence, he only said: “You, Geirmund, are Hrolleif's only kinsman of note, therefore he is with you and nowhere else,” and his conclusion had all the surety of a man of luck; it was not a result of suspicion, or supposition or probability, but of knowledge and of insight. But the wise man can do more than this; he judges men beforehand, and thus is not led astray by ill-fated connections with men whose counsels are barren. From sure signs in face and ways and manner he deduces what is hidden in the stranger, whether he is a man of luck (*hamingjusamligr*), one who will be an acquisition, or one whom it were best to avoid. The very wise man knows also the world outside human life, and can guess the connection between manifestations and actions; he knows the weather, and understands the speech of animals, or knows at any rate what they would say. He has a store of “ancient knowledge” in regard to things and events of the past, a knowledge which not only gives him dignity and esteem, but also security in his judgement of things now happening, and insight into the nature of things. He sees the past spread out about him in the same way as the present; the two penetrate and interpret each other. But his were a poor wisdom if he had not, apart from the mastery of past and present, also some familiarity with the yet unborn. Keensighted and foreseeing are identical terms among the ancients. The unknown came to the man of luck in many ways. He was a great dreamer, who was aware of things before they arrived, and saw beforehand men moving on their contemplated ways. Hrafinkel Freysgod's father, Hallfred, even moved his entire homestead because a man came to him in a dream and said: “You are unwary, lying there, Hallfred; move your farm, westward across Lagarfljot; there is all your luck,” — and the same day as he had brought all his goods into safety, the place was buried under a landslide. Thorstein Ingimundson, also, avoids the machinations of a witch-wife through a vision in a dream, and she may well say, when she finds he is not to be drawn into the trap: “It is hard to stand against the luck of these sons of Ingimund.” But to dreams and clairvoyance must be added the direct knowledge, which may be expressed in the words: “few things come on him unawares, surprise him”, or in the simple form: “my mind tells me”.

Therefore the “wise” man can follow his plan beforehand through time, test it and adapt it before it is despatched, or hold it back till the way is ready. But if

wisdom could go no farther, then his rede or counsel would after all be only as a boat thrust out on the waters without a crew, entrusted to favourable current and favourable wind; the wise and strong man's luck followed his plan, steering, pushing on and keeping it towards the goal. The thought goes forward, doing with force and effect what it was sent to do. It is as if it had eyes to see with and sense to speak for itself, and at any rate it can force its way into folk's minds and turn them as it will. All that it meets on its way through the world it takes to itself and uses as its implement.

The success of a plan depends wholly on what it has in it from its first outgoing, for it has its origin in a conception that gave it life and inspired it with luck. The projects coming from the greatest minds are at one and the same time the boldest and the safest of execution. The king's luck takes form as mighty thoughts of conquest — as when Harald had the luck to make all Norway one — and as inventions of genius, as for instance when a war-king conceives the idea of the wedge-shaped phalanx, which is mythically expressed as a device suggested by a god.

If a man have not luck enough in himself to foster such a “counsel” as he needs, he goes, presumably, to a man of might and begs him to put something of his own virtue into the undertaking already planned. And naturally, if one went to a man about some difficult business and asked his advice, one expected to be given good, *i. e.* lucky counsel (*hell ráð*) and not empty words that one had oneself to fill with progress and blessing. Empty, luckless folk might come to grief with spiritual values because they did not understand how to use them; if properly handled, the counsel must return with fruit. Naturally the ancient word *rede* or counsel comprises several meanings which are sharply differentiated in our dualistic culture; plan and resolution on the one hand, and advice on the other, are nothing but luck applied to one's own or to other people's affairs.

If a plan really has life in it, then it can only be checked by a greater luck killing it. A thought from some greater wisdom can go out and offer battle. The higher wisdom need not wait until the counsel has been despatched, it can lay itself like a nightmare upon a poorer man's luck and make it barren and confused. Thus it happened, to quote an instance from life, to the wise Thorleif of the Uplands, when Olaf Tryggvason, for very Christian reasons, sought the life of the obstinate heathen chief, and sent his faithful servant, Hallfred the Wayward Scald, to carry out his design. When the poet hero turned up in disguise at Thorleif's homestead, the old man asked what news he brought, and more especially if he knew anything of a certain Hallfred, for “he has often appeared to me in dreams; not that it should be strange for me to dream, but there will come king's men to this place ere long, and as to this Hallfred, I can never properly make him out from what folk say, and my luck is at an end in the matter of what is to come”. In other words: I may dream of him; but I see nothing in my dreams but a veil over the future.

When a man brought forth speech out of his store of words, the hearers could discern whether he were a man of luck. The Northmen, and probably also the Germanic peoples generally, cherished a great admiration for art in words; encomiums of fine oratory are frequent in their literature, and their delicate

wording, together with keen judgement of effects, almost makes us sharers in the complacency with which the listeners settled down when a man stood up among them who had luck to send his words safely into what harbour he pleased. The lucky man's speech would fall in those short, sharp images that the Northmen loved; the well-formed sentences leading one another forward instead of stumbling one over another, just as the separate movements, stroke and guard, fitted together when executed by a lucky body. The words of luck found vent in such proverbial concentrations of speech that struck at the very centre of a difficulty and cut at one sharp blow the question in dispute. Luck inspired a man at the moment of his fall to utter words so pregnant as to be held in memory to his honour. But words, if uttered by a man of great luck, had likewise the double edge peculiar to the weapons of victorious fighters: they struck down among men, loosed the spell of lukewarmness and lack of courage, or made open foes of secret haters, as Egil thanks the gods that he could do. There was a great difference between what a king said and what a peasant said, even though they meant more or less the same thing. When Olaf Tryggvason stood up at the law-thing, where men crafty in words were gathered to oppose him, all were cowed out of opposition by the utterances of the king.

Words were dangerous. They could bite through luck and fix themselves in a man. They were not to be likened to sharp arrows which wounded, but might then be drawn out and flung to the ground. For they had life in them, they would creep about inside the victim, hollowing him out till there was no strength left in him, or they would change him and mould him according to their own nature.

It was often a good plan to belabour one's enemies with words before attacking with weapons; one could in this wise weaken the opponent's watchfulness, blunt his courage and adroitness and dilute his invulnerability. In Saxo's narrative of Fridleif's fight with the giant, the king commences the combat by uttering taunts, for, according to the mediæval monk, the giant was easier to cope with when he had first been irritated by scornful verses: "You three-bodied giant, almost knocking your head against the sky, why do you let that foolish sword dangle at your side? . . . Why cover that strong breast with a frail sword? You forget how big you are, and trust in that little dagger. I will soon make your onslaughts vain, when you strike with that blunt edge." Now there is danger that the sword may prove too light, and its edge unable to cut through. "Seeing you are such a timid beast ... you shall fall flat on your face; for in that proud body you bear a craven and fearful heart, and your courage is not equal to your limbs . . . Therefore you shall fall without fame, having no place among the bold, but set in the ranks of those whom no man knows." Now it were best for the giant to look to his courage and his honour, and strike ere the words have taken effect. He will be robbed of his courage if the power from without be not flung back as quickly as possible.

Once, when the Britons were attacked by the king of the Northumbrians, they had taken a whole little army of monks with them, and placed them in a safe spot, to pray during the fight. King Æthelfrid, with practical sense, first sent his men to cut down the monks, and then proceeded to deal with the warriors. "If they call on their god to help them against us", he said, "then they are fighting against us, even though they use no weapon, since they oppose us with their prayers." Granted that such prayers were actually addressed to God, Æthelfrid

yet knew that even though the strong words made a slight detour, they would certainly end in the men for whom they were intended.

The power of words is such that they can transform a man when they enter into him, and make a craven or a niding of a brave man. The insinuation does not merely depreciate him in his neighbours' eyes — nay, the reverse, the contempt of the world is a result of the taunting gibe having entered into the man, attacked his manhood, and in the truest sense rendered him a poorer creature; it eats its way in through honour and frith, and will not rest until his humanity is bitten through at the root. The greater the tension in the sender's luck and honour, the stronger the word, and the more dangerous the wound. The utterances of petty folk, with little mind beyond their needs to lay in their words, might perhaps be taken lightly; certain great men, indeed, might ignore them altogether. But if there were luck behind the words, it were wisest to lose no time in rendering them harmless and getting one's honour back by vengeance. The counsel offered by Norwegian and Icelandic laws for cases of milder, everyday misuse of the vocabulary, *viz.* to answer back word for word, is only valid to a very limited extent, and must be received with the greatest caution; one must never forget that answering back does not give reparation, and it is well then to consider whether one can afford to forego a strengthening of one's honour.

But words can of course equally well carry a blessing with them. A good word at parting is a gift of strength to the traveller. When the king said "Good luck go with you, my friend," the man set out carrying a piece of the king's power in him. "Luck on your way to your journey's end, and then I will take my luck again," is a saying still current among the Danish peasantry. A good word given on coming to a new place meant a real addition to one's luck. When Olaf the Peacock moved into his new homestead, old Hoskuld, his father, stood outside uttering words of good luck; he bade Olaf welcome with luck, and added significantly: "This my mind tells me surely, that his name shall live long." *Orðheill*, word-luck, is the Icelandic term for a wish thus charged with power, either for good or evil, according as the speaker put his goodwill into his words and made them a blessing, or inspired them with his hate, so that they acted as a curse. There was man's life in words, just as well as in plans, in counsel. Thoughts and words are simply detached portions of the human soul and thus in full earnest to be regarded as living things.

The ancient word *rede* — Anglo-Saxon *ræd*, Icel. *ráð* — is a perfect illustration of Teutonic psychology. When given to others, it means counsel; when applied to the luck working within the mind, it means wisdom, or a good plan, and from an ethical point of view, just and honest thoughts. But the word naturally includes the idea of success, which accompanies wise and upright devising, and on the other hand power and authority, which are the working of a sound will. Men setting about to discuss difficult matters stand in need of rede and quickness of mind, says an Old-English writer. According to the Anglo-Saxon poet, the lost angels fell because they would no longer keep to their rede, but turned away from God's love; they did that which was sinful, and at the same time ill-advised, and thereby brought about their own undoing. And Satan complains that Christ has diminished his rede under heaven, rendering him

powerless. A redeless man is weakened by lack of will, lack of power and lack of self-assertion. The poet of the Anglo-Saxon Christ uses this expression in order to depict the abjectness of the damned, when they stand on the left side at the Judgement Day, and hear the Lord's command: Go hence, accursed ones: "They cannot withstand the bidding of the king of heaven, bereft of rede" as they are. Not until we have mastered the whole content, can we realise the depth of Satan's exclamation: Why should I serve, I can raise myself a higher seat than God's: strong companions, famed heroes of unbending courage, that will not fail me in the fight, have chosen me their lord, "with such one can find rede".

To feel the force in the ancient thoughts we must take care that our dynamic theories are not allowed to slip in; rede is not energy residing in the words, but the words themselves as well as the soul. Luck stretches in one unbroken continuity from the core of man's mind to the horizon of his social existence, and this, too, is indicated in the meaning of rede, which comprises the state or position of a man, his influence and competence.

The inner state of a man in luck is described in Icelandic as a whole mind, *heill hugr*, which of course comprises wisdom as well as goodwill and affection. The man of whole mind is true to his kin and his friends, stern to his enemies, and easy to get on with, when lesser men come seeking aid. His redes are really good gifts to the receiver — whole redes, in Icelandic *heil ráð*.

Outwardly, luck is dependent on the mutual love of kinsmen. With the flourishing of frith go luck and well-being. And in the opposite case, when men cannot agree, all life sickens and fades, until everything is laid waste. This rule applies to all frith communities, not only the family, but also temporary connections in the sign of frith (and under any other sign no alliance was possible). When men united in any undertaking, fishing or other occupation, the result would depend upon the power of the individuals to maintain friendly and sincere relations with one another. In the Laxdoela Saga, we chance upon this piece of information: "Wise men held it of great weight that men should well agree when on the fishing grounds: for it was said that men had less luck with their catch if they came to quarrelling, and most therefore observed caution."

The state of honour likewise determines the rise and fall of the family. The man who gains renown, wins not only the advantages that go with the esteem of his fellows — he augments the blessing, the power of growth and fertility both in his cattle and in his fields; he lays the foundation for new kinsmen in the family: the women will bear more easily and more often, the children be more hopeful and forward. Even in late centuries, the reciprocal responsibility of honour and luck were so rooted in Norwegian popular beliefs that men could say: No man has luck to gain and keep wealth until he has slain two men and paid for the deed to the heirs and to the king. And the same association of ideas underlies the faith of Norwegian peasants in the luck and healing power of families descended from stern and murderous men, whose honour could be proved by numerous killings.

If frith and honour sicken, the result is a decline in all that appertains to the family, decline and finally downfall. The Beowulf has, as we have seen, already given a description of the effects of villainy; the dying out of the stock and the



wasting of its goods. These verses wherein the wages of cravenness are so depicted, no doubt allude primarily to the sufferings originating in men's contempt for lack of honour; but the picture can be applied word for word to an earlier and more original view, according to which the social consequences of shame were only correlative to its directly destructive effect: "Never more shall any of that race grasp gladly the gold."

The northern description of the last things is only an enlarged form of this curse: men grow poorer and poorer, their power of action, their courage, confidence, mutual feeling and feeling of frith are scorched away; "brothers fight and kill each other, cousins rive the frith asunder, whoredom great in the world . . . no man spares another" however near of kin they may be; the heat of the sun declines, the earth grows cold and bare, early frost and late frost bite off the young shoots; summers grow weaker and weaker, winters more and more stern.

The poet of the *Voluspá* is certainly inspired by contact with Christendom for his eschatological vision; but there are only insignificant traces of direct impulse from Christian ideas. The inspiration caught from the West has worked so deeply in the poet that the ancient legends and images rise up and take on a new significance. His faith in the old ideals and his anguish at seeing them crumbling in the turmoil of the viking age impregnate one another, and at the touch of Christianity, this interpenetration of ethics and experience produces a coherent view of history on the strength of a leading idea. The poet's vision, which moulds the traditional legends to its purpose without in any perceptible way changing their contents, and wields a mass of disparate materials into unity, is the accumulation of guilt, that drives the gods through one disastrous deed after another into their doom. And to the poet, guilt is identical with breach of frith and honour. The force of his idea reveals itself in the fact that he has placed the myth of Balder's death in an intimate connection with the tenet of doomsday. The picture of the gods killing one of their brothers is given a central place, so that it gathers up the force of the events going before, and ushers in the twilight of the gods and of the world.

That luck and progress are dependent on frith and honour was a maxim borne out by experience, but the sentence could with equal truth be read conversely: Luck is the condition that determines frith and honour.

When frith is broken, so that kinsmen forget themselves towards one another, the fault lies in luck; either it has in some way suffered scathe, or it is by nature inadequate, leaving men helpless and without bearing. A good woman by the name of Saldis rejoiced in the two sons of her daughters; they were both promising lads, and moreover they loved one another tenderly. One day, Oddbjorg, a woman who could read the future, walked into the homestead; Saldis presented her grandchildren to the guest with pride and bade her prophesy, adding: "See to it, that your words turn out happily." "Ay, promising are these two lads," Oddbjorg admitted, "if only their luck will last, but that I do not see clearly." No wonder that Saldis spoke harshly to her; but the other only answered: "I have not said too much; I do not think their love will last long." On being pressed further she blurts out: "They will come to seek each other's lives." And so it happened. — When Sverri delivered the funeral oration over his kinsman and opponent, King Magnus, he began thus: "The man by whose bier

we now stand was a brave man, gracious to his men, but we kinsmen had not the luck to agree well together," and so on, "with many fair words, such as he knew how to turn the way he would." It is instructive to see how this highly accomplished and reflecting struggler Sverri, again and again in his calculated endeavours to speak in a popular tone, has recourse to the old ideas; he himself is modern throughout, and purposely joins his cause with Christianity and the strong element that has a future before it; but to get a grip on men's minds, it is necessary to speak in a popular form, he knows. And he understands how to do it.

To form a happy couple, the bride and bridegroom need luck. Hrut, an Icelander of unusual qualities and high extraction, and also a man of great insight, was late in marrying; one day his friends proposed a match with a lady of good family, called Unn. Hrut entered upon the plan, but rather hesitatingly, saying: "I do not know whether we two will have luck together." Hrut did not know at the time, that he would fall under the spell of an imperious woman, but on a visit to Norway he found favour with the Queen Mother, and their intimacy embittered the subsequent conjugal life of Hrut and Unn and finally wrecked their marriage.

Villainy, the act and state of the *niding*, is identical with unluck. "Late will that unluck pass from my mind," says Bolli when Gudrun congratulates him on having killed his cousin Kjartan; and in the *Volsungasaga*, Sinfjotli is taunted with his violent career in these words: "All unluck came upon you, you killed your brothers." Strikingly effective is the outburst of feeling in Kalf Arnason's words after the battle of Stiklestad. Kalf and his brother Finn had fought on opposite sides in the battle, Finn being a staunch supporter of the king, whereas Kalf occupied a prominent place among those who worked for his downfall. When the fight was over, Kalf searched the field and offered help to his brother, who lay severely wounded. But Finn aimed a blow at him, calling him a faithless villain and a traitor to his king. The blow failed, and Kalf gratefully exclaimed: "Now the king is watching over you, not wishing you unluck, but knowing that I needed care." Kalf, who had been Olaf's bitterest opponent, now extols the fallen king's luck as being strong enough to prevent the unbounded sorrow and anger of a king's man from turning to villainy.

In Gisli's saga, there is an exchange of words where "unluck" and "villainy" are used alternately with equal force. After Gisli had killed his sister's husband, he was hunted from one hiding place to another; but the incessant pursuit of his enemies was for a long time successfully thwarted by the exertions of his wife, Aud. On one occasion, when Eyjolf, who leads the avenging party, tries to drive her into giving up her husband, she pours out her scorn and insults him so cuttingly that he shouts: "Kill the dog, even though it be a bitch." Thanks to a brave man of the party, Havard, Eyjolf was saved from the ignominy of laying hand on a woman; on seeing Eyjolf forgetting himself, Havard exclaimed: "Our doing here is shameful enough, without wreaking such villainy as this; up, and do not let him get at her." Eyjolf now turned his wrath upon his friend, saying: "It is a true word: choose your company badly at home, and you will rue it on the road." But the saga proceeds: "Havard was much liked, and many were willing to follow him; also, they would gladly save Eyjolf from that unluck."

When villainy is called unluck, the latter term is not to be taken as an excuse; on the contrary the word conveys a strong condemnation of the man who is denounced as being unlucky. When King Hakon, in the previously mentioned condemnation of taking vengeance on the wrong man, calls such an act unluck, he is choosing the very sharpest term he can find in his vocabulary, the word that comes nearest to the idea of deadly sin. Unluck is mischief, and an “unlucky” man is the same as a niding, or in certain cases, a potential niding. The bluntest way of refusing a man who appeals for friendship, is by saying: “You do not look to be a lucky man (*úgæfusamligr*), and it is wisest to have no dealings with you”; these words simply imply moral as well as prudential misgivings; to draw out the full import of the sentence we must give two parallel renderings: you have no luck in your doings, and cannot bring those about you other than ill-fortune, — and: you are not to be trusted, a man may expect anything of you. And even when Njal says of his sons that they are not men of luck, the sentence had probably at that time a bitterer undertone than we now at once perceive; it implies, that the young men want wit and forethought, and it means further, that they are lacking in self-control and moral restraint.

The uncanny symptoms of villainy lie in the fact that luck and honour are identical. Luck is the combination of frith and honour seen from another side, and unluck, in the old sense, is simply the reverse of that feeling of kinship we have now learned to understand.

It is luck which enables men to maintain their frith, their friendship, to keep their promises, and refrain from dishonourable acts. But luck is more. It gives men the will to act morally, or rather, it is moral will itself. When Hrut utters his misgivings: “I do not know whether we two will have luck together,” he is thinking of their power of having and keeping mutual love, and their ability of creating frith in their home, as much as of their power of enjoying each other and having offspring.

In the Germanic idea, the moral estimate is always ready to rise to the surface; in fact, for the expression of goodness, piety and uprightness, the Teutons have no better words than lucky (Anglo-Saxon *sælig*, Gothic *séls* and similar terms), which embrace the idea of wealth and health, happiness and wisdom. In later linguistic periods, the ethical side of the idea often becomes dominant, and determines the use of the word in Christian writings. Thus the Gothic *séls* and the opposite *unséls*, are for the translator of the Bible the best equivalent for the “good” and “evil” of the New Testament.

## CHAPTER V

# LUCK IS THE LIFE OF THE CLAN

Luck is the ultimate and deepest expression of man's being, and that which reaches farthest. We cannot get behind it; however far we may go into the human soul, we can never get sight of luck from behind. First and foremost, the feeling of kinship is an outcome of luck, and when illwill and villainy break forth,

these disorders prove that the heart of that family is ruined, and we can then with absolute surety foretell that the one villainy will be followed by others, and the work of that race be barren. Thus naturally the people argued in the case of Sigurd Slæmbi, when, after having killed his brother, he claimed the title of king: "If you are truly a son of King Magnus, then your birth was unlucky (and iflboding, *úgiptusamligr*), and thus too it has fallen out, if you have murdered your brother." The unluck is by no means a consequence that comes halting along in the wake of misdeeds or dishonour. The Germanic mind actually counts on the fact that unluck sooner or later will arise in the place where dishonour has manifested its appearance, for the very reason that the concatenation of events was not dependent on God's keeping a strict balance. Fault and retribution are not connected by an intermediate link, that may perhaps be sundered.

Luck, then, is the power that inspires a man and emanates from his person, filling his words and his deeds; it comprises all the requirements of the family, its powers and possibilities, its accomplishments and its hope, its genius and character. Luck contains the very existence of the clan; the family is called *kynsæll*, lucky in kinship, when kinsmen are numerous and new members are constantly being born to fill the places falling vacant. In Anglo-Saxon, the same idea is expressed by *tuddorspéd*, which means luck in offspring and power of cohesion. In luck there lies, moreover, existence from the social point of view, the outward esteem in which the family is held. Prosperous kinsmen are said to possess man-luck (*mannheill*), i. e. the luck to have the friendship and affection of others, and luck of fame (*orðheill*), so that people speak well, both in goodwill and with respect, of them. In the Anglo-Saxon Genesis, God promises Abraham's son *freondspéd*, luck in friends, or, as we might equally well translate it, a wealth of friends. — Finally, luck involves honour, both that which shines out in the splendour of renown, and that which lies compressed to a power of tension in the human soul.

Luck sets its stamp upon a man outwardly. Whence had the Northmen their keenness of vision, which enabled them to apprise a man at a glance? At the first meeting they would say either: he is a man promising luck and honour (*sæmliǵir* and *hamingjusamligr*), one luck is to be expected of (*giptuvænliǵir*), or: he bears the mark of unluck (*úgiptubragð*). Partly on the strength of intuition, as we say — or, as the ancients put it, because the mind of the beholder told him what to think of the stranger, — but partly on external criteria; luck manifested itself openly in the newcomer's mien, gait, behaviour, bearing, and not least in his well-nourished appearance, his health, his dress, and his weapons. Only a family of wealth and speed is able to send its youngling out in many-coloured clothes and with a splendid axe, an "heirloom" of a weapon.

When Njal's Sons with their friends made their famous round of the booths at the Al-thing to gather supporters for the decisive suit, Skarphedin managed to stifle the dawning goodwill of one great man after another, because he could not repress his ironical smile and bitter words of scorn. The keen-sighted chieftain Snorri Godi discovered the secret of Skarphedin's failure when he said: "Doughty you look, Skarphedin, but your luck is near its end, and I should think you have but little of life remaining." At earlier times, when the words still

retained their original force, a man's doom was contained in the single sentence: Luck forsook him.

This luck — or in another word, *hamingja* — comprises all, body and soul, that made up a man's humanity; and to gather the full value of the term, we must bear in mind that this *hamingja* constitutes a whole, homogeneous throughout. Even though it may manifest itself in different forms, according as it makes its way out through eyes, hands, head, through cattle or weapons, it is one and indissoluble. Behind the visible man, or more correctly, behind the visible circle of kinsmen, there is a spiritual sum of force, of which the kinsmen are representatives. In a trial of strength, the whole *hamingja* is at stake, and in the result, it emerges, either stronger and more handsome in all its limbs, or palsied throughout.

It is this compact strength which makes king's luck so invincible to ordinary men. "You have not luck to measure yourself against the king," one may say; and this means, you have not kinsmen enough, not wit, courage, war-speed enough; your power to victory is too slight, your gift of fertility too weak. While you sleep, the king's *hamingja* will take yours by surprise, blind it and confuse it; his *hamingja* will pit itself against yours in other men's minds and cripple it, and before you come to face each other in open fight, you will be a paralysed man. The Northmen have an expression, *etja hamingju*, literally, to urge luck with a man, just as one might urge a horse with him, let one's war stallion bite and try its strength against his. Indeed, every trial of strength between men was a strife between two powers of luck, a spiritual conflict. The result of the fight depended to a great extent upon the man's quickness and agility, just as the luck of a horse depended on its owner's ability to support it and urge it on; but there was still something stronger which filled the scene, the struggle between the combatants was only part of a contest fought in a larger field of battle by powers who never slept.

"You have not luck to measure yourself against the king," said Kveldulf to his son Thorolf, when the relations between the king and the young chieftain drew nearer and nearer to open conflict. But long before that time, the old man had warned his sons against having anything whatever to do with Harald:

"My mind tells me that we kinsmen will not have luck with this king, and I will not fare to meeting with him." The saga lets Thorolf's brother make use of the same expression in his explanation to the King, when the latter is half forcing him into his service: "Thorolf was a far more notable man than I, and he had not luck to serve you. I will not serve you, for I know that I have not luck to yield you such service as I should wish, and as might rightly be expected." The fact was, that these big yeomen had not the aptitude for such a position, or, which comes to the same thing, they had not the will to adapt themselves to it.

And here we come to a deep-rooted peculiarity in the psychology of the ancient character. The idea that if one but earnestly wills, then the power will come, or *vice versa*, that the power perhaps may be there, but the will be lacking, had no validity for the Northman. All his peculiarities were due to the nature of his luck; obstinacy as well as courage, pride as well as inclination to serve the greater man, violence and intractability as well as fearlessness. Luck is the nature of the mind, the character and will. With our ideas as to the reciprocal

effects of desire and will, we must again and again in these old sagas find ourselves face to face with insoluble riddles. It often seems as if men would gladly relinquish destructive undertakings, as if they would gladly clear away misunderstandings and enmity, but something invisible leads their endeavours to miss the mark. We may say: they cannot because they will not, or they will not because they are not able, for both sentences are equally true. When we, in such cases, call in the idea of trust in fate and servitude to fate, it is easy to lose sight of the true reason why these men cannot resist fate, *viz*, that they will their own fate. It is the will in them that forces them up against desire and calculation and brings their most serious plans to naught, because the will has its nature, and cannot act beyond the limits drawn for it by its own character. The luck of Kveldulf's Sons was once and for all of such a character that it could not fit in with the king's; and therefore it was best to keep them apart. It was not so much the difference in strength which determined the relations of men one with another in the world, but quite as much the dissimilarity in character between them.

The luck of the chieftain was of a far different volume from that of the peasant. "You are rich in luck" (lit. your luck goes a long way), "and all turns out well in your hand," says Sæmund characteristically to the old Vatsdoela magnate Ingimund, when he himself can no longer manage his headstrong kinsman Hrolleif, and begs Ingimund to receive him. The secret of the chieftain's power to achieve the impossible lies, however, not in the bulk of his luck, but in its distinctive character.

This peculiarity of luck constitutes the natural foundation of a Germanic king's authority and influence. He has very little formal power, or hardly any; whether men will obey his commands or not depends on their inclination at the moment.

The Southerners observed the anarchy that displayed itself in the Germanic hosts, and gave up all attempt to find any common sense in the Teutons' monarchical principles. These barbarians, say the classical writers, show no respect to their prince, they do not salute him; if the king's decision displease them, then they surround his tent and force him with loud cries to alter his plans; they bring matters to war where he wishes peace, and peace when he desires war; it may happen, that in a fit of dissatisfaction with him, they simply drive him out. — Behind the words of the Romans we seem to catch an ironic question: what on earth do such creatures want with a king at all? We have no reason to discredit the observations of our authorities; they are for the most part made with the intelligence that comes of a cultured mind, and with the cultured mind's watchful interest in barbarians pressing ever closer on the frontiers of civilization. It is another matter, that the observer only saw the outward movements, and by his very culture was prevented from perceiving the nervous system that produced them. These statements must stand in some relation or other to the no less undeniable fact that the Germanic royal families possessed a remarkable toughness. We find tribes drifting vagabond fashion about over the greater part of Europe, now fighting for their lives, now sitting comfortably at ease in conquered territory, but always, century after century, under the same race of kings.

Procopius gives a priceless narrative of the Herules' fidgety experiments in kingship, wherein both the front and the reverse of barbarian loyalty are

portrayed with the keenness of caricature. The Herules, he says, one day hit upon the idea of trying what it was like to live without a king; accordingly, they took their only royal personage and slew him. No sooner had they tasted the sweetness of freedom, however, than they discovered that it did not agree with them. Regretting what they had done, and feeling that they must get back the old state of things at any cost, they sent an embassy from the Mediterranean countries up to the North, to fetch them a king of the old stock. The ambassadors go trapesing through Europe, and find a prince in Scandinavia; unfortunately, he dies between their fingers on the way. Undismayed, they turn back for a new specimen, which they manage to bring safely through to the south. Meanwhile, the others at home, having plenty of time to reflect, took it into their heads that in a matter of such importance it would be wrong not to consult Justinian; and surely enough, the emperor happened to know a native Herule living at the court of Byzantium, whom he could-therefore highly recommend. But just as everything is going well, comes a message to the effect that the Scandinavian previously requisitioned is on the way. The Herules, having put Justinian and his good men to such inconvenience, can do no less than show themselves worthy of the confidence shown in them; they follow their ruler with enthusiasm into the field, ready to put the late-cornet to the right-about. Unfortunately, they have a quiet night to think matters over, and this they utilise to go over to the side of the traveller from afar, leaving the Imperial candidate to find his own way home to Byzantium.

A most curious history, this, but one bearing the stamp of verisimilitude. Such kaleidoscopic characters are only to be equalled in the accounts given by Europeans of what they themselves have seen among savage and barbarous peoples. The analogy with the researches of modern ethnologists increases the likelihood that Procopius is merely relating simple notorious facts, but this comparison also suggests the possibility that Procopius has missed some hidden principle guiding the acts of the barbarians. The explanation lies partly in the political relations between the Herules and the emperor of Byzantium, partly, and chiefly, in the people's spiritual dependence upon the right king; king by the grace of God, as we might say, or by the grace of luck, as the Herules might have said. Jordanes has formulated the monarchical principle in his simple, mediæval manner: The Goths regarded their noble families as more than human, as demigods, "those in whose luck they, as it were, conquered."

In Sweden, the king and his people lived an open and honest life together, without any illusions. The fundamental paragraph in the part of the Westgöta law treating the king's rights and duties, runs: The Upper Swedes are to take the king, and to drive him out. And if we compare this pregnant maxim with the description given by the historian Snorri of the thing-meeting at Upsala, we may find here a powerful historical illustration of the rule. On this occasion, Thorgny the Lawman addresses the angry king as follows: "Now we yeomen will that you agree with Olaf the Thick and marry your daughter to him.

But if you will not have it as we say, then we will all go against you and kill you, and not suffer you to disturb the law and the peace of the land. Thus our forefathers did aforetime; they cast down five kings into a well because they were swollen with overweening pride, as you are now to us. Choose then at once what terms you will."



There is nothing very splendid about a royalty whose representative must suffer such a form of address. But when the lawman gives historical precedent for such obedience on the part of the king, he is unwittingly presenting the relation between king and people from another side. Thorgny gives King Olaf to understand what sort of ancestors were his, men who every summer went out on forays and subjugated the eastern lands: the earthen strongholds they raised over in Finland, Esthonia and Courland are still to be seen; these heroes, he goes on, were not too proud to listen to the advice of other men. Thorgny is perfectly right. But if the miserable Olaf of Sweden had taken after his ancestors, he could safely have asked for advice from other men, without fear of being forced into a peace that went against his will. Unfortunately, we know hardly more about these forefathers of Olaf's than Thorgny here tells us; thus much, however, is fairly certain: it was not the peasants who planned those forays and ravagings outside the country; it was the king. Eric the Victorious, Bjorn, and these conquering rulers of Sweden whatever they were called, gained both honour and advantage from the wars; the peasants no doubt got their share of honour, and possibly also their share of the booty, but the advantages of territorial acquisitions can never be so fully exploited in the work of a farm as they can at the king's court. The king neglected nothing of his work at home by being away on expeditions, but the peasants might well have work enough of their own to keep them busy during the summer. It might be, then, that other men listened well enough and willingly enough to what those kings said.

This trial of strength between the peasants' spokesman and the Upsala king rises to the position of a symbol of the Germanic kingship, in which its peculiar strength and its peculiar weakness are each sharply defined. Here, as everywhere among the peoples of the North, it is the king's initiative that furnishes under takings for the people. He stands, and not to the eye of the alien chronicler alone, as the conqueror, from whom plans emanate, and emanate in the form of commands. He commands, but he has nothing beyond what we should call his personality to rely upon for the enforcement of his commands. There are no statutes, no royal prerogatives to support him when he begins to show himself "redeless". All his power lies in the firm grip of superior luck; if that fail but a moment, then the people come forward with their: "we will not suffer injustice at your hands", and there is little then that the king can do that will not naturally be included under the heading of injustice. But as long as the king's plans are put forward with the effectiveness of luck, men will follow his call, carry out his plans, submit without audible protest to arbitrary acts and interference with their liberties. Then there is little that cannot be included under the heading of "law" or justice.

At a hasty glance, it might seem as if the kingly power were something floating loosely over the life of the people. And yet the truth is, that kingship is an institution which no revolutions, let alone momentary fancies, can shake. He who sits in the king's seat has it in his power to make himself the state, and on the other hand, he can make himself a powerless shadow of the state; but he cannot efface himself. While rights may wax and wane, the chieftainship stands fast, because the one family represented by the king or the chieftain, possesses a luck of altogether egregious character, not only stronger and more manifold, but in its essence fundamentally different from that of all others.

When the people sweep the king aside, then the reason is that they feel the decline of his "speed", his power to victory, but the luck itself, that family luck from which his personal influence wells up, is a thing they cannot do without. They know there is danger in thrusting him out: he has something peculiar in him that is not to be found anywhere else in the land, a luck to which they trust, and that with a faith rooted deep down in the lower strata where lie not only vital courage but vital fear. The individual holder of the title may degenerate — but the people of the land will keep to his stock nevertheless. They must have a representative of the superlative hamingja with them in the fight, or all their courage will be in vain. A child could accomplish more than a host of courageous and skilful warriors. Little King Ingi, poor child, was at the age of two wrapped in a fold of Thjostolf Mason's cloak, and carried under the banner in the forefront of that battle which was to decide his right to Norway. Luck was evidently in him, for the men carrying him in their midst won the day; but it was too frail to stand all the hard knocks; his legs and back were never sound thereafter.

In the same way the Frankish queen Fredegunde used her little son Chlotar as a shield against misfortune. She had had her husband Chilperich killed in order to set her son in his stead. Now the avenger comes upon her, in the person of Chilperich's nephew with numerous allies. Fredegunde staked all on a single throw, ventured an attack at dawn, and gained the victory; but indeed she had herself carried little Chlotar on her arm in the midst of the army throughout the battle.

But in thus emphasising the peculiar position of the king's luck, we moderns, whose thoughts always group themselves in categories, invariably lump the Teuton kings together as a species, and register the king's luck as an item in Germanic culture, and thus we lose sight of the true secret that every king's luck was a thing apart from all else, and owed its influence to individual powers of its own.

The history of the Norwegian kingship, its centuries of conflict with the old chieftainship, as represented by the "hersirs" or petty kings, may serve as a grand illustration of the individuality of king's luck. The kings of Norway were famed for their power and authority. Olaf Tryggvason ruled, apparently, as a self-constituted despot: he "forced Norway to Christianity"; those who would not as he willed, he mutilated, killed, or sent headlong out of the country; he could set out upon the strange expedition against the Vends followed by the chieftains of Norway and their fleets. But in the sagas, Olaf by no means always appears as triumphing over the will of the people and their leaders.

As soon as the king ventures into countries not in the strictest sense his by inheritance, the local chiefs come out against him as his equals, and offer terms. When Olaf Tryggvason appears in the Gula-thing with his proposal for conversion, he is given this answer by Olmod the Old: "If it is your mind to force us, and encroach upon our law (*i. e.* the state of law we live in) and make us subject to you, then we will resist with all our might, and let victory decide. But if you will make it worth while for us kinsmen, then you might gain our services." They price their loyalty at nothing less than a matrimonial alliance with the house of Norway, and demand the king's sister for their kinsman Erling Skjalgson. And the king at once sees the honour of such a proposal. Olaf then

holds another meeting with the peasants to discuss the question of religion, and when Olmod and Erling Skjalgson, Olaf's new brother-in-law, with all the circle of their kin, support the king's proposal, "no man dared to speak against it, and all the people were made Christians." It was on this occasion that Erling Skjalgson declined the offer of an earldom with the famous words: "My kinsmen have been hersirs." — Later, Olaf the Saint was similarly obliged to come to an agreement with Erling, and what this agreement meant appears as plainly as could be desired on a later occasion, when Erling actually raises an army and comes at the head of a couple of thousand men to claim his rights.

What we here see is the trial of strength between the old petty kingships and the new sovereignty of the country as a whole. And the minor princes are, where they stand on their own ground, the stronger. The people followed them, as it would seem, blindly, "wishing no other thing than they said", setting their shoulders firmly to the demands put forward by the chieftain, and often actually maintaining them — for the men did what they did in full confidence in the luck that inspired their chief. The yeomen trusted to his luck, because they had felt its force in themselves. These princes belonged to a race that had for generation after generation formed the centre of the life of their district; the family had had luck, and wealth enough to take up solitary adventurers and give them a place at its board, and inspire them with strength to fight its battles; it had had power enough to radiate luck over those who tilled the soil and herded cattle on their own account. Fertility and ripening oozed from its fields to those of the others, in the wake of these kinsmen others could sail with a full wind, in the strength of these highborn men they conquered, in their luck and wisdom they were agreed. The hersir was no more a despotic ruler than was the king of the country, perhaps even less so; he had but little power to command. But actually, he was more powerful than a despot. The luck of his race was interwoven with the most commonplace actions of the other families, in their peaceful occupations and their internal bickerings. He judged between them, and he could do so, because the traditional word of the law and its spirit were a living force within him. He was the personification of the social spirit, as we might say; but we feel now distinctly that this modern formula is too fiat to embrace the whole of his influence; it must be replaced by the old saying: he had law-speed in him. He was the object of a dependence so deep that it lay rooted in the self-reliance of his dependants.

Harald Fairhair had made Norway one kingdom, and conquered the local princes. But to crush them was more than he or his successors could do; the luck of the usurpers did not even succeed in piercing through that of the hersirs, so as to find root in the people itself. The old relationship between the villagers and their chieftains was a thing the successors of Harald had to leave untouched, so that in reality, as far as regarded a great part of Norway, they ruled only indirectly. For a long while Norway continued to be an assembly of lands, and the "peoples" retained the old intercourse with their chiefs, and only through them did they come into contact with the sovereign. Again and again we find a touch of something foreign, even of indifference, in their attitude towards the "outland" king. What was he to the peasants? They could not feel his luck moving the ground beneath them, whereas the luck of their hersir manifested itself in their harvests.

It is not easy to exaggerate the feeling of independence in the lands and the peoples under Harald and his dynasty, right down to the period of the great struggles for the throne. But the more we emphasise it, the keener the light we throw thereby on the power of a king like Olaf Tryggvason. His victorious march through Norway and his expedition to Vendland to secure the dowry of his queen appear in their true magnificence against such a background. Differently, but no less conspicuously, the puissance of the monarch reveals itself in the battle of Stiklestad, in which the sovereignty, despite the fall of the king, despite the victory of the peasants, celebrates its apotheosis. Comparing this meeting between chieftains and king with that other scene between Olaf Tryggvason and Erling at the Gulathing, we cannot but see that the political status of Norway is changing; the great event is not to be understood without regard to the growth of the royal power under the influence of European history. But Olaf's superiority is of far greater weight than any generation can build up, even though, with the haste of a period of transition, it heap revolution upon revolution. To be firmly established, the historical interpretation of these years must be based on a sympathetic understanding of the people's instinctive veneration for the luck of the sovereign, and the sovereign's unreflecting confidence in his own luck. Through the interaction between these tendencies and religious and political ideas coming from abroad, Norway grows from a Teutonic kingdom into a mediæval and Christian state. The death of Olaf constitutes a turning point in Norwegian history, because all the currents of the time, national as well as cosmo-political, find their confluence in Olaf and lift him into royal saintship.

Snorri Sturluson's description of the conflict between Olaf and the peasants is a worthy counterpart to his picture of the scene at Westfold. The words and the events of those memorable days have a weight that reaches far out beyond the moment, as if the great powers that carry history onward were here finding expression through men and masses of men. The description combines inner truth, such as could only be prompted by spiritual intimacy, with correctness in external facts, such as only a faithful report can preserve. The first thing that strikes us is the complete helplessness of the peasants and their leaders; the men run hither and thither, questioning, fumbling, none of the chieftains dares take the lead, one thrusts the responsibility upon the other. Olaf's party, on the other hand, bears throughout the stamp of calm, confident waiting, order, and sense of unity. Olaf possesses that unifying inspiration which carries the whole army in an elastic grip, the opposing chieftains are lacking in assurance, and feel their weakness acutely. In the peasants' army, the flow of luck threatens every moment to come to an end. Individually, each of the petty chiefs might be stronger than the king, but together, they cannot prevail against him. At home in their districts they are equal to anything, but they count for very little outside. Here the secret of Olaf's descent comes to light; the luck of the sovereign had such an extensive character that it could radiate out over the whole of Norway and could be distributed among a whole army without ebbing. The luck of Olaf was not dependent on a certain soil or an individual body of men, but could be victorious wherever the king showed himself.

It seems a contradiction that the king's luck should embrace the whole of Norway, but suddenly lose its force when applied to a limited district. But the

contradiction exists only for us, who judge the two lucks according to strength, and do not see that the decisive difference lies in their character. The luck of the 'local chieftain was absolute, but could only answer to the soul of the valley, the district, and the people; it might, of course, also extend to the fishing grounds outside the village territory, or seafaring expeditions undertaken by the villagers themselves; but in order to cover other lands and other communities it had first to undergo a transformation by drawing up the alien power into itself and assimilating it. Every luck is of its own sort. To go out fishing with a cattle-breeder's particular luck would give the same result as if one tried to catch cod with a ploughshare; to rule and give fertility in the East with a luck that pertained to the West was no less topsy-turvy; to defend or conquer Norway called for the luck of a Harald. Earl Hakon, of a powerful stock residing at Hladi, near Drontheim, at the end of the tenth century, had, when Harald's dynasty was on the wane, succeeded in usurping the kingship of Norway, and he used his power with a great deal of insolence and overbearing, which exasperated the people. His grip on Norway was insecure, because it depended on his personal shrewdness and force of character; but despite all inclination to revolt, the Norwegians were nevertheless practically forced to wait the hour when Olaf Tryggvason set up his luck as a worthy opponent to that of the earls of Hladi. When Olaf came to Norway, he was received, the saga says, by the peasants with these words: "... we thought, after the fight with the Jomsburg vikings, that no chieftain could compare with Earl Hakon in war-speed and many other qualities he had to make him a chief; but... all are now grown so weary of his insolence, that he shall lose both kingdom and life as soon as we find him. We believe that this will come about with your help and luck, such a man of luck as you are who got a hold of his son Erlend at the first attempt. Therefore we pray you be leader for this host." In the sentence: "we believe that this will come about with your help and luck," we can all but read the explanation of a century or so of Norway's history. And if we are to determine more precisely what constitutes the luck of Harald's house, we have nothing to say but this: The hamingja of a Norwegian king consists in being king of Norway, able to sit now at Viken, now at Drontheim, able to gain the victory with an army of Drontheim warriors as well as with an army of Viken warriors, able to march over Norway from one law-thing to another on a kind of peaceful conquest, as his ancestor once did in full warlike earnest, when he broke the petty kings to his will. And the only explanation of this luck is the history telling how Harald created it and his sons maintained it.

This faith in the individual luck as something that is at once a will and an impulse, a necessity and a talent, appears with peculiar splendour in the last great representative of that dynasty. Sverri, the unknown priest from the Faroes, had a double fight to wage, when he landed in Norway to claim the crown on his unsubstantiated pretension that he was descended through his father, Sigurd Mund, from Harald Fairhair. The submissive faith which went out to every pretender if he could only declare himself a descendant of Harald, had in this case to be built up among the people by the usurper himself. By his victories, he had to create, layer by layer, a conviction in the minds of the hesitant that the luck which upheld him must be the one decisive, Olaf's own. His genius is shown in the fact that he by every means of eloquence, artifice, guile, nay, deceit, manages to force the testimony of facts as far over to his own side as

possible, and hammer it firmly into the mind of the people. And this spiritual fight is the more impressive, insofar that it never clearly comes to the consciousness, but is waged between instinctive feelings in the king as well as in the people. Whether Sverri himself believed in the traditional luck, or only worked upon the potential belief that he knew was dormant in the people, is an idle question. In the history of every faith there comes a time when it can be used as a weapon by strong characters, such as are keen-sighted enough themselves not to be fettered down by its limitations; the secret of their influence lies in the fact that they are able to rise above their fellow-men in their reasoning and at the same time draw strength from a belief that is as instinctive and positive in its way as the blind confidence of the mass. Such a man was Sverri.

Sverri is the most interesting character in the history of Norway, because he translates the old idea of the king's luck into modern theories of the rights and nature of kingship. His character as the spokesman of an age of transition reveals itself in the contrast between his explicit reasonings and their underlying logic. As soon as he sets out to justify his claims, he drifts into an interpretation of the Psalms of David as prophetic foretellings of his own fate; he calls himself the messenger of God, sent out to strike down the insolents who have seated themselves on the throne without being kingly born; it is only in the theory of the king's eternal predestination in God's counsel, his call and his obligation to answer the call, his prospect of having some day to account to God for the talent entrusted to him, that he finds sound foothold, for himself. But beneath this theorising, there is the conviction that every possessor of king's luck has, not the right, but the duty to demand his share of the kingship, and that all right and law in the land must give way to the kingly born's need of rule. "Olaf's law" is the symbol of his kingly pretensions. In other words, Sverri's life still centres about the presumption that there is in every descendant of Harald or Olaf a power that forces him to be king of Norway or die. Kingly birth is not a will *or* a duty, nor is it a will *and* a duty, but at once a duty with the elasticity of will in it, and a will with the mercilessness of a duty. Kingly birth is a nature as essentially urgent as that which forces a plant to fix its roots in the earth, save that the plant can fulfil its destiny in many sorts of soil, whereas luck knows but one place to live. The kingly will, according to Sverri, cannot be imagined save as the outcome of a power that strews kingly actions about it, actions of sovereign dimensions, that cannot be carried out by any but the one, the descendant of Harald.

The priest from the Faroes forced the people to say: "Sverri is quick of wit, Sverri is a conqueror", and in return the opposing party could not say: "many are quick of wit, many are conquerors", they had to fall back on a denunciation of his religion, saying: "It is by power of the devil that he lays his plans and fights his battles."

Harald's kingship shows us the essence of luck and its qualities, emphasised in the light of history, its absolute individuality, which cannot be explained, or characterised, otherwise than by inheritance; that which we have derived from our kinsmen of old; that which they had power to be and to do. The difference between rich and poor consisted, not in the fact that the latter had been given only a small sum of luck, but that their luck was poor and inelastic, with but few possibilities, and those limited and weak. The luck of a well-to-do

yeoman was like himself, broad and safe, rich in cattle and crops, shining with splendid clothes and weapons; that of the chieftain added hereto the greater authority, love of magnificence, the power of conquest. But this does not give us the essential point, to wit, that the luck of every yeoman, every chieftain, was a character, with its peculiarities, its strength and weakness, its eccentricities, and linked throughout to a certain property. Again we have to dismiss the singular form, with its tacit assumption of community in things human, and instead of luck, use the plural form lucks, in order to emphasise the fact that these characters are not emanations of any primeval principle.

Or, we can, in place of the word inheritance, set the word honour. In honour, we have distinctly that which luck can and must be able to effect in order to maintain itself. The family has derived its renown from its ancestors, from them it has its ideals, the standard of all behaviour: how bold, active, firm, noble, irreconcilable, generous, how lucky in cattle, in crops, in sailing, the kinsmen are to be. From them also, the family has inherited that part of luck which is called friendship and enmity. Honour, and therewith luck, constitutes, as we have said, an image of the world of the family. In the quality of esteem and social position, it contains symbols of the family's surroundings, seen as personifications of the kinsmen's friendship and hate, their condescension and dependence. But these personifications are not characterless types, they resemble to the last degree the enemies and friends of the family. The luck reproduces the sharply defined features of its environment.

The sentence, that kinskip is identical with humanity, which at first sight seemed a helpful metaphor, has now revealed itself as nothing but the literal truth. All that we find in a human being bears the stamp of kinship. In mere externals, a man can find no place in the world save as a kinsman, as member of some family — only the nidings are free and solitary beings. And the very innermost core of a man, his conscience, his moral judgement, as well as his wisdom and prudence, his talents and will, have a certain family stamp. As soon as the man steps out of the frith and dissociates himself from the circle into which he was born, he has no morality, neither any consciousness of right, nor any guidance for his thoughts. Outside the family, or in the intervals between families, all is empty. Luck, or as we perhaps might say, vitality, is not a form of energy evenly distributed; it is associated with certain centres, and fills existence as emanations from these vital points, the families.

The power to live comes from within, pouring out from a central spring in the little circle, and thence absorbing the world. In order to fill his place as a man, the Germanic individual must first of all be a kinsman. The morality, sense of right and sense of law that holds him in his place as member of a state community, as one of a band of warriors, or of a religious society, is dependent upon his feelings as a kinsman; the greater his clannishness, the firmer will be his feeling of community, for his loyalty cannot be other than the sense of frith applied to a wider circle.

A comparison at this point between ancient culture and the civilization of our time will bring out the nature of luck, making for expansion as well as for concentration. We, on our part, must always be human beings before we can be kinsmen. Our happiness in the narrowest circle depends on a wider life outside,



and we have to go out into the world to find food for our home life. We cannot get on in the world at all, neither pursue our occupation nor cultivate our egoism nor our family prejudices so as not to come into conflict with the rest of mankind, unless we assimilate ourselves to a certain extent with what we call humanity. Among us, a life of kinship is only possible when the individual drags home the riches of humanity and sets the family stamp upon them, and it is the mark of an egoistical nature to collect thoughts and ideals in the larger field of society and hurry home to transform them into family blessings. In our culture, the one-sided family life involves a limitation and a consistent lowering of every spiritual value; it cannot but lead to poverty of ideas and dulness in all feelings. Thus family egoism is a vice, for the simple reason that it is impossible in itself; it can only lead a parasite existence. Its doom lies within itself; for a logical carrying out of its principles leads to suicide, in the same way as a state of amazons or a state of chaste men would annihilate itself.

For the ancient clansman, the course lies in an opposite direction. It is frith that shapes his character, and an intensifying of frith means a deepening of his character. A strengthening of the personal maintenance of honour and family involves a greater depth and greater tension in moral feelings and moral will, because it means an enrichment of the conscience. The more self-centred and *sui generis* a kinsman is, the stronger his personality and the greater his worth as a man.

Clan-feeling is the base of all spiritual life, and the sole means of getting into touch with a larger world. The same power which makes the Germanic individual a kinsman prevents him from becoming a limited family being and nothing more. The strength and depth of frith and honour mould the clans together in alliances, and call larger communities into existence. The thing-community for judging and mediating, and the kingdom or state for common undertakings, are institutions necessitated by the nature of luck. He who has felt the strength and depth of these men's frith and honour will not be in danger of misjudging the family in his historical view; but then again, he will not be tempted to set it up as the unit in existence, as the secret that explains everything in the society and the life of our forefathers.

## **CHAPTER VI**

# **THE WORLD**

After long and attentive observation of an object, one begins to feel the need of viewing it against its proper background. The formal measurements of the thing itself must be expressed in relative dimensions to make it part of the reality of the world.

To one who with unprejudiced mind re-experiences vengeance as it was, re-experiences honour as a motive power among men, brutal and sublime as it really was; to him our forefathers will appear with new life. They will begin to live and move, awakening in the observer a sympathy far removed from the

idealism wherewith a modern age ennobles its poetical or political *idées fixes*; and if we could attain to see these men, whose life in honour and luck we have learned to know, as a part of the world, and to regard luck as part and parcel of men's ideas of life in general, the reality of men and their luck would be enhanced.

Middle-garth — Anglo-Saxon Middan-geard, Old Icelandic Miðgarðr -- was the name given to the world men live in, and it extends far out on every side. Farthest out, where the heavens merge into one with the earth men tread, or the sea they fish in, there are the boundaries of this world of men. The way thither is a longer one than the stay-at-home generally believes. One may walk or sail day after day, five days, or even more perhaps, before reaching the mountains that shut men in, or the deep hole where the waters pour down.

Out there, at the boundary of Middle-garth, is the meeting place of ways from below and from above. One of them bends steeply back, but whither it leads we can never rightly learn. It would seem that none has ever passed that way. For the bridge — the rainbow — now called Bifrost, now Bilrost, stands all aflame— its colours may be seen glowing from afar — and is impassable to all save those who can move unscathed through fire. But we take it that it leads to some higher land, above the heads of men dwelling in Middle-garth.

On the other side, a way leads down into the third world, that which extends both outward from and in under Middle-garth; the road lies through deep, dark valleys, filled with the roar of icy, foaming torrents. It is clammy and resounding in the depths, but the ground is firm; the path will bear a mortal as well as dead men, and is so often travelled that there is no need to be ignorant as to whither it leads, and what is to be found at the journey's end.

This third world is, as far as we know, of endless extent. There is nothing to hinder a bold adventurer, from forcing his way ahead in the land that spreads out from Middle-garth. and down into the frosty depth, as long as he trusts his own courage to face the unknown, trusts his own strength and wit to clear a way through perils and difficulties and temptations all unlike those known on earth. He will need to be a strong man, for strength here is measured by a far higher standard — and withal, however great his strength, it will only avail him in lesser things; the rest he must win through by craft and mother wit. Even here, however, the normal human quota of wit will not suffice; for all that he sees is of alien nature now; he needs to be a great guesser.

They are hardly many who venture so far afield, and some of those adventurers whom nothing affrights will doubtless never return. But there were always enough of those who did to give an eye-witness description of Utgard, or Out-garth, as this world is called in the North.

These eye-witnesses told that when the boundary of Middle-garth was passed, the light which shines upon the earth disappeared. Daylight gives place to a gloaming, with errant gleams of light that dazzle and confuse without banishing the darkness. The road leads over damp, rimy hills, where icy winds come sweeping down; through rivers turbulent with venom and with swords. Round about sit monsters, creatures. neither man nor beast, with eyes aglare. Their glance darts forth an uncanny light, like a flame; their jaws emit dense clouds of acrid breath, fierce enough to singe the hair of a man's head and blind his eyes.

And their claws are fleshed in carrion where they sit. Farthest out is the haunt — so it is said, for none would seem to have reached so far — of the giant eagle Hræsvelgr, the devourer of the dead; when he rises from one corpse to swoop upon another, his pinions raise so violent a storm as to sweep in upon earth itself.

All is horrible, ill-boding, uncanny; pregnant with deception for eyes accustomed only to human dimensions. The quasi-human forms that move there in the mist and gloom are so immense as to be hardly recognised as living till it is too late. What seems perhaps a ravine may prove to be the entrance of a house, with a giant's legs bestriding the valley midway. Inside the cave, his womenfolk sit tending a fire, grey, lank-haired, in a pose that reveals the ugliness of every limb. The streams a wanderer has to pass are of another character than the waters of Middle-garth; stepping out into them, he finds them rising about him, things living and hostile of mind. And so it is with everything there, all is instinct with an alien will. Nothing is what it seems. All is dazzlement and illusion. Things seeming dead turn living at a touch.

Only a genius of luck, able not only to edge and wind its way, but also to discern the hidden qualities of what it meets, and face it with a cunning of its own unearthly wise; only this can avail to bring one safely through.

Such is the Northmen's account of their Utgard. Farther south, in Denmark and Sweden, where the hills and the mountains gave place to broad fields and all but impenetrable woods, the world must have had a different guise. I can imagine that in some places, it might be compared to a vast clearing, with darkness rising all about in trunk and branch, interwoven to a dense wall. Beyond is the place where outlaws prowl about with the wolves for company. There too is mist and gloom. And there are paths that are no roads, being otherwise than those trodden by the feet of men. Great marsh-waters are there, under forests of enchantment and unease. Storms rise from the lakes, when the wind lifts the waters and flings them as boding clouds over the earth, darkening the day. In Jarnvidr, the forest of iron, dwell the misshapen she-giants with their spawn; creatures with nose and claw as sharp as swords, and as keen to rend human flesh. Brood on brood the creatures bear, wolves and ogres together. In the marshy gloom, where every branch is an iron claw that snaps at him who passes, a man may stumble blindly, till he finds his end as food for some foul beast. Cattle straying there return with the marks of having been breathed upon, and are fit for nothing thereafter.

One might guess at a third conception of Middle-garth prevailing, perhaps, on the broad plains whose boundaries were formed by earth and sky closing directly in. The story of Hading and his visit to the underworld, as retold by Saxo, may perhaps have come from a land where the walls of the world were formed by the horizon. A man would then go — as many have gone at other times — through the verge of the heavens as through a dense, dark cloud, a solid mass of blackness, and emerge into a land of wide-spreading plains, where all was good and pleasant to the eye. But if nothing here showed fearsome and ill-omened, it was only that the peril was more deeply hid. Common to all things of the underworld is this quality of the incalculable, confusing eye and ear. A branch turns to a serpent as one grasps it, and strikes

one dead. There are creatures that can twist the neck of a stranger by a mere glance. Fruits and fluids have power to maze a man's wits. There is no knowing the nature of things, so as to avert ill consequences by counter measures.

Sharply contrasted with the dread of this outland world is the delight in Middle-garth. Here, men look out over the fields with gladness in their eyes. We read, in the *Beowulf*, of the world of men: "One who knew of far-off things happening in the early times of men, he said, that the Almighty had made the earth, the beauteous fields, encircled by waters; the victorious God had set sun and moon for a light to lighten the people of the land, and decked the lap of earth with branches and leaves," in contrast to the domain of monsters, where steep cliffs leave but room between for a single man to pick his way, where unknown roads lead down over sheer precipices, the haunt of trolls; a joyless forest growth hangs over the grey rock; strange serpents move in the waters, and trolls lie stretched upon the headlands. These pictures in the *Beowulf* illustrate the Germanic contrast between land and unland. In this connection, it matters little that the poet characterises the "land" in alien words, and glorifies its mildness by describing it as founded in the will of a god beyond its bounds, beautified by the reflection of his creative will, — we are here only concerned with the categorical distinction: the one place is waste, the home of evil and unluck, the other the dwelling of the host of the people, living in luck, in frith, in honour. In place of the Anglo-Saxon poet's "fair fields and bright" we may set, quite simply, the Northmen's soberer term *fjölhýt fold*, "the much-useful earth". Of that other region, we read that even the hart pursued by hounds in the forest yields up its life rather than venture out into that water; for the place was not *heore*. We may as well leave the old word as it stands, for whatever modern substitute we choose would need a load of explanation to give its proper weight. The word *heore*, modern German *geheuer*, old Icelandic *hýrr*, means that which is mild, gentle, pleasant, safe; and the opposite *unheore*, *úhýrr* is — not merely something harsh and unpleasant, but — the uncanny, ill-boding; a place, a state, an atmosphere lacking in all that human beings need in order to live; it is the luckless air that stifles them. *Heore*, in other words, is "lucky" in the old sense, and what more need be said? Yonder place is *unheore*; this place, the dwelling of men, is the joyful site of their home. The forest that hangs over the marsh is called joyless, void of that delight which is the distinguishing mark of human life.

Strangely enough, it might seem. For there was no lack of things uncanny here in Middle-garth. Witch-folk and witchcraft made themselves felt often enough. In the midst of the fair earth, in its most joyous life, the greatest and fairest of all kingly halls, where rejoicing rang loudest, among the bravest of men, the greatest lovers of life and scorers of death,— here, one day, is thrust in the *unheore* in the shape of Grendel. Here is witchery, devilment, all that brave men fear before all else; death in dishonour, in craven terror, in loathsomeness; to wit, without fight or burial.

The ancients are right in their way when they declare that the world is great, that a man must travel night and day to reach the bourne of death and enchantment itself; but they know, too, that these frontier powers are well able to reach over into this world itself at times. Most peoples have their Hell-farers, who ventured so far as to be swallowed up in the land of the giants, returning

after to their own as from a strange land; the Northmen were hardly the only Germanic people to relate such journeyings of adventure. But the stories derive their interest, and their reality, from everyday experience. A man might learn the quality of yonder "unland" but a league or so from his home; and the very fact that every listener must have had some experience of uncanny powers, enabled him to appreciate the verisimilitude of the explorer's sober narrative.

It needs more than simple imagination to place oneself in the ancient world and feel at home there, with its Middle-garth as the centre of the universe. We cannot reconstruct a picture from the facts at our disposal, as the numerous abortive attempts to chart the Northmen's cosmos prove. True, the giants lived beyond the horizon — but how are we to make this agree with their stealing about at nights outside men's doors? Middle-garth is properly only the world of day; once the sun has set, and men have withdrawn into their houses, the earth is given over to things harsh and wild. In reality, earth is not the same by night as by day, any more than is a man of unluck, who goes about in the daytime with a human countenance, seemingly like his fellows, but steals forth at night in the pelt of a wolf and runs ravening abroad. All the unheore that by day is held fettered and bound by the light, rises up as the sun grows faint, to stride forth in its giant power. "All dead ones of illwill grow stronger by night than in the light of day". We may perhaps try to clear the tangle and uphold the system by holding on to the idea of the world as stratified; Utgard — I use this late Icelandic name for want of a better, since words such as "desert", "wilderness", "realm of death" each denote but one side of the unknown — Utgard extends, as we know, under the earth, and can shoot up into it through innumerable openings at any time. Here and there in the middle of the fair fields are gateways leading down into the home of monsters. It was perhaps through one such way of entry that this or that bold venturer penetrated to the innermost region of the realm of death; one could at least get as far that way as by the long way round through the horizon. But this home of giants under our feet is not a province of the main land out beyond the horizon. Can one go down into the earth and then home round by the frontiers of earth — who can say? No one denies it, for no one has declared it to be so. If the question were put, it would certainly be answered in the affirmative; but that affirmative is born of the thoughts the problem calls forth, not given of itself beforehand. The cave in the earth is Utgard itself, identical with the place beyond the horizon. And the lair of monsters does not owe its existence to any subterranean communication with a world below. The ancient view of the world will not fit in with our geographical maps, in which the different countries lie neatly side by side with linear frontiers, because the ancient world was not measured with the eyes solely as a mere external plane without depth.

It needs something more than imagination and something more than constructive power to place Middle-garth and Utgard in their due relation one to the other. Re-experience is needed. We have to build up the world anew, without regard to all we have learned, irrespective of atlas and topography. With us, the world is formed by setting observations in their place according to measuring tape and compass, but if we are to build up Middle-garth and Utgard as well, then we must take experiences as a weight — and bear in mind withal, that no scales and standard weights can here avail; all must be weighed in the hand. Experiences are too many and various to be expressed in numbers and

measurements at all. They consist not only of the impressions produced by the external eye, but have also an inner reality. When we learn that the ancients imagined the limit of the world as situate close outside their village, we are apt to conceive their horizon as narrowed accordingly; but the decisive point in their view of the world lies rather in the fact that the contents of their horizon was far deeper than we think. How large is the village? Meeting the question in words of our own, but as near to the thoughts of the ancients themselves as may be, the answer must run; It houses ourselves, it is filled with honour, with luck, with fruitfulness — and this is equal to saying, that it is the world. Yes, the village is Middle-garth itself. How large, we may also ask, is the sacred tree that stands in the centre of the village, the tutelar tree of the clan? In virtue of its sacred character and power of blessing, it bears up the world with its roots and shades the world with its branches. And so, it is the world-tree, and what matter if the eye can take in its visible shadow at a glance?

The discussion of luck and honour has given us the experiences of the ancient Teutons; we need only to let them act upon us in their full weight. On the one hand human beings and human life, as deep as it goes in its intensity; on the other, the giants, the luckless nidings, the luckless land. That part nearest to us, the playground of men, is impregnated throughout with luck, with heore, while yonder unheore increases in density and ill-favour the farther we move from the homes of men. Farthest out, it fills all there is, until it becomes personified in material shapes of mocking mimicry, such as one may find at nights or in the forest. Who is there but knows the boundary of his land, there where his luck ends? Who but knows the boundary of the land of men, where all luck ends? Do we not stand, at every moment, in the midst of our luck, looking out to every side where the unheore rises as a barrier against our honour and our will?

Such experiences, gauging by depth and constitution as well as by dimensions, feeling night as a boundary of such kind as that formed by a mountain range, could not be at ease in a geography determined by measurements of superficial area. Topographical reality is not set arbitrarily aside to give place to an imaginary landscape, but to give a true likeness of the Teuton universe, it must be adapted to include also the spiritual reality — if we can use such a word as “adapt” without necessarily supposing a conscious rearrangement of observations. In the question as to the relative position of the two realms and the nature of their boundaries, all accidents of place must give way before the overwhelming influence of difference in character. The land of luck is a whole, which is not and cannot be broken by enclaves of unluck, unheore. And all that is unheore has its place as a whole outside, something only to be reached by passing beyond the landmarks of Middle-garth. Far from needing any subterranean connection between the cave under the earth and the land beyond the horizon, the fact is that in the conception of the Teutons they are one and the same place, also in the geographical sense. To go out into the night is travelling in demon-land.

Despite all the power of demons and of Utgard, this truth still holds good, that Middle-garth belongs to men, and belongs to them because they are the strongest, the conquerors. When witchcraft ventures forth into the domain of the sun, it comes but to be crushed, and in its downfall glorify the light. The Beowulf

was not written with a view to numbing poor victims for the sacrifice by filling them beforehand with a surplus of horror and dread. In the Germanic stories and songs, men make short work of witchcraft; they carve it small, burn it and bury it under solid cairns of stone, and rejoice at the fame accruing.

There is this momentous difference between the realm of the sun and the frosty dark, that in the former, men stand as those fighting on their own ground, with a host of allies about them; trees and stones, animals and weapons, the land itself is on their side. They know all they see, know that all is what it seems, know there is order in which they can trust; they have the secret of the things about them, and can thus force nature to furnish aid. If by some carelessness they stumble, they can rise to their feet again; they can find counsel and make good damage done, and in case of need obtain restitution; but out yonder, the slightest false step places them at the mercy of unknown powers. The tree-trunk against which they stumble holds them fast and throws them to the stone, the stone again to its neighbour, and this again casts them at the feet of some vampire, where they end as bloodless carrion, sucked dry. Out there, they move among a horde of wild beasts, never daring for a moment to lower their glance, and withal unknowing what danger threatens; here, nature bids them welcome at every step and puts itself at their disposal.

They know the nature of everything, possess its secret, or more: they hold its soul in their hand. They know their world right in to its innermost corners, are intimate with all creeping and walking things that live in its many dwellings. If a beast leaps across the path, they know with a fair degree of certainty whence it comes and where it is bound for, and why it took that road. Their knowledge is more a sort of personal familiarity than any lore of nature.

There are, of course, a host of things which a man must see and know as long as he stands face to face with nature, himself exacting tribute and taking what he needs. He must know, and does know, where to find the plants and animals that provide him with food and implements; he must be able to follow on the heels of the higher animals and outwit them by craft. And he must have a sure knowledge of nature's ways, and whims, so as to take his measures accordingly. A dearth of food is not uncommon among the poorest and the none too rich — the earliest gods gave man, among a wealth of other gracious gifts, the belt that could be drawn tight to assuage the pangs of a hungry belly — and had these strivers not been able to adapt themselves to nature, exploit its most secret sources of supply, and reckon out the rhythmical march of the seasons, their saga would soon have ended. Game laws and protective measures for instance, owe their origin undoubtedly to those same gods who gave the wonderful belt.

Naturally, however, they notice much more than is strictly needed for self-preservation. They are not content with superficial observation of the fact that certain insects have spotted wings; but they count the spots, after the manner of simple folk in the North, and note the difference in number as between different individuals, taking measures for the time to come according to the hint conveyed in the number of spots. The natural science that lives in these men knows no lacunæ, for their observations are not gathered at haphazard, but guided from the very first by tradition. The senses of youth are not only trained



and attuned to yield their utmost, but are set to work in unity. Young men are taught not merely to lie in wait, but to go raiding themselves and capture the swiftest, the rarest creatures in flight. Naturally, the observer's knowledge of nature extends only so far as his eye and ear can reach; where observation ceases, there his knowledge ends abruptly. When the birds of passage fly away before the winter, and creeping things seek refuge underground, then only guesswork can help natural observation over the gap. Then man puts forward his hypothesis, and — forfeits all the prestige which his observations have gained with modern scientists. We come prepared by the ignorance of the town-dweller to admire the man 'who knows the nature that surrounds him, but also with a brain alert, from the fruits of hand- and text-book study, to pass judgement on the results of any knowledge, and so we are apt to misjudge the wisdom of primitive man. But though we may grant the truth that the hypotheses of the primitive observer of nature cannot compete with empirical science, yet it is no less true that his guesswork bears the mark of his familiarity with nature; and the more we emancipate ourselves from the authority of our age, venturing to regard its wisdom as relative, and not as the standard whereby all else must be judged, the easier we find it to respect the simple myths, and the relative and forward-pointing character they often show. Properly viewed, they hide within themselves a depth of knowledge and insight.

It must be so; primitive men — in the sense of people daily at grips with nature, not in the mythical sense accorded to the word in modern science — primitive men must know their surroundings thoroughly. Such people are not to be judged solely by their literary expressions of natural science. No doubt their familiarity with nature is clearly indicated by their stories and explanatory myths; as to whence the various birds have their particular cries, why one sort of creature brings forth a whole brood of young at a birth or lays a nest full of eggs, while another struts about with its one ugly offspring; in their riddles, as for instance that of the Northmen about the spider: a marvel with eight feet, four eyes, and knees higher than its belly, or of the ptarmigan: play-sisters that sweep across the land; white shield in winter time, but black in summer. But such myths and riddles float after all but on the surface of men's knowledge, and only exceptionally give any indication of the depth to bottom; they hint here and there at what was seen but give no clear showing of how men saw it. The hunting implements and hunting methods of a people, their sense of locality and their protective measures for game are evidence of their intimacy with the most secret ways of nature. Perhaps also their games. If we would realise the infinite sensitiveness of the "wild man's" brain, and how faithfully it can hold this medley of memory pictures clear and alive, the best way is to see him at play, giving mimic exhibitions of his surroundings; the gestures of bird and beast, their gait, their fear, their prudence, their parental cares — these he can reproduce with the highest art, or the highest degree of naturalness.

It is a cause of wonder to European observers that the intimacy of primitive man with nature's ways seldom, if ever, embodies itself in impressionistic description or representation. It seems as if the art of realistic narrative is rather an exception among the unlettered peoples of the earth whose songs and stories have been gathered up by the missionaries and ethnologists of modern times. And our supposition that man has been slow in acquiring the skill of painting things as they are seen, is confirmed by the epic poetry of races who, like the

Greeks and the Teutons, have been able to turn their folk-poetry into literature before their thoughts were drawn into philosophical or theological channels. Judging from Homer, the *Beowulf* and the *Edda* we can, apparently, with perfect right declare our forefathers lacking in realistic spontaneity.

In folk-poetry we find no reflection of the changing and many-shaded life without; here, all is art, style. Earth may be called perhaps the broad, the far-pathed, and these epithets are then repeated with wearying zeal as often as earth is mentioned in the verse; day invariably dawns with the dawn-red spreading its rosy fingers out from the horizon. When our forefathers set about to describe their battles, they can find nothing better to say than that the wolf stood howling in anticipation toward the approaching warrior, the feaster of the grey beast; the raven fluttered in the air and screamed down to his grey brother, and at last came the hour when the bird of carrion swooped down upon its prey and the grey beast ran splashing about in blood. This schematic description is used without regard to the character or outcome of the fight. Wolf and raven stand for battle and slaughter, whether we have armies in collision and their leaders filling the beasts with food, or a couple of men descending upon a third "giving him to the wolves"; "there you can hear the ravens croak, eagles croak glad in their food: hear you the wolves howling over your husband", — thus the poet announces the murder of Sigurd by his brothers-in-law. Folk-poetry exists upon regular, as it were coined formulæ for the various actions of life, hunting and battle, feasting and going to bed. Persons, animals, things are distinguished by standing epithets bearing the stamp of their qualities once and for all.

Oxen invariably come "dragging their feet", whether the spectator have or have not any occasion to notice their gait — nay, they must drag their feet, even 'when they appear in a situation where it is impossible for them to move their legs; did not the suitors of Penelope waste the property of her husband by daily slaughtering his sheep and his foot-dragging cows? When a man rises in an assembly to speak, he stands there as the swift-footed, or the chariot-guiding hero. A man's ship is swift-sailing, seafaring, as well as curved, straight-built, many-thwarted; and he can, indeed, when he has drawn up his vessel on land, sit down beside the moorings of the sea-cleaving craft, and here receive the strangers who come walking down to his swift-sailing ship. It is as natural for *Beowulf* to fit out his sea-traversing ship as in Icelandic poetry for the horses of the rollers or props to gallop over the sea. The vessel that carried Scyld's dead body out to sea is called ice-clad, but if a modern reader should thence infer that this event occurred during wintry weather he would pretend to more knowledge than the poet of the *Beowulf* was possessed of.

An Old English poem gives a picturesque description of warriors hurrying to battle as follows: "The warriors hastened forward, the high-minded ones, they bore banners, the shields clanged. The slender wolf in the forest rejoiced, and the black raven greedy of slaughter; both knew that the fighting men had in mind to bid them to a feast of those doomed to death; at their heels flew, greedy of food, the dew-feathered, dirt-coloured eagle". On closer examination, we find convention apparent in every single connection: thus and no otherwise is a poet required to describe the setting out of an army. The anticipations of bird and beast set forth as such length do not indicate that the battle is to be fiercer, the

number of the slain greater than in other battles, — no, wolf and eagle are always looking forward to the coming feast. The eagle here is not “dew-feathered” because this particular battle opens in the early morning, it comes sweeping on dewy wings in the hottest noon; dew forms part of the picture where an eagle is concerned.

In the Icelandic, the “pine-perched watcher”, to wit, an eagle, can despite his lofty situation still tear the bodies of the slain if need be. Shaker of branches, or branch-scather, is the epithet aptly given to the wind in Gudrun’s plaint over her loneliness, when she says: “Lonely I am left as an aspen in the grove, bereft of kin as fir of twigs, stripped of joy as the tree of leaves when the scather of branches comes on a sun-warm day”. But in the old days, there was nothing incongruous in referring to the wind by that same name of branch-scather, when it came tearing over the waters and raising the waves.

Among the Germanic people, the king is called ring-breaker, strewer of treasure or furtherer of battle, feeder of wolves; the men are ale-drinkers and receivers of rings, wearers of armour, and they are mailclad whether they happen to be wearing armour at the time or not. Thus we may find the “war-famous, treasure-giving king listening with delight” to Beowulf’s offer to fight with Grendel, and another time we watch the “battle-urging lord” going to bed.

As the valkyrie says to Helgi: “Methinks I have other work to do than drink ale with buckle-breaking prince”, — so Helgi cries to his brother: “It ill behoves the ring-breaking princes to quarrel in words, even though they be at feud.” After the slaying of Fafnir, the tits in the bushes make remarks about Sigurd and Regin, and one says: “If he were wise, the clasp-wasting king, he would eat the serpent’s heart”. And Gudrun, after the dreadful deed that she has wrought upon her sons, addresses the ill-fated Atli thus: “Thou, sword-giving king, hast chewed the bloody hearts of thy sons in honey... never more shalt thou see them, the gold-giving princes, setting shafts to their spears, clipping the manes of their horses and bounding away.” And the same poet who makes Gudrun utter these words, praises the coolness of Gunnar in the serpents’ den, when he refuses to disclose the hiding place of the Niblung treasure, for “thus should a ring-spreading chieftain keep firm hold of his gold”.

No wonder readers of the present day glance round ironically with lifted brows and say: “Where is the much-lauded simplicity, the natural innocence we heard tell of once, and after which folk-poetry was named in contrast to the poetry of art? If there be anything of nature at all in these poems, then the qualities by which we generally recognise natural innocence must have been sadly crushed out of it.”

Style, or rather, convention, is the proper word for these poets and their technique. How, indeed, should one translate into any modern tongue the description in the Beowulf of the warriors returning to the king’s hall? “They went thither, where they learned that the guardian of heroes, Ongentheow’s bane, the young, the good warrior-chief, meted out rings in the midst of the burgh.” The reader must not draw from these words the coldly logical conclusion that an Anglo-Saxon chieftain sat all day in his high seat like a sower, in such wise that a stranger might find his way in by listening for the ceaseless tinkle of gold. Nor can the passage serve as basis for the hypothesis

that Hygelac had recently returned from an expedition and was now distributing orders of merit, or that it was payday. On the other hand, the lines contain more than a poetic indication of the place where he was wont to exercise his generosity; they do actually imply that Hygelac is at the moment seated in his high seat in the hall. The sentence cannot be rendered in any other tongue than that in which it was written. The king is he who metes out rings, and the hall is the place where he binds men to him by gifts and hospitality.

And yet, looking long at the conventional in this old poetic speech, we cannot but perceive that there is something astir beneath it. Closer acquaintance gives one a strong impression that behind this conventional art there lies a rich experience fraught with life. These poems cannot be classed with the work of epigon schools living on a tongue in which literary acceptance takes the place of sense and force. We feel that the men who wrote thus had their eyes full of memory pictures. They possessed a wealth of imagination, but an imagination rooted in the senses. Their vocabulary shows signs that the users of the words lived their lives in experience at first hand. But neither do these men speak as artists, choosing and rejecting with conscious delicacy of taste from among the expressions of the language; they choose without knowing, being themselves in the power of their images of memory.

Anyone coming to Homer from Xenophon, and to the Edda. from the sagas, will probably always remember his first feeling of wonder — unless indeed he had the misfortune to make the transition upon a rather low school seat, where all Greek seems very much the same, as an arbitrary pattern of vocabulary words, whether the lines run out full length and are called prose, or break off short and become poetry. The moment he closed one book and opened the other, he crossed a mysterious boundary line, entering into a world altogether differently lit. The sagas and the works of the historians deal with kings and peasants and warriors; and they tell of these personages with just that familiarity and just that degree of strangeness we should expect from the length of time that lies between them and ourselves. But the others? Where shall we find the key that unites these scattered notes into a tonic system? It is not the contents that we find difficult, the soul of Homer is familiar enough to us. But the words have often something strange, almost mystical about them, as if they belonged to another age. Does not the novice feel that these rare words, some of unknown meaning, are merely the wreckage of a foundered tongue? He will hardly be aware that what leaves him at a loss is a feeling of heterogeneity: these archaic words call for an altogether different environment than that of the common and general Hellenic or Scandinavian out of which they rise; they point back to a time when they did not stand alone in an alien world, but had about them a circle of known and knowing kin, all bearing the stamp of that same ancient dignity and power. — The youthful reader goes about for a while with a feeling of internal schism, until habit eases the mind, and relieves him of his painful craving for an interpretation which should go beyond the ordinary limits of exegesis.

The young student did not know what his unrest meant, he could not translate it into questions, still less into thoughts. But none the less he was right when he felt the presence of spirits where his teacher apparently saw and heard nothing. Many of the words which checked him in wonder are actually relics of an age

when speech was coined after another wise than now. With all respect for the majesty of accidental circumstance, we may safely assert, for instance, that the AngloSaxons would not have hit upon such an army of words for "sea" if they had not needed them. There is something imposing in such a series as: *brim, egor, flod, flot, geofon, hāf, hār, holm, lago, mere, stream, sund, sæ*. Often enough, the poets are accused of creating a meretricious wealth by half illegal means, a craving for variety leading them to take words of poor content and make them stand for more than they properly mean. We may try to thin out the impressive phalanx by taking, let us say, *stream*, and saying, this is really a current, and only in a looser sense applied to sea; or we may say of *brim*, that it means, strictly speaking, breakers, and is only applicable as a last resource to sea. But such comfort is false. Each of the words had undoubtedly a meaning of its own, but only in the sense that it served to indicate a whole by emphasising some particular quality therein, or the whole viewed in the light of one such quality. The poets are not always as guilty as we make them, for their method can, even though it may degenerate into arbitrary æsthetic trick-work, yet claim the support of ancient tradition, and justification in the original character of the language. The old words invariably had a deep background. What we understand as the meaning proper has arisen by specialisation, a certain quality or side of a thing being torn away from the original whole, and set up as an abstract idea in itself. Roughly expressed in our differently attuned manner of speech, we may say that stream, for instance, did not stand for a current, but for the sea as moved by a current; the abstract idea of motion without a thing moved would not occur to the minds of the ancients.

This wealth of expression is evidence, *inter alia*, of the fact that in the old days, men had clear and precise ideas of the world and things therein, and could not speak of them save in sharply definitive words. Similarly, the characterising epithets in Homer bear witness to a definite and dominant mental imagery. He calls the oxen "foot-dragging" or rather, "the oxen, they who in walking press one leg in against the other"; and such an expression would hardly be used unless one were forced to use it, unless by the pressure of an idea within which shapes the words of itself. Like realism can be traced in the poetic vocabulary of the Northmen, and indeed of the Germanic peoples generally. Here in the North, there is a preference for substantive expressions, where the Southerners are lavish of adjectives: here we find mention of "the branchscather, the ring-breaker, the battle-wager", whereas in the south, the prince would be referred to by name, and the quality given in an adjective. However significant this difference may possibly be as indicating the character of the language, and thus indirectly of the people concerned, it reveals at any rate no great dissimilarity in the mode of thought. In the foregoing, I translated purposely with adjectives, in order to call up something of that sensitiveness to the value of combinations which has been dulled by over-literal re-shaping of old Icelandic poems. Ring-breaker, ranger of hosts, for instance, are not titles, as we are led to believe. These words, like all the rest, degenerated under the abuse to which they were subjected by the scalds, but there is no reason to suppose that they stand in the Edda, or indeed in the works of the earlier court poets, without force of meaning. The variations themselves contradict such an idea; when we find, for instance, now *hringbroti*, "ring-breaker", now *hringdrifi*, "he who scatters rings abroad", now again other combinations, we have no right to accuse the poet of

having an eye to prosody. And in any case, the words must once have had suggestive power.

With regard to the Germanic 'writers' poetic vocabulary, we can gather but an approximate idea. Its original wealth and force, its character generally, do not appear to the full in the somewhat late second-hand versions which now stand as sole representatives of the great poetic culture of northern Europe. Here in the North, we have often to search for the old word-pictures among a host of half misunderstood and altogether uncomprehended terms which have been included in some scaldic handbook or other, when the poems in which the words were living things have disappeared. Many an epical expression was only saved from oblivion by cleaving as a name to some mythical being. In Snorri's manual for courtly poets we find, for instance, the abrupt hint that the mode of referring to a buck may be varied by calling the animal *hornumskvali*, "the one that clashes its horns", or "the one with backward-curving horns". In the same way, a bear may be hinted at as *iugtanni*, which must imply some quality or other in the brute's teeth, or "blue-toothed"; another of his names is "step-widener", which must be designed to indicate his characteristic gait, or his footmarks, in somewhat similar fashion as when he is spoken of as "wide-way". We find the raven called "dew-feathered" and "early-flyer", the hawk "weather-bleacher"—bleacher taken passively, or rather in a neutral sense, as with "step-widener" above. The same suggestive power is inherent in the name *duneyrr* applied to deer, meaning probably "the one who scuttles over pebbles with rattling hoofs".

The keenness of characterisation which lay in these old epithets is something we can only partially appreciate nowadays. The vocables of our dictionary are always too wide in scope of meaning, compared with the verbs and substantives which our forefathers had at their disposal. We have no word precise enough to fit that *skvali* which was used to denote a collision of horns, and this one instance may serve to show how loosely all our translations cover the original form of speech. Etymology is too clumsy an expedient to render any help as soon as the quest is extended beyond the dead vocables into the living thought and feeling that once inspired the language and filled the words with subtle associations. We may lay down by analysis that the word *slitherde*—applied to boar in Anglo-Saxon—can be rendered "ferocious", but the etymologist knows as much and as little of its real life as the man who merely hears the word pronounced. Our examples, then, cannot be more than vague indications of a world rich in things seen and heard and tasted, which is now closed for ever.

Homer is not folk-poetry, the Iliad and the Odyssey bear sufficiently evident marks of having passed through a complex civilization. The Edda and the Beowulf are by no means primeval Germanic poetry; we find in them both over-refinement and decadence. Undoubtedly there is in the former as in the latter a certain, not inconsiderable conventionality discernible, a necessary consequence of the fact that the form belongs to an earlier age than the contents. The style of the scalds, whether Anglo-Saxon or Icelandic, cannot be acquitted of mannerism, but their stiffness is nothing but the ancient poetical language carried to its utmost consequences, and thus exhibiting in high relief the natural tendencies of primitive thought. The rigour of style is an inheritance



from earliest times, and the inner heterogeneity which we feel in Homer, and to a lesser degree in the Beowulf and some of the Eddic poems, is due to the interference of a later culture more realistic and impressionistic in its mode of experience. We should be greatly in the wrong were we to blame the rhapsodes of a later day for the contradictions in these images; the poetry which lies behind Homer and the Edda, that 'which created these expressions as its form, was not an iota more natural. It is questionable whether the poet of the Lay of Atli, who praises the "ring-spreader" for "keeping firm hold of his gold", and calls Hogni "the bold rider" at the moment when he lies bound hand and foot, should be assigned to the epigon host for these lines.

As this poetry speaks, so spoke the people out of whose midst the epic arose. The poetic images in which keen observation and the tendency to association of ideas are peculiarly combined, are not a product of style, but the inevitable expression of these distant men's mode of thought, mirroring the people's estimate of its heroes and of itself. Men's outward appearance, their dress, their way of moving, as well as their manner of expressing themselves, are, in heroic poetry, determined by a certain poetic decorum; a hero who does not utter forth his feelings in the traditional style, a hero who suffers himself to be named without the title of armed or bold, or long-haired — all attributes which any free man must claim if he have any self-respect — such an one may be likened to a king sitting on his throne in his nightshirt. The Germanic prince must be glad-minded, cheerful and gentle whatever the actual circumstances; when Grendel harries Heorot, Hrothgar is all the same the glad-minded Hrothgar, the good king, who in all his sorrow had nothing to reproach himself. A man must be *eadig*, steadfast in his luck; and when Hrethel dies of grief at his son's craven deed, the poet cannot divest him of the title of *eadig*, any more than Noah can cease to be the lucky man, when he lies besotted with wine and shamed before his son. It lies in the nature of healthy men to be victorious, and no peril can deprive them of their human characteristics. When the heroes of Israel are seated on the wall in fear of what the morrow is to bring, staring out at the threatening camp of the Assyrians, the Anglo-Saxon poet cannot but picture Judith as giving "the victorfolk good greeting", and later calling out to them: "Ye heroes of victory, behold the head of Holofernes." The decorum goes far deeper than all poetic or social etiquette. It is related to the massiveness of the persons themselves, which makes it impossible for them to adapt their behaviour to what a single situation may demand.

Modern poetry takes as its starting point the fragmentary in human manifestation; whatever men may be occupied with one towards another, whether discussing the deepest affairs of heart and passion, or carrying on an everyday conversation, whether they are fighting or making love, they show but a small illumined segment of the soul to each other; the greater part of their soul life lies in darkness, only divined, or lit in occasional glimpses by a fleeting light. But the heroes of old are invariably presented *in* the round. They are like those well-known figures in primitive paintings, standing side-on to the beholder, and yet looking at him with both eyes. They cannot trust us to understand a thing by implication only, because they are incapable of doing so themselves; the consciousness of their whole previous life, the obligations and privileges of their position, even of the whole past of their race, is ever in the foreground of their



mind. When their speech one with another touches such disproportionate depths, reaching back to family relationships and family history, going beyond all bounds of the situation which has brought them into converse, this is but one among many expressions of their sense of wholeness. When the king's retainers lead their lord's bride to the bridal chamber, they feel themselves as shield-bearing, even though their shields of linden wood are hung above their places in the hall. When men lay stone on stone and see the wall gradually rising, they feel none the less the grip of the sword-hilt in their hands; it is the sword-bearers who are building. When they sit down to eat and drink, they cannot for a moment lay aside their valour and renown, even in this common occupation of all mankind. Even though they take off all their armour and get into bed, it must still be the mail-clad, sword-wielding, horse-taming hero who snuggles down under the blanket. And whenever they strike a blow, the listeners must understand that there lies in that blow all the tradition of a race, the impetuosity of a hero, the untamable thirst for vengeance of a son, or more correctly, this weight in the blow forces the whole of the hero's title, with lather and forefather, into the verse.

It is not the men alone who thrust their entire personality upon the spectators at every step. Homer knows that the queen resting with her husband on the nuptial couch is sweeping-robed. When Judith leaves the Assyrians' camp bearing the head of her enemy, she strides forth in all her queenly dignity, as the wise, the strong in action, the white-checked, as the ring-bedecked; but neither she nor any other Germanic lady of high birth would ever appear otherwise, whatever her aim or errand. Wealththeow, queen of the Danes, walks gold-bedecked down the hall, greeting the men; the noble dame hands first the cup to the king, at last she comes, the ring-bedecked queen, the strong-souled, to the place where Beowulf sits, and greets the prince of the Geats wise in words.

And as men and women are, so is the world in and with which they live. The same massiveness is apparent in all that presents itself to thought or sense. The horse champing at its bonds stands there as the swift runner, and the horse that dashes across the plain runs as the fair-maned, single-hoofed as it always is. Coming from afar, one sees not merely the door and front of a house, but at the same time the whole of its appointments, its splendour, and the life within. The castle which travellers approach is not only high-roofed — so that those seated on the benches need not feel the ceiling close above their heads —, it is not only wide — with bench room for a great host —; but it is alight with the glitter and reflection of weapons, and filled with gold and treasure. The wanderer espies from the road afar the high-walled burgh, sees — from the road in the distance — halls towering over treasures, sees houses vaulted over the red gold. It is not otherwise, we may take it, with the hills that stand as banks of blue upon the horizon; to one who knows them from having often wandered there, they would be, even when lost in mist, the many-sloped hills, the hills of shady paths. When thinking of his far-off country, the Northman would probably shape his words much as those of the Homeric hero: "between Troy and Phtia there are both shady mountains and a roaring sea." When a man leaps down to the ground, or falls on his back, the spot his body covers is still: the earth of the many roads, the corn-bearing, the many-feeding, or the broad. So speak the Hellenes, and the Northmen say of the serpent that it be-creeps on its belly the broad earth.

This fulness and comprehensiveness of the idea does not belong exclusively to poetic speech; it is inherent in the language and leaves its mark on legal phraseology far into the Middle Ages. The lawyer who says turf must add green; murderers, thieves and such like folk shall be buried on the beach "where the sea meets the green turf", as the Norwegian lawbook decrees. He cannot name gold without styling it red or shining, nor silver without adding white; in the precise language of law, day is bright day and night is darksome or murky night.

There are in Homer two strata, easily distinguishable one from the other. On the one hand, that represented by comparisons, the elaborate pictures introduced with a "like to...": "As East and South in rivalry shake the dense woods in the clefts of the mountain, and beech and ash and slender-barked cornel lash one another in fearsome noise with their projecting branches, while clamour of splintering trunks arises, so stormed the Trojans and Achæans together, and smote each other; none thought of flight". The man who speaks thus has his mind full of a situation, a momentary picture; the scene before his inward eye expands to every side, and opens vistas round about to other visions again. The poet welcomes all associations of ideas, and pursues in calm enjoyment the broadest of those roads the situation opens to him. This is the modern spirit of experience. It is otherwise with the images contained in such expressions as "the foot-dragging oxen", "the many-pathed earth", "the blue wave"; these are not creatures of the moment, but on the contrary, a product of years of experience. Here, it is not the poet who pursues, but the idea which draws and compels him, being rooted far down in the depth of his soul. The metaphor is more ancient than the simile. It speaks of a time when the soul never lived on individual sense impressions, when it might perhaps, as wakefully as now, accept all that presented itself to the senses, yet without stopping at the isolated impression, rather churning its experiences together into a comprehensive idea. The man of metaphor may be said to remember with all his senses. But all his experiences of any given object exercise a mutual attraction one towards the other, and enter into an indissoluble unity. Each new observation is drawn up by those previously made and forms with them a unit, so that the images which live in the soul, with all their natural truth, their precision and strength, are not individual ideas, but universal ideals, as rich in content, as weighty and insistent as the heroes of poetry are.

This mode of thinking calls men to account at every moment for their actions and their being, recognising no distinction between different official and private selves, — such as we now enjoy. The figures we meet with in ancient poetry, and in ancient history, cannot be divided into the public and the private personality, the man of ordinary and the man of special occasion, into king, husband, man, judge, councillor, warrior. One cannot say "man" without thinking "armed"; and therefore, when we pronounce the latter word, thought builds up the whole. There is thus nothing artificial in the expression of Cædmon: "the armed one and his woman, Eve". It may strike strangely on our ears to hear Jesus called the "ring-giver" and his disciples referred to as the body-guard, the bold warriors. But to the Germanic mind it was impossible to avoid these expressions, as long as the ancient circle of thought remained unbroken. There was no actual thought of Jesus as sweeping across the country upon a viking expedition; the poet does not even say "ring-giver" because it was the custom to rhyme man with generosity. Jesus was the Lord, his disciples the men; Jesus

was the man of luck, his disciples those who partook of his luck, and the relation between master and men could not be apprehended in the quality of a fraction; it must take up the idea of entirety, and enlist all words in its service.

The idea of a wolf or of an eagle is made up of all the experiences accumulated at different times anent the life and character, of the creatures named; their habits and appearance, their wills and propensities. And so the animal stands as an inseparable whole, living its life without regard to its place in a classificatory system, possessing its limbs and its qualities in a far more absolute fashion than nowadays. For thought was so completely dominated by the idea of entirety, that it lacks all tendency to take the world in cross-section, analysing, for instance, the animal kingdom into heads and bodies, legs and tails, or the forest into leaf, branch, trunk and root. The separate parts simply have not in themselves that independent reality needed to produce such word-formulæ as: leg or head. A head is only conceived as the head of a particular beast, it must be either a dog's head, or a 'wolf's head, or some other individual variety of head. Even a leap seen ahead on the path will have a particular character, it will be the haste of this or that animal, not a movement in general.

It is thus not the fairy tale alone which lives upon the art of conjuring up an entire organism from a single claw, a hair, a thread. The old proverb: "where I see the ears, there I wait the wolf", held good among primitive men in a far more literal sense than with us; at the first glimpse of those two ears, the wolf sprang up, rushed in, bringing with it a whole atmosphere, setting all senses to work, so that the eye saw its trot, its stealthy glance behind, the dirty yellow of its pelt; so that the nose scented it, the hand felt a tickling sensation as of bristly hair. And not only does it bring its atmosphere when it comes, but it spreads a whole environment about it. It enters on the scene as a character, and radiates its habits, its manner of life out into a little world of its own.

It is but rarely that we find, in the popular tongue, any mention of such generalities as "tree" or "beast". The earth has its growths of oak, beech, ash, elm, fir; its inhabitants, wolf, bear, deer, eagle, raven, serpent. The curse of outlawry, in the Scandinavian, holds good "as far as *fir* grows". The proverb to the effect that one man's meat is another man's poison runs, in its northern equivalent thus: "what is scraped off one *oak* is all to the good of another". "The *fir* that stands alone will rot", neither bark nor leaf can protect it. It is a good omen when the wolf is heard howling under the branches of the *ash*. The great world-tree is not called the *tree* of Yggdrasil, but the *ash* of Yggdrasil. And poetry retains, here as elsewhere, the old sense of reality. Sigrun sits waiting in vain by Helgi's burial mound: "Now he were come an he had in mind to come; there is no hope now, for the *eagles* sit perched already in the *ash* and sleep is in their eyes." "Lonely am I now as the *aspen* on the bill" (when its fellows have withered one by one) — thus runs Gudrun's plaint.

In the language spoken on the steppes, the moorlands, in the forests, specific and classifying terms play but an insignificant part. The general terms fall completely into the background; they form but the shadow of reality, not the stem of reality itself, as they are with us. The individual manifestations stand so abruptly one against another, rise so independently out of the natural soil, that they can have no immediate contact with one another; and thus the

systematical arrangement into animals and plants, into species and classes which to us is of primary interest, has no footing at all.

Wholeness and independence, these are the two main qualities of images in the simple mode of thought which still shows through in the offshoots of the heroic poetry, and to which we find parallels about us among non-European peoples. Our words are wide and vague, because we see and feel things loosely, and accordingly concern ourselves more with the interaction of phenomena than with actual objects. Our world is built upon generalities and abstractions, and the realities of life recede behind the colourless "facts", as we call them, of cause and effect, laws and forces and tendencies. The words of ancient and primitive races are narrow and precise, answering to the experience of men who did not run their eyes over nature, but looked closely at every single object and took in its characteristics, until every item stood forth before their inner eyes in its fullness, as a thing unique. This definiteness of experience seriously hinders analysis and classification, but this does not mean that the spiritual life is kept down to a simple verification of the actual facts, or that ideas are merely acknowledgements of the impressions. On the contrary, ideas have, for these thinkers, a strength and influence which can at times lead strangers to regard the barbarians as philosophers all; the truth, however, is that they are distinct from the philosophers by the very force and power and reality of their ideas.

The conceptions that make up the body of our spiritual life, such as colour, beauty, horse, man, exist by themselves in the intervals between the things of the world, and our sensations are but the pegs on which they are hung. In the primitive mind, every idea is firmly connected with an object; the thing is seen in its perspective, as it were. Answering to the narrow scope of the word, we find a dizzying depth in its idea, since this in itself includes all that can be thought of the object named. The meaning is not restricted to cover only the body of things, but embraces their soul in the same degree. In the idea of "oak" lies all that one can think of *quercus*; from the oak itself as it rises before the eye, or can be felt with the hands, from its speech, its form, its peculiar manner of moving, its fertility, and the like, to "oakness", the state of being oak, the quality which makes one an oak tree. So comprehensive is the thought, and so intimately wrapped about reality. The full depth of the word is not reached until we arrive at the state of pure being, a being which in respect of spirituality has every claim to admittance among the company of the highest ideas, but which differs nevertheless from our venerable abstracts in having a marked character; a pure being, in which lie predestined the qualities of lobed leaves, gnarled branches, broad-crowned growth, edible shell-fruits.

Endeavouring now to track down these thoughts, it may be that the exertion we feel in the task involuntarily applies itself to our estimate of those old thinkers, and induces us to think of them as profound reasoners. And there is still greater danger that the motion of our thoughts may be transferred to the ideas we are following, so that we imagine primitive ideas as something complex or complicated. For us who endeavour to think again the strange thoughts of a stranger, the difficulty lies first and foremost in keeping firm hold of the unity and banning all suspicion of musing and profundity. Primitive idea is not created by a reflection whereby something is abstracted from reality, nor by an analysis

loosing the separate elements from their connection and rearranging them in logical categories — on the contrary, it depends on a total view, the nature of which is inimical to all analysis. We call the primitive idea oak — oakness two-sided, but with only conditional justification, inasmuch as the ideas of primitive peoples do not contain anything which can properly be called dualistic. It points simultaneously out towards something spiritual and something material, but it has no seam in it where matter and spirit meet. Idea and reality, that which is perceived and that which is felt, are identical; are, so to speak, two opposite poles of the conception. We can begin with the concrete; with a wolf, a stone; and gradually, through its character and qualities, its evil nature and goodwill, its mobility and weight, arrive at the qualities of wolfness and stoneness, as subtle as any philosopher could spin it, and yet at the same time as strong in its reality as any sense impression. And we can commence with a “force”, the force of being a wolf, a stone, and through the effects produced by that force arrive once more at the solid objects before us. We can move forward or backward from pole to pole, without any somersault, without even the least little hop. The connection is unbroken, because the thought never at any point loses hold of the idea of a limitation in character and form.

The things of our world are flat and silhouette-like to such a degree that they shade into one another and merge into such vague entities as “nature” or “world”. Primitive facts are all-round objects and shapes that stand out free of the background, and when our comprehensive phrase “the whole world” is translated into old Norse, it takes this form: “As far as Christian men go to church, heathen men worship, fire bursts forth, earth bears fruit, son calls mother, mother suckles son, men light fire, ship strides, shields flash, sun shines, snow drifts, fir grows, falcon flies the spring-long day when the wind is full beneath its wings, heaven vaults, earth is peopled, wind howls, water flows into sea, carles reap corn.”

Thus we are led to see that the primitive way of depicting life is realistic in the truest sense of the word. The epic formulæ, as we are apt to call them, paint the world as it is, but their world is very different from the place in which we move and have our being. Primitive men differ from Europeans not in theories about reality, but in the reality itself.

## **CHAPTER VII**

# **LIFE AND SOUL**

It is a melancholy fact that modern researches into primitive thought have led us farther and farther away from any real understanding of foreign cultures and religions. And the reason is not far to seek. The European is hampered by his naive faith in his own system and his own logic as the measure of all things; the missionary and the ethnologist invariably try to force a ready-made scheme on cultures of radically different patterns, in the same way as linguists formerly arranged all tongues after the scheme of Latin grammar; just as the introduction

of gerund and supine and ablative only served to obscure the structure of Indian or Australian languages, so our rigid dualism cannot but distort primitive psychology. The Scandinavians, the Greeks, the Hindoos, the Israelites as well as the Indians and the Australians have been examined by the catechism: what do you believe about the soul, how do you conceive the interaction between body and soul, what becomes of the soul when it leaves the body, as if the Hellenistic and European dualism as it is embodied in the catechism and the handbooks of psychology were at the root of all experience. By such an examination from without, facts may no doubt be brought to light, but the facts are often worse than false, because they are wrenched out of their natural coherence. Without an understanding of primitive thought as a consistent whole, our forefathers' talk of life and death, soul and body would be incomprehensible.

All peoples recognise a body and a soul, or rather a material and a spiritual side to everything that exists. The bird has a body which is lifted in the air, and it has a soul which enables it to fly, as well as to strike with its beak. So also the stone is a body, but in this body there is a soul that wills, and enables the stone to do harm, to bite and strike and crush; a soul which gives it its hardness, its rolling movement, its power of prophesying the weather or showing the way.

Thus far — to the extent of establishing soul and body as two halves of existence — we may safely go in our analysis of the ancient mode of thinking. But as soon as we endeavour to give each half its proper share and delimit its scope of influence as against the other's, we fall from one difficulty to another. If we begin by seeking the soul in the body, we may split and dissect it lengthways and across, we can never attain to set our finger on the spot where it is not, nor on the spot where it exclusively resides. And if we proceed to examine the qualities of the thing, one by one, as a test in the hope of getting the thing separated out into an active, initiative side, that of the soul, and a slower, obedient, executive part, that of the body, we end as surely in arbitrary definitions; we shall soon find ourselves obliged to distinguish on our own responsibility, if we are to preserve the system. There is no seam to be found. A reliable indication of what is soul and what is body in stone or bird according to primitive thought is a thing impossible to discover.

It is not difficult, however, to find the soul; wherever we grasp, be it stone or beast or tree, we lay hold of it. It comes towards us conscious of itself, as a thing that knows and wills, acts and suffers — in other words, as a personality. We may add, as far as the Teutous are concerned, that the body is the seat of a soul. That is to say, that there resides in it a little mannikin, which enlivens and sets in motion, guides and directs, and on occasions, impatient of its clumsy medium, sets out naked into the world and settles things on its own account. There is undoubtedly something in the idea that keensighted folk have seen a little sprite, or a little animal leave the body, and slip in again when it thought no one was looking; and this little sprite was the soul. But on attempting to grasp the soul and draw it into the light so that we can note its form and other peculiarities, we shall soon find that it mocks us by oozing out through the meshes of the web which itself has woven in letting itself appear as a personal being, in human shape or the likeness of a beast. The soul that was but now so firm in qualities, so massive in personality, dissolves away into a mist of power;

shaping itself to and filling whatever space it may be, nay, without even the limitation of independence, so that it can be assimilated by other souls as a quality. The soul of a man can reside in a stone or a sword, it can enter as a power into a fellowman by a touch or a breath, adding to the receiver's strength or cunning. The soul that was but a moment ago so independent reveals itself as a neutral something which is the polar opposite of personality.

But even now its tricks are not at an end. Step by step, or by degrees, it slips away between our fingers to more and more spiritual forms of existence; power, quality, will, influence — there is nowhere it can be stopped. We are always behind, grasping only its transformation; and when we have chased it through all existences, from that which stands at the transition from material to spiritual, through the more and more spiritual refinements, out to the limit where we think we can check it on the verge of absolute nothingness, it changes over into a state our language cannot express, but which may be most nearly rendered by our word energy, or even principle. It manifests itself suddenly as life. And if we then are bold and crafty enough to grasp at it in order to tear it from its body and hold it fast, lock it away to see what happens to the thing without it, then we find that it was existence itself, the very being, that we caught hold of. It was the soul which made the stone hard, and the bird flying, but it was also the soul which enabled bird and stone to be at all. Without soul, no being; to take the life from a stone is the same as making it vanish into absolute nothingness.

But this is more than lies in our power. Tear up existence — this we cannot do. But we can hold fast. Despite all its transformations, the soul is not grown too spiritual for human hands to grasp. And if we crush it in our fingers, we shall find sooner or later that it hurts. In a little while, life gives birth to a sharp, hard, edged object between our fingers. If we have courage and wit enough to follow the soul through all its forms and hold it unyieldingly, then it must at some time or other resume its first form and answer with all its personality. Then it must stand forth, not only visible and material, but in the form in which it appears as a part of the world.

Not until then is the transformation complete. Now we have learned the secret of life in primitive experience. The soul is something more than the body, as it is seen and felt in space-filling reality, but it is not anything outside the material. When we cannot find the boundary between the inner and the outer, there is nothing to be done but give truth the credit, and say that the body is a part of the soul, or even the soul itself. The moment we grasp a stone firmly in the hand, we have grasped the soul of the stone, it is the soul we can feel. It is always possible for the body to be sucked up by the soul and vanish away, to emerge into the light again some other time. The spiritual can leave the material to reveal itself under other forms; but when it does appear and lets itself be seen, heard, felt, then the manifestation takes place in virtue of that nature the soul possesses. However far away it may go, it still has matter bound up in it. To a certain degree, it is possible to speak of soul and body, but the distinction does not go so deep that it is possible to wrench the one from the other.

A soul cannot be caught in any of our narrow formulæ. Language gives us a hint to build our thoughts wide, and at the same time a warning not to bring along too many of those distinctions which are so useful in our world. We must begin



with the material, pass through — not round — personality with its will and feelings, from that out into the neutral, what we call life, further again through life into the ideal, existence, being, and only there, in the simple power to be, can we find the limit of the soul.

But when we have reached so far, to the bottom of the single soul, the way stops suddenly, just at the point where to our imagination all roads meet. When, in our own philosophy, we reach the depth which we call life or existence, we feel ourselves standing at the entrance to the origin of all, the well-spring which opens out into a network of channels from soul to soul. Life is to us a colourless force that is able to inspire any number of disparate forms, and our problem of life lies in explaining how the one and all transforms itself into the manifold shapes of the world. It is otherwise with the practical thinker. For him, all thought ceases at this point. Between the souls, there is set that most impenetrable of all barriers, a gap, a void, nothingness. The separation is absolute, from the very fact that it does not consist in a wall built by thought itself, but in the lack of all conjecture and in the lack of all inducement to speculate, because all the things of the world are complete in themselves. Involuntarily we feel that in the word life, or existence as we should rather say, there lies an invitation to speculate upon the common condition of all that exists. But, in primitive culture, such a question can never arise to demand an answer, because it can find no foothold on the given basis.

Life, existence, so wide is the idea of the soul, but the extent of this sentence is only realised when we turn it about: soul, so narrow is the idea of existence. Life is not a common thing, something connecting, but rather that which makes the greatest distinction in the world; not a universal support, but an individual quality. Life is always determined as to character. It explains, nay rather, it contains all that distinguishes the possessor of life from all other beings, it contains all his qualities and abilities, all his tendencies and needs, it contains him even to the structure of his body.

How deep the distinction is between our thoughts and those others on this point only becomes clear to us perhaps, when we see that the primitive soul reaches farther than the mere person, so as to embrace also the sphere of life. Not only the manner of life of an animal, but also its area of life belongs to its soul. Poetry retains a distinct reflection of this idea of entirety. The raven cannot appear without bringing with it the idea of blackness, of dewy-wingedness; but no less surely does it bring with it a whole atmosphere of carrion. The poet of the Anglo-Saxon Genesis is altogether in the power of the ancient mode of thought in this respect. In his source it is stated that Noah first sent out a raven from the ark, but it flew backwards and forwards until the earth grew dry, and this forms of itself the following explanation in his soul: "Noah thought that if it found no land on its flight, it would at once come flying back over the broad waters, but this hope failed; it seated itself gladly, the dark-feathered one, upon a floating corpse, and sought no farther." Blackness and the lust of carrion, the devouring of corpses, even the corpse itself, form part of the raven's soul. When the raven is called greedy of battle, greedy of slaughter, this means in reality, that just as a raven properly belongs to battle, so battle, or rather slaughter, forms part of the raven's life. The wolf, too, is of a carrion nature, it is called the carrion beast, but to this must be added something more, that which is

expressed in the name heath-walker, heath-treader. The wilderness is a part of its soul. Or the additional words "in the forest" follow of themselves as soon as the creature is named; the wolf rejoiced in the forest, the wolf howled in the forest, nay, the grey wolf in the forest ran over the heath among the fallen.

The gulf between souls is impassable, reaching down to the very root of the world. All beings rise straight up from the ultimate ground, separate from top to bottom. No bridge is built at any point. There is something misleading to us in the fact that all things, even that we call lifeless, had a soul, and consequently also a life. It might seem to us as if the distance between the different existences was then rather smaller than now, seeing that all things were united in the possession of will and feeling, nay even understanding and the power of expression. But this life was not, as we naturally imagine, a common essence, and far from bringing the thousand things nearer to one another it kept them rigorously apart.

Life is will. All that is, acts because it feels an impulse, feels pleasure in this and displeasure in the other. The soul of the stone, as well as that of the tree and the animal, is filled with desire and purpose and preference, but the stone's will is not the animal's and neither is that of the human being. Man had soon to discover that every one of his surroundings loves and hates in its own fashion, according to its unassailable principles — after its own kind. It is this discovery which has made man so watchful and sensitive to all manifestations of the souls surrounding him. Woe to him who thought that things had human will and human power! He who is to fight his way forward, and be able to hand over to the morrow his conquests of to-day, he needs first and foremost to understand what it is his surroundings will; all education is directed towards giving the novices soul-knowledge, and thus enabling them to take up the battle of the world. There is then, in the human being, a strong sense of the difference between the passions and the self-control in himself and the spiritual powers that clash with him on every side. In the variety of his ritual proceedings, primitive man manifests his power of distinguishing between the different wills operating in his world. The ceremonies for obtaining a plentiful downpour of rain are not the same which he employs when he wants to secure the goodwill of the buffalo, and the buffalo rites differ in their turn from his addresses to other animals. We are deluded by our language and our propensity to use all abstract words in the singular; but our singular form "will" is the result of a work of thought which was not carried out at all in those times, when the tree and the animal and the stone were realities, and not, as they are now, mere shadows on the background of nature. We misinterpret what we call natural man's personification of nature, because we view mythology in the light of Hellenistic philosophy; our poetical language, as well as our scientific terminology, is descended from Alexandrian anthropomorphism, and all European speculations on myths and legends have been dominated by the mentality of the Stoics and Neo-Platonists who tried to convert the original Greek thoughts about nature and man into a rationalistic and sentimental system. Primitive words which Europeans translate "soul" take in a large part of the meaning covered by our words "existence" or "being", but on the other hand, all primitive existence is life.

If we would know how despotic is life in Middle-garth, we should do well to ask for instance, if the stone is not a dead thing. Judging by all analogies from other

peoples, and from the hints contained in Teutonic poetry and customs, our forefathers would have shaken off this paradox with a gesture of displeasure, as a thing not merely idle, but altogether meaningless. Death, in this connection, had no significance for them. They would not oppose the idea, for they would simply fail to understand what lay in the question.

Man's task has been to think his way forward to the conception of lifelessness, and he has found the task a hard one indeed. Again and again he manifests his astonishment at the phenomena which seem to oppose the reality of life. He prefers to wrestle with hypotheses of transformation, metamorphosis, the changing of life into forms acting in other wise. And the roads here are long. It takes centuries before he has explored them so far that he is forced to turn about and face the problem as a merciless enemy. The closer it presses in upon him, the more he places himself in stubborn opposition; he denies death, declares it an impossibility. He will not even admit that the termination of life forms part of the order of things; in face of the hard facts, he falls back upon the explanation that "death" came into the world through a misunderstanding. Now it is a violent assault on the part of something outside the home of men, which has brought about this disturbance in the original state of things; now it is man's own foolishness that is to blame, in that some race long past made a false step at some critical moment, and by neglect of some rule of life reduced the general vitality. And only very slowly is this "death" which to him is and remains a seeming only, deepened down towards an annihilation; that is to say, he thrusts life over the salient point, and dumps it down into a nothingness, which he again and again conceives as something positive, a nothing in being, a massive hole. Death itself he has never found.

It is thus not by any deduction from himself to others that man sets a foundation of life under existence. When he says life, he does not utter the word as a discovery the extent of which he realises. Life is a *sine qua non* for everything. Man has no more discovered life than he has discovered light. In modern thought, lifelessness is still only a modification of life reached by gradually shutting out the most prominent qualities of organic being, such as moving and feeling; we try to reduce life into lifelessness, but all we can attain to is a negation, we are never able to establish an existence of another order, and consequently the characteristics of life turn up as soon as we start speculating on matter and death. The great difference between primitive speculation and modern thought does not consist in our saying existence where the myth-makers say life, but in our extending one sort of life to all things, and so making life the basis for an hypothesis of unity. European philosophy has emancipated thought from experience to such a degree that it becomes possible to picture all nature in the likeness of man. We have discovered, or rather learned from the Greeks and carried the discovery farther, that it is human life and human existence that resides in plant and stone. For the last three centuries, the task of philosophy and science has been to deprive life and existence of the most prominent human features and reduce them to vague colourless ideas applicable to all organisms, and in a wider sense to all phenomena, but even if life and existence have changed name and are now called force or tendency or law, they have not changed character, and in the formulæ of the evolutionaries — to name but one instance, in the struggle for existence and the groans of nature — pure anthropomorphism comes to the surface. On the strength of this

anthropomorphism we have established an inner relationship between all things of the world. All questions are thus gathered up into one problem: the origin and nature of life, the meaning of the world. Here the difference comes in that makes it so difficult for modern men to understand the thoughts and the problems of primitive culture. Life, existence, being, soul, body are naturally used by us in the singular form, conveying a generalization of experience that has no counterpart in the myth-makers. To primitive man life is not one but legion, the souls are not only many but they are manifold.

In order to understand the thoughts of foreign peoples, we must necessarily convert their self-revelation into our own terms, but our words are apt to carry such a weight of preconceived idea as to crush the fragile myth or philosophy in the very act of explanation. If we want to open up a real communication with our fellow-man, we must take care to revalue our words before clapping them on his experience. As far as possible we must hold back our set formulæ until we have walked round the object he is confronted with and looked at it from every side. But analysis will not carry us all the way to intimacy. Culture is not a mass of beliefs and ideas, but a balanced harmony, and our comprehension depends on our ability to place every idea in its proper surroundings and to determine its bearings upon all the other ideas.

Primitive ideas about life and existence are neither congruous with our concepts nor diametrically opposed to our science and psychology. The belief in souls does not include personification of natural objects, but on the other hand it does not exclude the possibility that Sun and Earth may assume a human-like appearance. In Scandinavia, nature is peopled by powers in human shape. Up from the earth and out from the hills elf and dwarf peer forth, a host of giants bellow from the mountains, from the sea answer Ran's daughters, those enticing and hardhearted wave-maidens, with their cruel mother, and at home in the hall of the deep sits venerable Ægir. Over the heavens go sun and moon; some indeed declare that the two drive in chariots with steeds harnessed to their carts; the sun is chased by two wolves eager to swallow its shining body. Of the sun and the moon it is said, both that they were given and taken in marriage, and that they have left offspring.

In the old Norse series of small poems called the riddles of Heidrek the wave-maidens play with the freedom almost of nymphs.

Who are the maidens that come mourning; many men have sorrowed for their coming and thus they manage to live.

Who are the maidens that come trooping many together, they have fair locks wrapped in a white kerchief; no husbands have these women.

Who are the widows that come all together? Rarely are they merciful to voyagers; in the wind they must keep vigil.

Who are the maidens that come in shifts of breakers moving in through the fiord; the white-hooded women find a hard bed, but little they play in a calm.

But these verses express only half the thoughts of the North-men; the other half lies indicated in the names borne by those fair-haired cruel ones: one was

called “Heaving”, another “Heaven-glittering”, a third “Plunging”, a fourth “Cold” and a fifth “Bloody-haired”. And these two halves must be joined together if we are to get the true value of the ancient descriptions of the sea. Modern readers unconsciously re-model the pictures of the riddles under the influence of contemporary poetry of nature. Our rendering changes the perspective of the scene, because our words are fraught with other associations, and when joined together they create an atmosphere foreign to the old poems. In reading these descriptions of the waves breaking on the shore or of the billows chasing one another in long rows, we enjoy the sight of clear-cut shapes, and we sniff in the salt spray of the breakers, but this reconstruction of ours is at once too plastic and too impressionistic, because according to our mode of experience it is the overwhelming sense of the moment that seeks an outlet in poetic images. The ancient words do not reproduce the impressions of moods of the moment, and in order to recapture the depth of the old picture we must replace the modern allusions and their emotional values with the hints conveyed in the names of the wave-maidens, Plunging or Cold or Bloody-haired, which break the pretty picture of clean-limbed nymphs and at the same time banish all emotions roused by the momentary beauty of the sea. “Much has Ran reft from me; the sea has riven the bonds of my race”, thus Egil wails when his son has been drowned, and his words may be taken as meaning that he has seen Ran standing as a fearsome woman with hands grasping that which belonged to him. “Ægír's wench” he cries to her in his challenging defiance. But the poets could, even in late historical times, speak of Ran and Ægír as the sea they were, without veiling their personality. “The horse of the sea-hills tears his breast out of white Ran's mouth”, says a scald speaking of a ship ploughing its way through the sea; another describes a vessel plunging heavily, in these lines: “The wet-cool Ran leads time after time the vessel down into Ægír's jaw.” The poet of the Lay of Helgi now hears Kolga's (i.e. Cold's) sister and long keels rushing together with a roar of breakers, and next moment sees Ægír's fearsome daughter endeavouring to capsize the ships, sees the beasts of the breakers (the ships) wrenching themselves loose from Ægír's hand.

In the same way Earth is at one time a woman, screaming, threatening or conceiving and giving birth to children, at another time she is capable of fading or of burying men in her womb. One moment a river rises like a man to challenge the wader, the next moment it rushes like a flood at its enemy and drowns him in its rage of waters. In a laudatory poem on Earl Hakon, Hallfred seeks to impress on his hearers that the upstart chief of the North has really conquered Norway, and by his victories has established his right to govern the country in spite of the hereditary claims of the fallen kingly house; and he is not content until he has twisted the fact about and shown it in four different poses. The main theme is that the Earl has won Earth and drawn her into a firm alliance. The warrior was loth to let And's fair sister sit alone, and he used the sword's speech of truth upon leafy-haired Earth, the promised bride of Odin. Thus the marriage was concluded, they entered into a compact that the earl, wise in counsel, won for his bride the only daughter of Ónar, the forest-clad woman. He has enticed the broad-featured daughter of Báleyg with the compelling words of steel. In his eagerness to extol Hakon's might and right, the poet exhausts the metaphors of the language, and unintentionally he gives us a catalogue of the family relationships into which Earth entered with other powers;

and though Onar and Aud and Báleyg are little more than names to us now, we need not doubt but that these persons and their intercourse with Earth were founded in ancient belief and true myths. Hallfred does not force the language when he represents Norway as a kingly bride worthy to be wooed by an ambitious earl like Hakon, but the attributes of the queen are not those of a human woman. Onar's daughter is the "forest-clad", Báleyg's woman is "broad-hewn of feature", Odin's betrothed is "leafy-haired", and in this embellishment Hallfred also draws upon the conventionalities of poetic speech.

The same versatility and deftness in juggling with traditional words is shown by a fellow-poet, Eyvind, in the mocking songs he sings of Harald Greyskin, the close-fisted king, who, after the manner of small freeholders, hid his treasures in the earth. In the days of Good King Hakon, he cries, the rings shone on the arms of his warriors and scalds; the gold is the sun that should shine on the hawk-hills — the arm of the warrior where the hunting falcon perched —; but now it lies hid in the flesh of Thor's mother.

The courtly poetry of Norway is hardly illustrative of ancient Teutonic imagination in general; the metaphors were to poets like Hallfred and Eyvind more like parts of speech that could be mixed freely by an ambitious scald to show off his ingenuity. It is not only that art has degenerated into artifice; the poets often manipulate the words to produce novel and startling effects. The contrast between the golden sun on the hills and the dark womb of the earth is a pretty conceit which proves that Eyvind is a modern poet with an imagination touched by western civilization. But these mediæval scalds of Norway cannot cut themselves loose from the traditional language prepared for them by men of the past; they try to work out their individual fancies and conceits in the material that lay to their hands, and thus their verses exhibit the working of ancient imagination as it was embodied in phrases and figures.

When earth is called the wife of Odin, the mother of Thor, when wind is styled the son of Fornjót and the sea is conceived as Ran, the wife of Ægir, the myths are not anthropomorphism or personification in the modern and Alexandrian sense. Human-likeness is joined to the other qualities of natural phenomena or, more truly expressed, human appearance enters as a quality among other qualities into the soul of earth, wind and sea, but it does not in the least interfere with the impersonal workings of the forces of nature. There is no contradiction between subject and verb in the scald's description of the winter gales: "Fornjót's Sons began to whirl," nor is there really any breach of common-sense in a storm scene such as this: "The gusts carded and twined the storm-glad daughters of Ægir." The moon gives birth, the earth is a mother, stones bring young into the world, and that is to say that these beings beget, conceive and are delivered, for thus all procreation takes place under the sun. But this does not imply that earth must transform itself to a human being and seek a couch to bring forth its children. The little we know as to our forefathers' practical relations with the world about them indicates, as will soon appear, that they did not appeal to the objects of nature as pseudo-personalities; like their primitive brethren all over the world, they tried to win the friendship and power of animals and trees and stones by much surer means. When the poet lets Frigg send messengers about to fire and water, iron and all kinds of ore, to stones, earth, trees, sicknesses, beasts, birds, to get them to swear they will never harm

Balder, he has plainly no idea in his mind of such messengers going out to knock at the doors of nymphs and demons; his hearers must have been familiar with a method of appealing directly to the things themselves, to the souls.

To get the whole idea as it lived in the minds of the Teutons we must try to fuse elements that are incompatible in our thought, and still more we must discard our habit of looking at nature in the light of the moment. The word "storm-glad" applied to Ægir's daughters, that now calls up to our fancy the playfulness of the waves, had a more intense and far less instantaneous meaning, as we partly understand by comparing it to the war-gladness of heroes in ancient poetry. The modern substitutes can never capture the energy of the Teutonic words; it is not enough to add that the adjective was formerly more powerful or that the joy of battle was more violent. To our feeling, the ecstasy of fighting arises out of the collision between the warriors; in the ancient psychology, joy of battle and the battle itself are a permanent quality in the man or part of his soul. In the same way, storm-gladness is an inherent quality in the soul or nature of the waves. When the wave is called cold or Ran is called wet-cool, the adjectives do not mean that the woman is cold as the sea, but that she has the cold of the brine in her; the shivering iciness belongs to her soul just as oldness or long-living belongs to the bear's nature, for which reason he is called in Anglo-Saxon — and still in popular speech — "the old and terrible one".

We can piece together primitive soul, but we can never succeed in expressing its living unity in our language, because our words are modelled upon totally different ideas, and resist all attempts to switch them off into another plane and joining them into a new pattern. But to understand the ways of primitive man we must to some degree be able to realise his experience. We must see that the soul or idea of earth is a whole, spanning from being many-pathed to motherhood without a break. The Northern Hel is death, just as neutral as we are able to think death, but Hel is also a realm for the dead, and she is a real person, not a pale personification, one who acts as death and is putrefaction itself, blue and black of hue. Hildir means battle, that is the clash of arms, the surging mass of fighting men, and it means battle-maiden too.

Anthropomorphism has its root in primitive experience, because personality lies in the being of every soul from the beginning, but it cannot make its way through until thought is emancipated from experience. Not until man is so firmly established in his place that he does not need to be fixing his surroundings every moment with a dominating glance, not until he begins to look his own nature more consciously in the face and starts speculating on the processes going on in his interior, does the inclination arise to humanise the universe. Then he becomes a nature-poet. Only when this standpoint is reached can he venture to face his environment as his equal, meting out to it the same treatment that he himself appreciates and bows to. Before this revolution he knew only too well that in order to exploit the goodwill of nature and guard against its power to harm, it was necessary to know the character of souls. Anthropomorphism true and proper is born when man ensconces himself in towns or castles, shutting out nature by means of thick walls, and confining himself to social intercourse with his fellow-men.



The great change takes place at the moment when the personality, from being dependent on the natural qualities, turns to acting from purely human prejudices. When the soul is emancipated, so as to stand above its phenomena, then, and only then, is it a human being. When nymphs no longer ripple, when earth can no longer hide its children in itself, when the sun stands up in a chariot, guiding a gleaming pair of steeds, which he can put into stable together with all the qualities of sun, then nature is broken, and personification is born.

It is a difficult matter for us to get such unconditional ideas as life and existence narrowed down to the small circumference they must have in order to be applied to the soul of the past, without letting the depth disappear at the same time. We can perhaps get nearest to the old thoughts by saying that life and existence were in those days a nature — nature understood in the old sense, as something included from birth or from the first origin of a thing, something that goes with it inseparably, and determines not only its appearance but also its essence and characteristic features. A nature can only bring about certain definite results, namely those which lie in itself, as for instance, four legs of that particular sort a wolf has, together with such and such a smell, jaws that open and close in such and such a way, a tendency to thieving and sneaking about in wild places. Another nature can only produce something rugged, hard and heavy, which under certain circumstances will roll down and bite off the toes of a man standing in its way. But then too, it is inherent in nature that it cannot refrain from producing its effects. Wolfness may indeed exist as soul, but sooner or later it must manifest itself as a biting beast.

Wherever character is different, the be-souled are divided by the impassable gulf which separate life denotes. The incombinability of nature outweighs and overshadows all external, as well as all inner similarity. The nature of the tree, its character, will be judged from its appearance: whether it have rough bark or smooth, leaves round or long, whether it shoot up to a height or spread broadly around, but also from its ways: one tree has bark that glistens in bad weather, that of another will turn dark and threatening; one tree rustles its leaves, even when the weather is calm, another flings its arms about wildly in a storm, but otherwise hangs dully drooping. There is in this habit of the tree a revelation of its innermost soul, and much luck of wisdom consists in being able to read the soul of a tree from its behaviour. It is known that one tree possesses a knowledge and a power of divination which the other does not exhibit, or not in that distinct manner.

And finally, the usefulness of a tree is part of its soul. It is in the nature of oak to sail, as in that of ash to form spearshafts. The specific classification of trees and bushes in the ancient languages is based upon their importance to human life; they are divided into trees with hard wood and trees with soft; the barren and the bearing, such as cast fruits to men and beasts; also perhaps into those good for fire and those which burn slowly. From the Anglo-Saxon runic catalogue we gain a picture, weak and fractional though it is, of the souls of trees. The yew is "rough on the outer side, hard, firm in the soil, feeder of *fire*, deep-rooted"— and something more which we do not understand. The birch is "fruitless, yet bearing branches without offspring; it is fair in twigs, gaily decked as to the crown, swelling with leaf, intimately responsive to the air". The oak serves "the children of men to feeding of the flesh, often it voyages across

the sea, and the wave puts its firmness of core to the test". The ash is "greatly high, dear to men, firmly it holds its place in the ground, even though many men make onslaught against it" — and, we must add, or the meaning will be but partial, it holds its own stoutly, whether it be rooted in rocky ground, or as an ashen spear, in the warrior's hand.

Stones, too, have their nature, which gives them their sluggish-ness and their hardness, as well as their power to move at times, their keenness in biting, their power to crush — each stone according to its kind. The unfailing sense of locality among these people is due to the fact that they know from their childhood every tree, every stone, every little rise of the ground; they are accustomed to carry what they have once seen so accurately impressed upon their memory that no slight variation escapes them, and the slightest change is noticed. Then too they know well that stones on open ground have their different character, manifest not only in their shape, but also in their 'ways' perhaps in the power of pointing the road.

The mountains and hills that form the horizon have, as he who has observed them year after year will know, each their own peculiarities, they are all susceptible to what happens in the air, but they do not prophesy the day to come, its weather and its events in the same way, perhaps not always with the same wisdom. Several of them are entrusted with the task of pointing the time of day, according as the sun is on this or that point of the horizon, so men apportion their daily work and their hours of rest, and their nature is indicated by such names as The Hill of Noon and The Peak of Even.

Our forefathers, it would seem, followed with especial confidence the counsels and warnings declared by running water; and there are indications that they read with keen insight the souls through the form and movements of the mountain streams, perhaps also listened to peculiarities of voice in the falling waters. A poet who felt himself beyond the childish wisdom of the world, the bishop Bjarni Kolbeinson, defends himself, in the *Jómsvíkingadrápa*, expressly against the suspicion of having drawn his wisdom "beneath waterfalls"; as if his conscience writhed under all the paganism he must allow to pass his lips when he made poems in the ancient form. What Plutarch tells of the Suevi of Ariovistus is perhaps more widely applicable; they prophesied from the eddies of streams, and from the curves and foaming of the waters. At any rate, even if the sentence were born as a whole in Plutarch's brain, and not authorised word for word in the thoughts of the barbarians themselves, it may doubtless be taken as expressing the essential element in the mind of a Germanic observer watching attentively beneath a waterfall.

In our minds, animals are catalogued according to their teeth and morphological structure, and we carry our zoological or botanical systems with us when we set out to investigate the world as it is seen by a Hindoo or a Buddhist, by an Australian or an Indian. With a charming naïveté we break up into fragments the information obtained from other peoples, to make it go into ready-made categories, thus making nonsense or superstition of all the mythologies of the world. What is wanted in all parts of the world is patient study of primitive and non-European experience. The ethnologist must learn how to see and what to see; he must observe every animal with the eyes of the natives without any

reference to his own textbook, and thus piece together a new zoology and botany and mineralogy, or rather as many zoologies and botanies as there are different observers. On the prairies of North America he must discard his popular notion of the radical difference between flying and running creatures, to learn that the crow and the buffalo are related in the same way as the wolf and the heath in the North of Europe, because it is an inherent trait of the crow's character to hover over the herds of buffaloes and indicate their presence. Among the Scandinavians he must slowly piece together his view of the moon by learning that it marches, it counts the years, it determines luck and unluck, and it sends disease. To understand what a Teuton meant by "oak" we must simply learn that seaworthiness belongs to its qualities as well as its gnarled stem and eatable fruit. Prophecy is included in the nature of running streams in addition to swiftness and coldness.

There is no other way for outsiders than gathering facts piecemeal and combining them into a new totality; taking every hint that falls from the stranger's mouth when he is looking at things, without any magisterial distinction between details according as they fall in with our ideas or clash with our natural philosophy. In the North of Europe, our material is scant and fragmentary, but nevertheless we are able to piece a likeness together from the remnants of poetical and legal speech. As to the sea, we learn that it is cold, salt and wide; further, it is called by the Icelander coal-blue, by the Anglo-Saxon *fealu*, *fallow* in words that suggest other associations than those of mere tints. *Fallow* possibly conveys an intimation of the barrenness of the deep, like the Greek epithets. It is cruel, and possibly coal-blue carries some hint of its deadly power. It is the road of the land of gulls, swans and gannets, the land of seals, whales and eels, the road of the ship and the seafarer. And to these epithets must be added the picture of Ægir, the man of the sea, and Ran, the woman of the deep. Earth is wide, great, enormous, spacious; it asserts itself as immovably steady. It is called the green - even the evergreen - and the growth-giving, bearing, nourishing; "as wide as the world grows" is a northern expression for "all over the world".

But it is also part of earth's nature to be farable; in offering tracks and free stepping space to men's feet it wins the name: road or roads; and here we can see with our own eyes how deep the words go down into daily thought. In verse Odin can say, referring to his experiences when he crawled through a fissure in the mountain to woo Gunnlod, the giant bride, that over and under him stood "the roads of the giants", and in everyday speech Norway is simply the North-ways, and the East-ways denote Russia. "Green tracks" is in Norwegian a name designating Middle-garth as contrasted with the barren Utgard; in the compound two qualities of the earth join: her fruitfulness and her farability, the teeming and the wide-pathed. To these intimations must be added the hints from practical life. We hear that men called in the power of earth in cases of need either to ward off the effects of strong drink or to guard against evil influences. In an Anglo-Saxon formula, direction is given to take earth in the right hand and place earth under the right foot and say: "Earth has power against all manner of beings, against envy and forgetfulness, against the tongue of a mighty man". The verses are included in some instructions for farmers when their bees have swarmed, but the matter of them appears to suggest their applicability to many other circumstances of life. Possibly the idea of firmness and of the fruitfulness

of earth meet in this incantation. Finally earth is a woman who conceives and gives birth, who hides men and things in her lap or in her body.

In beariness, wolfness, ravenness, in oakness, beechness, elmness, the soul ends on one side. But when we turn about to look for the limit of the soul on the outward side, toward the light, we soon find that the road is longer than we thought. The two flanks of nature, that which goes down into existence, and that which goes out into manifestation, must be of precisely the same length; as far as Nature goes — that is to say, as far as qualities and appearance are the same,— life is identical. All wolves, all oaks, all stones, have the same soul. And not only are all members of a class partakers of a certain kind of soul, shareholders, as it were, in a fund of vital force, but they are identical both in body and soul, so that they suffer one another's sufferings and feel one another's offences and anger and goodwill. Primitive thought regards separation in space as an insignificant accidental circumstance; one might be tempted to express it thus: it feels the solidity of matter, of the body, but is blind to its extent in space, and perhaps that expression is more than a paradoxical image.

In the primitive experience of life, identity has a deeper foundation than mere continuance. We combine our separate sensations and make a whole of them by conjecturing that the world is filled with individual beings and every single individual lives a linear life of its own; when the animal Slips out of our view we fancy that it trails a line of existence somewhere hidden among the thousand things of the earth until it reappears across our path. The universe is crossed by millions and millions of threads, each one spun by an isolated individual. According to primitive experience, the facts arrange themselves into a different pattern. All bears are the same soul and the same body, and every new appearance of a bear — whether it be no other than that we saw yesterday, or the most distant of all among the kin, as we reckon it — is a new creation from the soul. A bear is a new birth every time it appears anew, for the deep connection in the existence of the soul is a steady power of regeneration. In our observation, animals are either counted or they are lumped together in a collective genus or type; we speak of a wolf, of wolves and of the wolf; but in primitive language and poetry, the animal is neither this particular wolf nor *the* wolf that crowns a chapter in natural history, but wolf simply. It is this individual and yet all-embracing personality that forms the subject of the Anglo-Saxon gnostic verses such as this description of the bear: the bear shall be old and terrible, or paraphrased into modern words: old age and terror is his nature or soul.

The popular tales have retained the ancient mode of telling, and under cover of the traditional language still persists a vague reflex of the old idea: the wolf that swallowed little Red Riding-hood is surely not a particular beast that had taken its station in that part of the wood, but the wolf of the wood.

The sun also is the same from day to day, for there is not more than one sun-soul; but when it is said in legal language of some thing or other agreed on that it must be carried out before the fifth sun or on the day when five suns have come to an end in the sky, then the words do really mean that there comes one sun to-day, another to-morrow, and finally a fifth to shine over the completion of the undertaking. And it is no matter for wonder to find oneself suddenly, in a

ritual or a story, brought face to face with a whole series of sun-gods. Every day is a fresh birth, but all days are nevertheless Dagr, Delling's son, to speak the language of Northern myth, just as winter is the son of Vindsvalr and summer the son of Svasudr. The myths are simple statements of fact when they create, as they sometimes do, a great being, the chief of all bears or the father of sun and of moon, who incorporates the life of beariness or sunness and sends his messengers out into the world. But when we approach the mythical idea from the angle of poetical thought, we need no reminding that fatherhood is *tote coelo* different from our begetting, which presupposes individual life as the line on which existence is built up. The "Wind-cold" who is winter's father and the "Sweet-breeze" who is summer's father are nothing but the everlasting soul that bursts into appearance at the proper time.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **THE ART OF LIFE**

No wonder, then, that life in Middle-garth seems so safe in spite of all perils and unforeseen happenings. Man stands firmly and self-confidently on his feet, undismayed in face of all those Utgard beings that now and again come roving about the earth; he is fighting on his own ground, and with a host of allies about him.

We saw man stumbling blindly outside the limits of his world; every step was the guessing at a riddle, riddles of the sort that giants propound, when life depends on their solution. Out there, a rarely gifted hero may manage to win safely through a few days and come safely home, but to live there is impossible. If Middle-garth had been so constituted that men were forced to feel their way thus blindly, then the giants would have ruled over earth to the end of all things.

There is no such stumbling now. Men know the soul of all things, know what there is in every being of will, both good and evil, they know the nature of hate and the nature of love, they can utilise goodwill and guard against the power to harm, they can turn aside at the proper place, and grasp a thing at the right moment. In virtue of their wisdom they can rule, and where power does not suffice they can lay their crafty plan with certainty, without fear of its missing its aim, as it would so often out in yonder land of demons. They can force the souls of things to serve them, by making them friendly. Plants that house a hostile will, and would infallibly eat up the ignorant from within become, for one who knows their soul, sources of strength and healing, if properly dealt with during growth, or wisely handled after they are plucked. Man has taken the stones into his service, made them into implements wherein all harmful and annihilating will is directed outward, and all goodwill inward toward the user, so that he can confidently wield them and attain his end. He is surrounded by tamed souls.

There is perhaps no soul that can testify more strongly to the wisdom of man than fire. What it has been, and what it still can be, we may learn from the

names given it at times. It shares the name *frekr* with the wolf and is thus brought into company with the “shameless, voracious” beast; cruel and greedy, runs another of its characters. And now, what is the best thing in the world? “Fire is best among men’s sons, and the sight of the sun, health and life without blame”— in such a series ending with the greatest thing in life, blameless honour, fire can hold its own. “Fire guards, or aids, against disease”, runs another ancient saw, and he who knows something of folk-life, and the part there played by fire in the welfare of men and cattle, knows the depth of significance covered by this little sentence. Fire is even the nourisher of life, says the poetic speech. And this transformation of the restless element is due to man himself; men are ever taming the flame anew and anew, consecrating it and devoting it to use in Middle-garth. The rites of this old consecration have been lost, but from later customs of the people we can at least form an idea of their character. On certain festivals, or when the decline of luck intimated that a renewal was needed, the fire was quenched on every hearth; the inhabitants of the town assembled and called new fire to life by means of the ancient and venerable fire drill that lets wood beget fire out of wood. And from the new-born flame blessing was spread to stall and barn, and new life kindled on the hearth.

But when all is said, the dwellers in Middle-garth are not dependent upon goodwill in the souls; they are not only the crafty ones who know how to exploit the weakness or generosity of another; they can force him to obey their will. The hunter can master the game he pursues, so that it does not escape him, but on the contrary, comes in his way of its own free will; bears him no grudge, and does not plan vengeance for his onslaught. It is a far cry from soul to soul, there is a great gulf fixed between man and the things around him, and none can, in virtue of the life that is in him, directly influence another being so as to raise up impulses and tendencies out of its soul. But the more easy, then, it is to steal into an alien soul, and set it in motion by its own limbs and of its own strength. Appearance and qualities are not, as we have seen, accidental results of nature, and therefore, by accepting one of the peculiarities of the soul, one gathers up the soul in its entirety, and makes it one's own will. If one can but establish connection with the soul on a single point, one has the whole; life is as fully inherent in a little torn-off fragment of the body as in the leaping, spying, willing organism, and can one assimilate that little section into oneself, by eating it or binding it to one's body, then- one sucks up the whole soul. But the end can be attained as effectively by spiritual means; by mimic reproduction of the ways and behaviour of the body, one acquires the nature, and becomes possessed of the whole great full-bodied soul — or draws it at least half way into oneself. One can enter into the nature of a beast by pursuing its aims with its gestures, by imitating its stealing out in search of prey, its cry, its leap, its mode of eating, perhaps even its mating. And one can then, from within, bend the beast to one's will. Indeed, the “idea” itself, as we would say, is really sufficient to gain one mastery over the soul, if one can but get the idea fixed in a form amenable to treatment. Possibly the name is such a true symbol in which the soul is enclosed; then it is a charm to overcome the enemy. Some dangerous being or other places itself in a man's way, opens its jaws to swallow him, glares at him as if to turn him to stone; but he flings out his “I know your name” against the monster, and if it be true that he masters its name, it sinks down impotently or steals away scowling. But mastery implies that he knows all which the name

stands for: the ways of the beast, its ferocity and its dodging; mastering implies real knowledge and familiarity or, in other words, power.

But he who knows the nature of things and understands how to avoid conflict, can also take action himself and exploit the world. Not only can he bind and cow his surroundings for a time, he is also able to establish a lasting feeling of solidarity, so as to build up frith between himself and the beings around him. He can unite himself with a soul outside the circle of mankind, imposing on it certain obligations towards him, with a reciprocal responsibility in no wise inferior to the honour of the circle of kinsmen. This can, however, only be attained by his mingling mind, as the old phrase runs, with the animal. He engrafts upon himself soul of its soul, so as to bring about between the two kinds of life an identity similar to that which binds all individuals of the beast species together in bodily unity. Such union takes place by transference of soul-fragments, and where it occurs must bring about full and complete transference of the alien nature into the foster-brother. Man adopts the soul of his new kinsman, acquiring both right and power to use its luck when need arises. Among the Germanic peoples we find but a few scattered relics of the time when men united themselves with animals, but right down into historical times we find evidence of a feeling of foster-brotherhood, and that, moreover, a very strong one. In the neighbourhood of Eric the Red's homestead in Greenland, there appeared one winter a great white bear which ravaged around, and when Thorgils, then a guest at Brattahlid, slew the beast to save his little son's life, he gained the praise of all men. Only Eric was silent, and though he made no objection to the customary disposal of the body for useful ends, it was understood that he was incensed at Thorgils' deed. Some said that Eric had cherished "ancient faith" in the beast. And the saga hints that the relationship between the two men was from that day even cooler than before; indeed, Eric sought to lead Thorgils into peril of life.

The wolf was generally considered as an uncanny beast, unheore and belonging to Utgard, but as part of the battle the beast entered into the soul of the professional warrior. The language had need of two words, *vargr* (Anglo-Saxon *vearg*) and *úlfr* (Anglo-Saxon *vulf*); *vargr* is the demon beast, and no man could be *vargr* unless he was bereft of frith, given over to trolls and roving beastlike in the woods; wolf, on the other hand, is a friend of the king, and his name is often borne among men. To be true to the ancient sense, we had perhaps better say that language needed two words, because there were two beings, the animal that enters into league with man, and the wild beast of the trolls. The use of Wolf as a title of honour for warriors and as a man's name, and still more the existence of Ylfing or Vylfing as a family name, implies that men might contract alliance with the beast, overcome the strangeness of the animal and draw it into a firm alliance; such wolf-men surely had wolf-nature, the strength of a wolf and part of his habits. It is a fair guess according to the hints of the ancient literature that the Ylfings were real wolf-men, and possibly some phrases in one of the Eddie poems hark back to a half forgotten reality: In the Lay of Helgi the young prince who is a "scion of the Ylfings" once, when he went about in disguise, alludes to himself as the grey wolf. Ketil Hæing (the Salmon) belonged to a race of the Lofotens where people to a large extent depended on the bounty of the sea for their living. His name is accounted for by a myth in the family saga, a pretty sure sign that there was some inner



relationship between the man and the fish. Perhaps we may also see a legendary reflex of everyday fact in the story of Otr, the fisherman, who was able to change himself into an otter to catch fish for his meals. The words in which the Volsungasaga describes the nature of this Otr are too discerning to seem wholly dependent on late romancing; probably the author is indebted to popular wisdom, if not to ancient tradition. "Otr was a great fisherman, more skilful than other men; he took the shape of an otter and dived in the river and caught fish with his mouth .... He had in great measure the habits of the beast, and used to eat in solitude with his eyes shut, lest he should discover how his food dwindled." In the Ynglingasaga the author has accidentally inserted a queer fragment of a family legend regarding a sparrow man. We learn that King Dag was wise enough to understand the language of birds, and further that he possessed a sparrow that flew far and wide, bringing information back to his master. In one of its rambles the sparrow settled in a field to peck at the ears of corn, whereupon the peasant picked up a stone and killed it. When Dag found out in what land the bird had lost its life, he set out on an avenging expedition and harassed the country of the slayer cruelly.

By virtue of his dominance over nature, man can also combine souls, and engraft the essence of one upon another. Thus he inspires that which his hands have worked on, and equips his implements with qualities calculated to render them useful in their calling. When he fastens a bunch of feathers to his arrow, he gives its flight the accuracy of a bird, perhaps also something of a bird's force in swooping on its prey; as surely as he gives himself a touch of bird-nature by fastening feathers about his body. Or he may, in the strength of his artistic faculty, content himself with a presentment of nature. He chisels a serpent on his sword, lays "a blood-painted worm along the edge" so that it "winds its tail about the neck of the sword", and then lets the sword "bite". Or he may use another form of art, he can "sing" a certain nature into his weapon. He tempers it in the fire, forges it with art and craft, whets it, ornaments it, and "lays on it the word" that it shall be a serpent to bite, a fire to eat its way. So also he builds his ship with the experience of a shipbuilder, paints it, sets perhaps a beast at the prow, and commands that it shall tread sure-footed as a horse upon the water. Naturally, the mere words are not enough, if there is no luck in them; they take effect only if the speaker can make them whole. How he contrives to accomplish this is a question too deep to enter into here, but as we learn to know him, we may perhaps seize upon one little secret after another.

The poet is a great man of luck. He has more word-luck than other men — this is apparent not only in the ring of his words but also in their effect upon men and natures. We, in our one-sidedness, are inclined to see only the æsthetic side of his production; as if all his art consisted in describing how the battle serpent smote from the hand of the warrior and bit deep into the brain of his foe, how the war-flame shone as the hero swung it aloft, and bit its man to death at every blow, how the birds of battle flew singing from the bow, how the sea-horses, the wave-gangers, trod the fish-meads. Such images are not to be thus lightly dismissed. "Sea-horse" is not a comparison, the poet does not say the ship is like — no, the ship is the thing he says; the ship does not go over the waves as a horse trots along firm road, but the sea horse treads the wave with an unfailling step. The poetic portrayal of the warrior as the tree of battle, which serves as padding in every other line for the sedulous scald, seems to belong to

the North; at any rate, there is no certain trace of the figure in the poetry of other Germanic peoples. But whether specially Scandinavian or not, it has the authority of age. Later poets take pleasure in the picture of warriors as trees, standing in the storm of battle and waving their arms wildly while the death-dew pours down the trunk; the paraphrase itself says no more than that the warrior is the thick-stemmed, fast-rooted tree that is able to withstand many a cut of the axe without toppling over. The description of the ash in the runic catalogue is perhaps the best commentary here; "firm in the ground, holding its place even though many men make onslaught", words which take their light from the double play of thought between the tough ash as a tree and the invincible ashen spear. Undoubtedly, that poet was a great man of luck who first inspired his chieftain with a soul that had for its dominant quality the stubbornly swinging firmness of the ash. The beauty of the poetic figure lay in its truth; for if the metaphor failed to express a reality, it had no poetic justification.

Through innumerable kinships, natures are knit together this way and that, until the world hangs in a web of frith. So man draws souls into his circle. For the present age, the war-cry is: rule. Be master of the earth, subdue creation is the watch-word running through our time, and it looks as if this commandment sympathetically strikes the heart-note of our culture and ever sets the pace not only for its actions but also for its speculations. All hypotheses anent past ages in the history of our race hinge on the assumption that man has made his way through an everlasting battle, and that civilization is the outcome of man's struggle for existence. But modern civilization with its cry for mastery and its view of life as a continuous strife is too narrow a base for hypotheses to make history intelligible. The evolutionary theory of an all-embracing struggle for food and survival is only an ætiological myth, as the ethnologists have it, a simple contrivance to explain modern European civilization by throwing our history, its competition and its exclusive interest in material progress back on the screen of the past. When ancient and primitive cultures are presented in the light of modern economical problems, all the proportions and perspectives are disturbed; some aspects are thrown into relief, other aspects are pushed into the shade, without regard to the harmony inherent in the moral and intellectual life of other peoples; and the view as a whole is far more falsified by such capricious playing of searchlights than by any wilful distorting of facts.

The key-note of ancient culture is not conflict, neither is it mastery, but conciliation and friendship. Man strives to make peace with the animals, the trees and the powers that be, or deeper still, he wants to draw them into himself and make them kin of his kin, till he is unable to draw a fast line between his own life and that of the surrounding nature. Culture is too complex — and we may add too unprofitable — a thing to be explained by man's toil for the exigencies and sweets of life, and the play of his intellect and imagination has never — until recent times perhaps — been dominated by the quest of food or clothing. The struggle for daily bread and for the maintenance of life until the morrow is generally a very keen one in early society, and it seems that the exertion calls for the exercise of all faculties and powers. But as a creature struggling for food, man is a poor economist; at any rate he is a bad hand at limiting his expenditure of energy to the needs of the day. There is more than exertion in his work; there is an overshooting force, evidence that the energy

which drives him is something more complex than the mere instinct of existence. He is urged on by an irresistible impulse to take up the whole of nature in himself, to make it, by his active sympathy, something human, to make it heore.

Primitive man has never been able to limit his needs to what is strictly necessary. His friendships among the souls are not confined to the creatures that are useful to his body or dangerous to his life. When we see how man in his poetry, his myths and legends creates an imaginative counterpart of his surroundings, how he arranges his ceremonial life, at times indeed his whole life, according to the heavens and their movement, how at his festivals he dramatizes the whole creation of his limited world through a long series of ritual scenes, we gain some idea how important it was to him to underpin his spiritual existence. His circle of friends spans from the high lights of heaven to the worm burrowing in the soil; it includes not only the bug that may be good to eat, but also innocuous insects that never entered into his list of delicacies; it comprises not only the venomous snake, but also harmless crawling things that have no claim on his interest save from the fact of their belonging to his country.

The traces handed down from our forefathers of their ritual life are slight and few, but numerous enough to show us that they communed with things high and low. They were able to make friends among the leaping and growing creatures, as we have dimly seen. Their life was both a sun-life and a moon-life. The sun had entered into their soul to such a degree that actions were orientated from east to west. If there is to be luck in an undertaking it must be done sunwise, from east to west. The Swedish king had to ride his "Eriksgata"—a sort of triumphal progress from town to town throughout the kingdom—sunwise through the land; and sunwise, we may presume, men carried the fire when consecrating a new homestead and drawing the waste land into their luck. When Iceland in course of time had grown more thickly populated, and land was not so plentiful, it was decided that no man should take more land than he could compass with fire in one day. The procedure was to light a fire while the sun was in the east, move on and light another within sight of the first, and so continuing until the last fire flamed with the sun in the west. Even down to matters of everyday life the law of the sun holds good. Sunwise the drinking horn is to pass from hand to hand round the hall. Under ordinary circumstances, it seemed, men would walk sunwise round the house, to judge from a passage in the saga of Droplaug's sons. Grim and Helgi lost their way in a blizzard, and had no idea of their whereabouts, when they suddenly came upon a house wall; they walked sunwise round the place and discovered that it was Spakbessi's place of sacrifice. Their walking thus was, according to Bessi's view, the cause of the storm's continuing for a fortnight. If we may believe that the saga writer knew what he was talking about, it must be the actual movement about the temple which gave the weather so powerful a forward thrust that it could hardly stop. On the other hand, by going against the sun, men can throw nature back upon itself in such wise that it breaks and is put out of joint. In Iceland, we learn, witches were able to cause destructive landslips by walking round the house. The sorceress Groa, who had a grudge against the powerful Sons of Ingimund, prepared a feast of death and sent a gracious invitation to her victims, but as usual, the luck and wisdom of the family proved too strong, and the guests were prevented by dreams from attending. After sunset Groa walked round her

house, counter-sunwise, looked up at the mountain-top and waved a cloth in which her gold was tied, and with a sigh: "It is hard to stand against the luck of these sons of Ingimund," and the wish: "May that now come to pass which has been prepared," she closed the door after her. Then came a landslide down upon the house, and all perished. The same device was used by Audbjorg, to avenge the degradation of her son upon Berg Shortshanks. She could not sleep for unrest at night. It was calm, with a clear frost. She went out, and walked counter-sunwise round her own homestead, lifted her head and sniffed at every quarter of the horizon. At once the weather changed, a drift set in, the wind brought a thaw, and a snowslide came down over Berg's dwelling, so that twelve men met their death.

For one who understood the business, this counter-sunwise movement need not perhaps have unnatural effect; it might even, if wisely directed towards a certain end, do good. At any rate, we read of a man who calmed a storm by walking against the sun around a circle formed by his companions; that he should find it necessary to talk Irish while so doing, is probably nothing more than an indication that culture proper was at an end, and the time come for mysticism to replace the simple meaning culture had taken with it to the grave, by its practical or speculative abracadabra. The action in itself might well have its authority in culture.

The close association between man and sun is also indicated by legal custom. Legal acts and bargains were not valid unless they had been accomplished in the light of the sun or in broad daylight. It is unlawful to take an oath by night after the sun has passed below the wood, to cite a Swedish instance. Killing by night, was deemed murder, and the reason is not to be sought for in the secrecy of the act. What was done in the dark is altogether different in character from what was performed in league with the sun or in the spirit and power of the sun. To catch the full weight — we may say the psychological force — of the saying "night killing is murder" we must remember that murder is a dishonourable act, a niding's deed, and undermines the doer's moral constitution; it discloses, some morbid strain in his character or, as the ancients would say, some taint in his soul. Consequently acts done in night time lack the sound, honourable initiative that needs the full luck of the doer, and in the temporary weakening a demon element may insert itself.

With regard to the moon, Tacitus informs us that it served to regulate the popular assemblies; at new and full moon men assembled at the law-thing, "for in all undertakings they regard this as the best beginning." Cæsar's observations also, anent the Germanic choice of days, is evidently very significant: "Ariovistus and his people knew, from the prophetic warnings of the womenfolk, that they could not hope for victory if they opened the battle before new moon." We might easily add to these casual hints from modern popular superstition with its hundreds of rules for what shall be done at the time of the waxing moon, and what be postponed till the moon is on the wane; and with caution, we can draw so much wisdom from this thickly muddied well, that the influence of the moon was not restricted to matter of public life, but penetrated the whole of life, even in everyday affairs. Unfortunately, however, the insight into the being of the moon is lost and its character stands now as a dark riddle. Only this much we know, that it was the moon—the year-teller — which

determined the passage of time and days, and thus gave day its force by giving it of its soul; the luck of time thus ebbed and flowed with that of the moon.

We cannot be in doubt as to the importance of sunwise moving thoughts; men accept and fix the sun's nature in themselves. In this wise they must have gathered enormous powers and great luck; but if they gained good fortune by such friendship, they would necessarily acquire something more, to wit, peace of mind. That the ancients felt veneration for the sun, feared it and sought to enlist its strength, that they wished to use it to their advantage, win its favour and force it in under their own will — all this is true, for it is all one and the same thing; what men strive for, and what they attain, is frith and mutual responsibility. Without kneading natures together no kinship is possible. Men make nature part of themselves by engrafting of their own life upon the alien element, or, what is the same thing to them, drawing something of that alien life into themselves.

But man has a wider object in sight when he concludes friendship and mingles mind with the souls around him. By weaving a web of community he introduces peace and order in the world. The Northmen say that there was once a time when the world was unheore, the giants ruled as they pleased, spreading themselves as masters throughout all existence. But a race of mighty and wise beings came down upon them, and now the spawn of the ogres sit beyond the frontier, gnawing bones and biting their nails. Thus land is marked off from unland, heore from unheore. But even to this day the frontier is only held by strict watchfulness. The gods, it is said, instituted the first massacre of the monsters, slew the primeval giant, so that hosts of the brood were drowned in his blood, and swept the rest away out of Middle-garth. Even now Thor, the guardian of Middle-garth, still makes his exterminating raids; there is still danger, even for sun and moon; now one, now another dweller in Utgard has sought to yoke them under his giant will. The present order and beauty of this "fair world" has not instituted itself; it is brought about by the care of some god or hero. And in this view the Northmen are in accordance with peoples in other parts of the world. The poet of the Voluspá, who was a mediæval philosopher with ideas of his own, but drew upon ancient myths for his material — has rescued an account of the state of the heavens as it was before the arranging powers had manifested themselves: "The sun knew not where were its halls, the moon knew not what strength (i.e. luck, determination) it had. The stars knew not where were their places."

In the legendary shape which the myths took on when they were reduced to stories by the philosophy of a new religion, it would seem as if the fateful trial of strength took place between gods and giants, while the dwellers on earth were left to look on with bated breath. The poet gives his narrative in the past form as if it were something over and done with; from the form of the words it might seem as if the listeners enjoyed an enhanced sense of security by calling up the memory of a moment when the fate of the world hung in the balance and then swung over to the proper side. But the literary form which the myths acquired in the hands of the poets during the Viking age and later obscures the actual meaning that was plain to the listeners, when the legends were recited at the feast and illustrated, or rather supplemented, by rites and ceremonial observances. The fight is waged from day to day in the midst of the human world, no one is sure of keeping the light and the warmth, unless he and his

fellows by some ceremony or other are ever strengthening the bond between themselves and the high-faring lights. If the alliance fail but for a moment, then the heavenly bodies will lose their way, and then sets in the state which the poet of the Voluspá still knew, and could describe.

And the peril that hangs so threateningly in the sky lies actually in wait for every soul in Middle-garth. Behind all security there is this grave fact, that natures have potential hostility in them; they can run wild, they can become unheore. And they do so at times, when men fail to maintain themselves and their luck, and thereby their alliance with their environment; then the clammy soil grows barren, then cattle lose their power of yielding, and trees become bearers of ill-luck; the fish move in dense shoals out to sea, while the waters fling destruction upon land. If the peace of the world is to be maintained, there must be great self-restraint among men, and at the same time great watchfulness and care to do all that is fitting at every festival and ritual beginning.

Without this intimate connection between man and the other natures about him neither he nor Middle-garth could exist. The myths tell us, if properly read, that man has created a habitable well-ordered world in the midst of chaos, and that to live and thrive he must for ever uphold his communion with every single soul and so constantly recreate the fixed order of the world. Primitive man never thought of pointing triumphantly to an eternal order of things; he had the sense of security, but only because he knew how the regularity of the world was brought about, and thus could say how it should be maintained.

Man is never able to embrace all beings and draw the whole round of creation into his sympathy and understanding. The beings left out cluster on the borders of reality as a threatening and disquieting force. Through all cultures runs a chasm separating the warm friendly reality from the cold strange fact — the known from the unknown, or in Old English words, the heore from the unheore. And deep-rooted in all humanity is the fear of the unknown, a feeling which, while seemingly simple and clear enough, leads down, on closer scrutiny, to depth upon depth. Uppermost lies the fear of a will which no obligation hinders from harming and molesting; barely hidden under this superficial dread lies the anxiety as to what the alien thing may hit upon, what it may have strength to do, the uneasy restlessness that comes of being without means to estimate the danger. But this fear of the unknown extends, in reality, far beyond a sense of danger threatening life and limb, it opens out into a painful anticipation where despair is every moment on the point of breaking out; for where souls are not in some way or another welded together, man must be prepared to find actions striking with the force of a catastrophe. The forces emanating from the alien source are of another kind, and take effect in a different way, so that the sufferer may perhaps not feel the effect until the harm is done, and has at any rate no means of defence calculated to ward off the influence.

The line of demarcation runs through all cultures, but its place shifts from one people to another, and it is never possible to lay down a rule as to which beings will be found on either side of the frontier. Naturally the desert and the sown, the rough mountains or wild woods and the pleasant lea, with their kinds, are separated by a sharp border. But the reason why one animal is drawn into communion and another is left out as unheore must be sought for in the



individual experience of each race. In one place the snake is a sacred animal, in another place it is an uncanny beast; thus in northern Europe, where the wriggling, striking reptile was held in execration and placed in demon land. Later mythology makes a family of Fenrir, the Serpent of Middle-garth, and Hel or Death, and names as their mother Angrboda, an ogress; this construction proceeds from the fact that Fenrir, the chief wolf or father of wolves, and the great serpent, together with death, have their origin and home in the unheore world of the ogres.

The chasm extends into the world of human beings. Humanity proper is made up of all the families and tribes with whom our people has intercourse, for companionship means constant mingling of frith, honour and luck; outside the pale the "strangers" crowd, and the strangers are another sort of men, because their minds and ways are unknown. When they are called sorcerers the word only emphasises the fact that their doings are like the doings of demons and trolls, dark and capricious, admitting of no sure calculation. The only means of overcoming the wickedness of strangers is by annexing their luck and honour and mingling mind; by mingling minds the will and feeling in the two parties are adjusted, and henceforth their acts interlock instead of running at cross purposes. Between men there may be fighting, community may be suspended by enmity, but the struggle is human and carried on by the rules of honour; against strangers men have perpetual war, and the warfare must be adjusted to the fiendish ingenuity of the demons. Towards vermin or wild beasts men cannot feel responsibility or generosity.

That Utgard is full of witchcraft and unheore, is known to all, and all fear with which man looks out over the limits of human life, is after all of a different sort from the fear of home-bred witchcraft. For when a member of the community separates himself from spiritual intercourse with his brothers, or when the worker of things unheore establishes himself within the boundary between land and unland, his presence lies like an incubus on all thought, paralysing both will and power. His doings, even his very thoughts, are a constant danger to the luck of the inhabitants; they will infallibly cause strife among neighbours, and wither up the fertility of the land. Their presence is a breach in the cosmos, and as destructive of spiritual security as the sun or the earth would be if they broke loose from the friendship of man and ran wild. To uphold the world, man must destroy and annihilate all sorcerers, with their houses and all their goods. The boundary which separates magicians from humankind is so sharp, because it is independent of all petty external estimates of black and white; it can never be effaced, however much the acts and powers of the magician may resemble those of everyday man, and it cannot become sharper through the fact that the magician's arts go far out into the dark.

We see in Northern literature that the practices of the wizard did not differ markedly from the ritual proceedings of common men; when he changes himself or transforms things out of recognition or practises optical delusions, he may know some particular trick caught up perhaps from neighbouring peoples — the Lapps for instance — but generally he works along the lines laid down by the experience of his race. He is hated because he practises his tricks in the spirit of darkness and seclusion; he is a stranger who stands outside the pale of frith, and therefore his deeds are in every case full of unheore, and when they



are further marked by an uncanny cruelty, these qualities are but a necessary manifestation of the nature of his will.

It is a toilsome thing to be a human being, far more so than one would be predisposed, from human needs and human conditions, to believe. The demands of every day in regard to food, housing, fire, clothing, arms wherewith to face an enemy, implements for necessary purposes, can, by their incessant urging, keep men going; but the struggle for food cannot produce that incitement of the blood in the veins which drives a man beyond himself. It may seem a stern task enough to have to compel the sun and moon to hold on their course, keep the sluices of the rain adequately open, bind the fish to the coast, equip the woods with leaf in spring, and maintain the harmony of the world; but this task nevertheless is altogether overshadowed by another, far more difficult and even more impossible to thrust aside: to hold thoughts in their courses and keep the soul together. The god who brings the universe into shape is only a grand mask; and behind the mask is a man who works at the not less grand task of creating a clear and coherent unity out of the mass of his experience. The anxiety that drives man to intertwine nature with his own will and feeling is deeper than all fear for his bodily safety, for it is the dread of inner chaos. We Europeans are born late in the day in the sense that our social and scientific contrivances are removed by several stages from direct experience of the world; our psychology and our philosophy are built up by scholastic modifications of the thinking done by the primitive Greeks and Israelites and Teutons whose successors and spiritual legatees we are. Modern man, who deems himself much wiser than his ancestors, derives most of his strength from that very part of his spiritual work which he is most apt to hold in contempt as childish or "superstitious". We awake in an illumined world, where all we need is to kindle a blaze or turn on a light when the sun is out of the sky and the moon is in the dark season; we find ourselves seated in a well-supplied larder where we have only to fetch the food we want. We have made ourselves independent of the rhythm in nature between richness and dearth, growing and declining; and the caprices of nature do not afflict us directly, but come only disguised as economical crises, storms in the social realm. We look upon the world as a regular easy-going machine, and all this order of things we take as a matter of course. As we stand here in the common centre of innumerable circles wherein sun and moon and stars, summer and winter, day and night, beasts great and small, birds, fishes, move without ceasing, without breaking out, it never occurs to us to enter this regularity among the great deeds of our forefathers; least of all do we realise that without them here would have been a chaos which had whirled us, poor wretches, to the bottom.

Man is born into an overwhelming ocean of sounds and sights that hurl themselves at him piecemeal without cohesion or unity, and it is left to him to arrange the welling mass into forms and structures. He must create sun and moon, clouds and rain, animals and trees into coherent personalities and shape a course for all these abrupt momentary apparitions so that they may coalesce into a continuous recognisable form. All those peepings out of heads and whiskings of tails, gleamings of eyes and fleeting movements have to be sifted and sorted into bodies and labelled wolf, fox, badger. The work of establishing order and harmony calls for selection and elimination as well as addition; we

cannot make a sun or an animal that includes the whole body of experience; so we boldly ignore part of the facts or sometimes make two beings that overlap one another, as the Teutons did with the wolf, and as we do now with the flower of beauty and the flower of botany. But to create a unity we must also necessarily supply some connecting links that may be called theory but are to us part of the experience. The dark masses cleaving to mountain tops may be recognised as belonging to the hills as part of their nature or soul — this will often be the primitive view; or the clouds may be severed from their resting places and combined with the steam rising from a boiling kettle into a separate entity akin to water — thus modern experience that sacrifices one very important point of reality to gain coherence on another point. According to our classification, fire and matter are kept separate, and we boldly disregard the fact that certain stones strike off sparks and certain kinds of wood produce fire when rubbed. Primitive men arrange the facts in another pattern, saying that fire belongs to the nature or soul of tree and stone — the sparks are conceived and begotten by the fire drill; consequently there is an innate kinship between stones and trees on the one hand and the fire that comes down from the heavens on the other.

In our conception of men and animals we fasten on the outward bodily coherence and continuity, thus creating a mass of isolated individuals where primitive man sees manifestations of grand souls or ideas. In our world, the reality of man is determined by the circumscribed and isolated status of his body, and his soul is made up of the thoughts and feelings confined to his isolated brain. The solitariness of the human being is so strong in our culture and so prominent in our experience that we slur over all other facts, such as the spiritual influence of his presence, the power of his words and the inevitable concatenation of fate between individuals that makes a family, and often a still larger body of men, suffer for the imprudence and guilt of one sinner. To us, the individual is the reality on the basis of which all practical and theoretical questions must be solved, and we look upon all the other facts as secondary, prepared to grapple with them as problems, and we go on tackling them, piling one solution upon the top of another, even when they prove insoluble. On the other hand, primitive culture gathers the whole mass of facts into the reality called man, and constructs a "soul" in which the power of words and spiritual emanation, the "suggestive" force and the touch of hands are included as well as form and features, in which the solidarity of the many is recognised as well as the responsibility of the individual.

## **CHAPTER IX**

# **THE SOUL OF MAN**

In the midst of the world of souls stands man, and he stands there in virtue of a soul, a life. This soul can bear precisely the same antitheses as the other souls or natures in Middle-garth. One may quite well begin in the Anglo-Saxon riddle-fashion by saying: "I know a strange thing: it is invisible, yet stands forth before

the eyes of all men in the hall; it is no more than six feet tall, and yet none can see more than one end of it; it can be felt with hands and without hands, and yet none can grasp and hold it fast; it goes over heath and breaking wave as swiftly as cloud before the storm, and a dog can overtake it; it flies in the air, and yet lies sleeping in the hall" It is bound to matter, and free to move about in spite of time and space and gravity. It is formless as the heat that passes in a grip of the hand from one arm up into the other, and invisible when it spreads as a force from a warrior to all his host and inspires them all as one man. And it is obliged sooner or later to take shape.

If we want to know what human life is, we must first of all discard our preconceived notions about soul and body and their antagonism and simply look out for the distinguishing signs of human nature, or in other words, for its modes of manifestation.

We may call it by the name of *megin*; in this word there lies an idea of power, and in this word all living things meet. The soul of the earth, its megin, is often spoken of as a costly essence. A drink with which earth-megin has been mixed is stronger than any other liquor, while earth-megin on the other hand seems to contain a spiritual strengthening to counteract the too powerful effect of ale. "The weather too has its megin," the megin of the weather is the clouds, it is said. In the earliest days, before the world was fully set in order, moon and sun existed, but they knew not their soul, their megin, they did not know what was their power, their purpose, their career.

These suggestions will help us to understand man's megin. Man's megin is his power — and first of all his bodily strength. But there is something beyond muscle in man's megin; there is power, action, victory. And finally, megin reaches up into the strength of the soul, so that he who loses his megin will fall unconscious, as we should call it.

That which distinguishes the god or ase --- from all other beings is naturally the fact that he has *ásmeGIN*, the soul of an ase, or god, with its mighty qualities. "If you grow, Vimur, then my asemegin grows as high as the heavens," cries Thor when he stands midway out in the Utgard river and it swells up till it foams about his shoulders. Thor had, in the course of his perilous wanderings, plenty of occasion to put on his full asemegin, when the giant powers gathered thickly about him, and we understand that his godhead swelled out not only in marvellous strength and wrath, but also in divine greatness of stature.

Again, the soul is called by the name of *fjör*, a word which practically became extinct with the passing of the old world. Fjör is life, that which enables a man to walk and speak and have his place in the light. Fjör is also the soul, that soul which sets out upon its own ways after death. Fjör is the self, that which makes man a man, it is the man himself, and can therefore be applied to the body, even after death has touched it. And it is luck hearing its man, giving wings to his wit, giving him thoughts, sustaining him, and equipping his plans with progress. When Hakon Athelstansfostri came back to his own country as a claimant for the crown, it seemed for a while as if the elements would overpower him; his fleet was scattered, and the rumour spread abroad that Hakon was lost with it. King Eric took the message as a welcome certainty, but Gunhild, his queen, shook her head; she was a sagacious woman and knew

that Hakon had fjör,— and as it proved, he did arrive in Norway with his ship safe and sound.

The soul is called *hugr*, Anglo-Saxon *hygi*, thereby indicating it as desire and inclination, as courage and thought. It inspires a man's behaviour, his actions and his speech are characterised according to whether they proceed out of whole *hugr*, bold *hugr*, or downcast *hugr*. It resides in him and urges him on; thus ends Loki when he has said his say among the gods: "Now I have spoken that which my *hugr* urged me to say," thus also Sigurd when he has slain the serpent: "My *hugr* urged me to it." It sits within, giving counsel or warning; "my *hugr* tells me," is a weighty argument, for when the *hugr* has told a thing, the matter is pretty well settled. "He seems to me unreliable, you will see he will soon turn the evil side outward; it is against my will that he is with you, for my *hugr* tells me evil about him," thus Ingolf exhorts his brother to turn away a vagabond who comes to the place. A winter passed, and Ingolf could say that all had fallen out as his *hugr* had warned him. And Atli Hasteinson, of noble race, confidently gives directions to his household after the fight with Hrafn: "You, my son, will avenge your father, if you take after your kin, and my *hugr* tells me you will become a famous man, and your children after you." And when the *hugr* is uneasy, as when one can say with Gudrun: "Long I hesitated, long were my *hugrs* divided in me," then life is not healthy. But when a man has followed the good counsel from within, and attained his end, then there rises from his soul a shout of triumph, it is his *hugr* laughing in his breast.— Now and again, the soul has its knowledge directly, as we should say; at times it has acquired it by spying out the land, and then it may chance that the enemy has seen his opponent's *hugr* coming towards him, whether in human form or in the shape of a beast. He dreams of wolves, and is told that it is the *hugrs* of men he has seen.

Finally, we encounter the soul as *mód*, as the Anglo-Saxons have it. A man's *mod* is his mind, the will and strength of him, the long-remembering, that which keeps both injury and friendship alive in the foreground of his consciousness, and the boldness, which will not suffer will and memory to consume each other in indecision. *Mód* is quite properly the soul in its fully awakened state. When Thor is altogether himself, he appears in his godly *mód* (*ásmódr*); the giants put on fiendish *mód* when they assume their full nature. When the gods hired a builder to raise a wall round Asgard, and promised him the sun and moon with Freyja into the bargain for the work if it were completed before the first day of summer, they knew not with whom they were dealing. The work went on with terrific haste, the builder's stallion drew whole fragments of rock together in the night, the master himself piling them solidly up during the day. When he had compassed so nearly round that they could begin to take measurements for the gateway, the gods held a council, and it occurred to them then that Loki had been the intermediary when the agreement was made. And Loki was forced to promise he would find a way out of the difficulty. Thus it came about that the stranger's horse went rutting, and dashed away in chase of a whinnying in the woods. Its master ran all night, but failed to catch it, and next day he stood looking at the gap; there were but two days now till summer and no hope of finishing the work — then he burst into giant's *mód*. But when the gods were aware that it was a mountain giant who had come, they waived all questions of a compact and called for Thor to settle the account with a blow of his hammer.

To assume giant's mód or bring it into play is understood to imply all such peculiarities — violence and ferocity as well as features — that show him a being of demon land.

We are led farther and farther toward the holiest centre of the soul. Life is recognised by honour. We have learned how intimately connected are luck and honour, or rather, we have seen that the two are only sides of the same thing. The ancients were quite certain that the moment they allowed their good repute among men to decline, the moment they neglected the reputation of their forefathers, when they failed to maintain their own fair fame, when they committed any dishonourable act — then their luck would sicken. Their certainty was based upon experience. They had realised the importance of a due regard for honour in its effect upon the health and initiative of the coming generation, its stature, muscles and courage; they knew, indeed, that dishonour could kill a child in its mother's womb and render women barren. Honour was nothing less than life itself, and if a man kept his soul in a half-stifled state, then his descendants would be hampered in their growth, coming into the world as weaklings, crippled, and without boldness. If, on the other hand, a man had nourished his soul and enriched his life by gaining dominion over others' honour, then heroes would be born in his house, men keen of eyes and mighty of strength, children who reached out after weapons before they were well out of the cradle. Night-old the hero appears in mail, one would be justified in saying of an Ylfing; more in everyday style, perhaps, we may read that the boy sternly pulled his chastiser by the beard, and achieved his first killing at an age when other children hold by their mothers' apron-strings. Or perhaps there would be such strength in the children that they themselves craved life. We read of a boy named Thorstein, son of Asgrim, a prominent man of the Telemark, that he was to have been exposed to perish at birth; but in the meantime, while the thrall was preparing to carry out the child and bury it, all present heard the babe sing: "Let me go in to my mother; it is cold here on the floor; what other place is fitting for a boy than his father's hearth? Leave that whetting of steel, leave the turf in peace — I have a future among men."

But even though children may be a sure indicator of the state of the soul, this does not mean that one has to wait for the coming generation to see how dishonour gnaws at the vital root. To the Icelander, the two combinations: "preserve one's honour" and "preserve one's luck" are synonymous; when he says: "I do not think I can maintain my honour if I sit idle in this matter," then his words have a weight which proves, that this sentence, for the heart if not for the brain, is equal to avoiding death, maintaining one's existence.

Honour has the reality of life, or soul, and therefore the bitterness of death is removed by a hope of resurrection in fame. The hero rejoiced to think not only that so and so many would utter his name hereafter; his confident faith in the future lay in the certainty that in this naming and this praise his innermost self spread out, ruling and enjoying, living life. When the Northmen say: "Kine die, kin die, man too must die; this I know that never dies, dead man's renown," or when Beowulf comforts the king in his distress with his: "Sorrow not, wise man; better it is to avenge a kinsman than to sorrow much for him; each one of us must see the end of his life in this world; let him who can, win fame before death, this is the greatest joy for a warrior when life is ended," the words, at the

time when they were pronounced, perhaps mean nothing more than we approximately read into them when we repeat the lines; but they have their power for that age from a reality extending far beyond what we can imagine in posthumous fame, a reality which we can only appreciate adequately 'by substituting such a word as re-birth, or resurrection.

To live in fame hereafter, and preferably for as long as the world should last, was the greatest ambition of the Northman. The word comes to his lips of itself in the most solemn moments of life: when Hoskuld welcomes his son with a blessing at the son's new homestead, his wishes for welfare shape themselves finally thus: "This I surely believe, that his name will long endure." And throughout the whole of the Germanic region runs this thirst for fame. The cry for posthumous honours, for something which shall last beyond the hero's day, rings out as insistently through the Christian verses of the Heliand as ever it did from the lips of any heroic poet. "It is man's pleasure to stand firm with his lord, willingly to die with him. This will we all, follow him on his going, counting our life of little worth, and die with the king in a strange land. Then at least there will be left us honour and good fame among those who come after us,"— thus Thomas encourages the other disciples. The Anglo-Saxon Seafarer, who cannot quite get his Christ to command the waves, whether those within or those without, clings to the same faith in the judgement passed on the dead. For him the whole world lies mournful and hopeless, as a chaos of toil, hardship, want, broken hopes and parting where one looked for meeting. He can find nothing lasting. Sickness and age and battle vie with one another in plundering mankind. There is, then, nothing else to build upon but the praise of posterity. His advice is: make use of time before the end comes, to manly faring against enemies and devils, that the children of men may praise thee, and thy fame live among the angels. Late-born as he is, he regards the manly age of the world as at an end; the time when men lived and had faith in life, gave jewels and threw in luck because they were strong, that time is for ever past and gone — so runs his plaint. And with the inconsistency of bitterness he brings his accusation against existence itself, and holds up its unalleviated wretchedness before the eyes of all. But though the cynics of all times are alike, their resignation yet bears the stamp of their age and place. One says: Well, let us eat and die, another: Let us think and die, the Seafarer says: Let us die and be remembered.

If we take the word fame as meaning something lying solely in the mouth of others, something dependent upon the goodwill of strange people and their power to appreciate what was great, then it would after all have been too uncertain a value to reconcile the Teuton with death, or even make of death a gain. The joy in a great renown had its indomitable strength and its ideal value from the fact that it was based on a reality. The life of fame after death was a real life.

It is easy enough for us to grasp the enthusiasm in the ancients' pride of death. We are quick to see what is flaming and bright in the words, but we are hardly able now to feel their power of spreading warmth. The modern reader probably thinks he is showing the poet all possible honour in taking the words in as spiritual a sense as can be, but actually, he is merely killing their true life by his ideal admiration. Another expression of the value of the name is found in the

ancient exhortation to warriors, as we find it in the Norse *hirðskrá* --- the law of the king's body-guard —: "Have in mind, that he who once dies as a niding, he shall never another time (*i.e.* again) become a brave man, but as he dies with that name, so with that fame shall his memory live." Here, the old sense of reality still speaks dearly. If we can bring ourselves, with our mind filled with those praises of fame after death, to take this exhortation literally as it stands, then we shall ourselves feel both the solemnity and the vital seriousness of the ancient longing for great renown.

The name, then, goes out from him who bears it as a conqueror, and lays the world at its feet, goes forward undeterred by life or death, because it has in itself, nay, is in itself, the soul. If the man dies in body, then all life contracts in his honour, his fame after death, his name, and lives its life therein undisturbed; it can at any moment fill out a new body and inspire it to a life in honour and luck. When the name is given to a kinsman, the soul emerges into the light again, as if nothing had happened. He is come again, men said.

Another word designating the human soul is Icelandic *aldr*, Anglo-Saxon *ealdor*, which from the point of view of our languages, must in some places be rendered by "age, life-time" and in other places simply by "life". The texts speak of losing age, staking age, taking age from another man. A man can hazard his *aldr* and lose it, he can take another man's *aldr* from him in battle. *Aldr* is the *fjör* residing in the breast, which the sword can force its way in to bite. But this soul, or life, does not exist merely in a pale generality, as a white board on which the world casts its shadow. It has some contents, it is a fate. According to the Lay of Helgi, the *norns* came to the homestead of the hero on the night of his birth and created, or formed, his age; they bade him become the most famous king, greatest in renown among princes.

A man's age is determined from his birth, say the Norsemen, meaning thereby, that one's history, as we should say, or one's fate, as they themselves would put it, is a given thing; through such and such happenings he is to be led to his end. One can recognise a hero of the past in one's contemporary, by his courage, and by the contents and strength of his honour, but also his career provides its evidence, and this perhaps of the clearest, as to the connection between past and present. When we know what sort; of a soul there is in a man, we can say with immediate certainty what awaits him, and what his end will be. A man's fate is predetermined, and therewith both friends and enemies, alliance and conflict, tradition and aim; and with the characteristics of a race there follows, in rhythmic repetition, the same history. Atli Hasteinson refused, after the fight with Hrafn, a friendly invitation from Onund:

he would rather go home, for in all likelihood it would follow from his name that he should die of his wounds, as did his father's father, Earl Atli, whose name and life he bore.

The truest commentary is furnished by this paragraph in the Snorra Edda: "Good *norns* of noble birth create a good *aldr*, but if men fall into unluck, ill *norns* were at work." The *norns* were at heart nothing but the manifestation of the kin's luck and history.



Our word fate is scarcely applicable to the thoughts of the ancients as to life and its course in so much as we chiefly apprehend fate as a mysterious and incalculable force; the fate of our forefathers was a being with impulses, passions, peculiarities: a tendency always to choose one particular side of a thing, to choose combat and the decision of arms rather than discussion, or always to look about for possibilities of negotiation; the tendency rather to kill one man too many than one too few, or an inclination always to do that which serves one least. We have always to deal with an individual fate, that which belongs to a single man, and distinguishes him from all others, and this fate may fairly claim to be called nothing less than soul. It can proceed out from him and communicate itself to others, and it can find an individual re-birth. According to the prose passages of the Helgi Lays in the Edda, Helgi Sigmundson and his love, Sigrun, are supposed to be reincarnations of Helgi Hjorvardson and Svava, and then to be reborn themselves in the persons of Helgi Hadingjaskati and Kara Halfdan's daughter. We have here three parallel legends, of a hero whose mighty and hasty pace of life is due to a semi-supernatural woman. Helgi Hjorvardson is awakened to action by the valkyrie Svava, and consecrated to death by his brother's reckless vow to cheat him of his love's right. Helgi Hundingsbane, in the course of his warlike expeditions, wins the love and protection of Sigrun, daughter of Hogni, but for her sake he is driven to slay Hogni and thus prepares his own downfall. The third legend is known only from a dim reminiscence in a mythical saga where Helgi, striking too high, wounds his love and protectress, and thus forfeits luck and life for himself. How the separate parts of this trilogy stand one to another as regards origin and contact we do not know; only this we can see, that the reason of their being so threaded together lies in the similarity of the fate which unites the *pair*. Helgi and Svava do not enter into life again, but life has reborn the group, hero and valkyrie maiden, and their love with its tragic result.

Whoever interpolated these prose passages into the poems would hardly himself have arrived by speculation at this hypothesis of re-birth; but whether there were some germ of combination in the legends themselves or not, these lines of prose have their authority in the ancient thought. Life is known by its doings. The soul has a course of life inherent in it, as one of its qualities. Fate, or as we also might say, history, is not, any more than luck, a thing lying outside a man; nor does it merely hang about him as a necessary result of his character. It is luck itself, it is his nature. It is born out of him in the same way as fruitfulness and victory. It is on this identity between fate and will that the bold fatalism of the Northmen depends.

And so it is not from resignation that an Atli speaks as he does. The Northmen did not let themselves be dragged off by fate, they went willingly, chose themselves that which they knew was their destiny, chose the inevitable of their own free will, paradoxical as it may sound. Fate was to them a necessity man could not avoid, but they felt it nevertheless as a matter of will. They took up the counsels and plans of their kinsmen as warmly as their own, and in the same way they lived through the fate of their forefathers with eager appetite. They grasped firmly at their destiny with a will that is the will of fate itself — here lies the secret of their sturdy sense of life, the imperturbable contentment with the solidity of existence that keeps them from ever going into the depths to search

for treasure, while on the other hand they never think of dreaming and consoling themselves away from what is and must be.

Name and fate interpenetrate. The name was a mighty charm, because it carried the history not only of the bearer, but of his ancestors and of the whole clan. Deeds lie concealed in its sound and they may blossom out into an addition, so that the name becomes an epic in brief. Such names as An Bow-wielder, Sigurd Fafnirsbane or Hroerek Flinger of the Bracelet are the nuclei of family legends.

But there is still a whole side of the soul untouched. Nature needs a body. When the mother had given birth to her child, it was carried to the father, that he might see which of the old kinsmen it was that now appeared in the light again. Possibly his keen eyes could discern the character of the departed in the movements of the child. Some children came into the world with clenched fists, others uttered the cry of a hero at the very commencement of their career. The child looks promising, men say, he will be a hard fellow, but true to his Mends. But first and foremost, the father scanned the new-born child for likeness in features, eyes, and build. The soul did not alter. Powerful limbs, sharp eyes, waving fair hair were not accidental attributes of the hero-soul any more than the hardness and cold of a stone are accidental qualities of the body which a stone-soul takes for its garment. It is a standing expression in the sagas, that the young chieftain to be is distinguished by his eyes. He has keen eyes, he whets his eyes after the manner of true princes of war,— so we read of Helgi Hundingsbane. So also of the birth of Sigurd Fafnirsbane: The king was glad when he saw the sharp eyes in his head, and said that none would be his equal. These eyes are in poetry the chieftain's patent of nobility: a glance that could tame or cow both men and beasts. Sigurd's murderer had to go out of the chamber twice without achieving his aim, for the eyes of the Volsung were so keen that not many dared gaze into them. The horses dashed aside and would not tread on Svanhild, as long as her eyes were open. Saxo's description of Olo Vigetus is a study in the glance heroic: his eyes were so sharp that they smote the enemy harder than other men's weapons; the boldest cringed under his glance. He comes, unknown, to the king's court. The king's daughter was accustomed, in passing round the hall, to observe the guests; from the features of their faces she could read their quality and standing. But at sight of Olo's countenance, she falls three times swooning to the ground. "Here is a kingly-born hero", she says, and all cry to him to throw aside his hood. When he obeys, all the men present sit staring in admiration at his beauty and his yellow locks, but he kept his eyelids lowered deep "lest they should see and be afraid."

Saxo, modern as he is, wonders at the girl's perspicuity; at any rate, he thinks it as well, with such a remarkable piece of divination, to put it, as it were, in inverted commas with a "men believed" that she could read the standing of the guest from his features. But as a matter of fact it needed no great art to point out a king. It is hopeless for him to disguise himself. Let him put on the kirtle of a slave, and a kerchief about his head, and set himself to turn a mill; it will yet be seen that the wench has sharp eyes, this young blood is never come of cottar's stock; he cannot help turning so that the stones fly asunder and the casing is sent flying. Such an appearance, and such strength, belong once and for all to his luck, his nature. Tall, stately, handsome — handsome, that is to say,

without the labourer's features of the peasant type — he must be to be a chieftain, and could not be otherwise if chieftain he were. When the soul is reborn, it shapes a human form about itself with such limbs, such eyes, such hair, for it cannot do otherwise. Or let us perhaps rather say, that the soul itself is yellow-haired, blue-eyed and strong of sinew — this after all is the true meaning.

All these individual determinations of the being of a soul fuse in one single word: luck. The soul is luck in the all-embracing sense that opens before us when we follow patiently its activity throughout the full circle. When luck is at an end, then, we know, life itself is ended, not because it was dependent upon certain external conditions, but because it was existence itself that ceased when luck broke off. To be in luck, to show oneself in luck means the same as to step forth in light and life.

This vitalising power of man which thus manifests itself under different aspects is, according to our terminology, appropriately named soul, but we may call it life or existence without changing the point of view. Here the radical difference between the primitive and modern experience makes itself felt. When we set our reflection to explore the premises which lie at the bottom of our talk of the power that moves in us and moves us, it arises with the idea of a clear, transparent stream taking up in its course feelings and moods; life is something we have in common with all other creatures, and it becomes man's life by taking on or evolving purely human elements. It is otherwise with the life which bore forward the actions of our fore-fathers; life to them was purely human, and not only a merely human but a personal thing, as personal as a nickname. Force and effect are to our experience so far apart that we can interpolate the question: let us see what effect comes of this force; to primitive experience, power and its result are one, and grow together.

As soon as we replace our "soul" by the word *hamingja*, the thought is translated from our pale view of life to the full-blooded and muscular view of the past. *Hamingja* is a nature that can only act in its essentially determined manner, and only to the end that lies in itself. *Hamingja* is a character which can only manifest itself as these or those particular persons, but must on the other hand produce its predetermined effect: this particular honour, will, and fate, and must create these or those personalities, in their peculiar relations within and without. Therefore it comes now as a man, now as something human, now as a personality, now as a force — and always it is itself, never more and never less. Whether it march at the head of an army, in bodily manifestation of one sort or another, or it emanate from man into the soil and make the germs sprout through the mould, makes no difference to its nature. Luck constitutes, we know, a close whole, alike throughout and indivisible. Therefore, every single quality of man possesses the whole force of the *hamingja*; fame after death bears in itself a living soul or a living human being. In this homogeneity of life is implied the necessary condition for such expressions as the Old English: "The heathen fell frithless on the field of battle," and "The time came for him to suffer a parting from frith." These passages are not understood when taken one-sidedly as evidence that life on earth was, to the forefathers of the Anglo-Saxons, first and foremost a common life, a frith; nor can they be taken as instances of poetic use of frith in the sense of soul. The explanation lies deeper;

frith was really a form of life, and that, in the Germanic thought, means the soul itself, and thus to lose frith and luck was literally to die.

Here, the contrasts which are of primary importance to us lose their authority. Body — soul, neutral — personal, whole — fraction, these definitions have a place in ancient thought, but they are not fundamental. When we read of a man's hugr that it meets his enemy in the shape of a ravening wolf, then we know that it is a personal soul; if we are told that a man has a bold hugr, then we know, or think we know, that it is a quality of character that is spoken of. But in other cases we are tortured, perhaps, by an unpleasant sense of doubt; if a man feels himself impelled by his hugr, or warned by his hugr, is it then the spirit — his mind, as we should say — or a spirit — his genius, in other words — that speaks within him? As long as we take it for granted that the two exclude each other, we can only hesitatingly weigh *pro et contra* on reading a verse such as that which Gro sings over her son: "If enemies bar your way, with evil in mind, then let their hugr change over, to your service, and their mind be turned to peace." Now all either— or disappears; hugr is everywhere as personal as it is impersonal.

The ancient thought does not oscillate over the contrast between soul and body. There is a contrast between the material and the spiritual existence, and the divergence between the two forms of human manifestation is great enough to set thoughts in motion, but not wide enough to range them into two hostile arrays. The tension between existence of the spiritual and sensing of the tangible is not yet grown so strong that the two poles will separately draw experiences to them and hold them fast in two groups, so as to make a breach or a problem. For modern men who are under the sway of Hellenistic philosophy and religion, it seems as if primitive men leap backwards and forwards over a hole from contradiction to contradiction, but there was no gulf and no contradiction in them. The connection has such solidity that it can stand whatever pressure facts may bring to bear upon it. As long as we look at the body, we can dwell as continually and as one-sidedly as we choose upon the corporeal limitations of man; and if we look at man from the spiritual point of view, we need not hedge round our description of the capricious soul with qualifications through fear lest our former words should rise up and witness against us. Indeed, it is only when we have given each its due, fully and uncurtailed what it deserves, that we can maintain the equilibrium between them.

No one will dispute the power of the soul to separate itself from the body in order to live a free, untrammelled existence while the body apparently, and perhaps also in reality, lies idle as a house without a tenant. The soul can go whither it will, set out on its own errands, spying out, preparing and also acting on behalf of the whole person. There is a story to the point about the Frankish king Gunnthram. Once, it is told, while out hunting, he was overtaken by great weariness, and lay down to sleep beside a stream; when he woke, he could still remember how he had crossed a river by an iron bridge into a mountain where lay great treasures of gold. The soul had seen correctly, for when men went to dig in the place the king had pointed out, they found enormous treasure. But he who sat with the king's head in his lap had seen that out of the king's mouth came, while he slept, a little snake which hurried backwards and forwards along

the water, until he laid a sword across the brook, when it at once disappeared across the bridge and into a little hole in the mountain side, returning shortly after the same way.

We know that the soul — at any rate now and then — can go whither it will; but we know also that it carries the body in it. If that royal snake had met anyone strong enough to do it harm, then the king would have seen the marks on his body when he woke. At any moment, this soul can burst out into a body, as it were turning inside out, and showing outwardly the matter which in its airy state it bears within. And then it appears not only as a vision, a picture of the person, but as a hard and fast, powerful body, a corpus certainly not to be passed through without perceiving it. A man's fylgia — as the soul is called in this state by the Icelanders — can both strike with its weapons and crush with its arms so as to take away a man's breath. It is told of two Icelandic peasants that they met one night in animal shape between their homesteads and fought out the quarrels of the day; and when they awoke in the morning, each lay with battered limbs pondering over the events of the night.

The Northern fylgia stories indicate plainly enough that the soul has an advantage over the person as a whole; it can choose what form it will take. When the body is at rest, the soul sees its chance to take on another shape than its customary clothing, one better suited to the needs of the moment. We hear of men taking the form of birds, either to travel through the air, or to gain entrance through openings not to be reached from any highway but “the bees' road”. When the slaughter of Gunnar and Hogni was imminent, Kostbera, Hogni's wife, had warning dreams of Atli's soul coming into the hall. “Methought I saw an eagle fly in and down to the end of the hall; bitter is that which waits us now; he was dripping with blood; I saw from his threatening looks that it was Atli's shape,” says the verse in the *Atlamá*, and the words, poetic as they are, reflect an everyday reality.

Gunhild, the queen of the Norwegian king Eric Bloody-axe, was a wise and indomitable woman, whose strong *hugr* so moved the imagination of her contemporaries that she has passed into history as a half supernatural being. It happened that Egil, who was no friend of the king's, was shipwrecked on the coast and forced to throw himself on the hospitality of the king. Egil had no other way to buy the goodwill of Eric than by composing a laudatory poem, but during the night, when he sat working at his *Hofudlausn* — the poem to save his head — he was pestered by a bird which kept twittering at the window, and late saga writers hold it beyond doubt that the bird was none other than the *hugr* of the implacable queen.

Where strength was needed, the soul would come running up in the shape of a bear, and with a bear's force. “This Hjoryard and his men see, that a great bear goes before King Hrolf and his men and always nearest the king; he kills more men with his paw than five of the king's champions. Sword and arrow turn aside from him, but whether it be horse or man that comes in his way, he strikes them down and crushes them with his teeth.” The bear was Bodvar Bjarki, whose body sat at home in the hall, asleep.

Without doubt this power of taking on another shape is something peculiar to the soul as distinct from the body. The trance, or temporary dying, of the body,

is a condition required to give the soul full freedom to exploit that other nature and utilise all the qualities that lie in the shape adopted: its massive manifestation, its peculiar powers, its swiftness and wildness. As soon as Bodvar awoke and drew his heroic body about him, the bear vanished. But we unconsciously introduce our preconceptions in translating these reminiscences of the ancient experience into our modes of thought. The hagr could not take on the body of a bear, unless its luck had something of bear nature in it. The elements of which the soul builds itself a body

— *hamr*, as it is called — are not taken from without; they lie within it and are likewise present in the everyday body; he who really appeared as wolf, as bear, as ox, as eagle, had the character-marks of wolf, bear, ox or eagle in him always. His luck was of such a sort as to imply an essential relationship between him and his beast; he used its strength, its courage, its wildness, its craft, its power of divination and its power of tracking, also in daylight and in his own body. And when the human shape lies bound in sleep, the other peculiarities that are contained in its nature can realise themselves in exterior form; perhaps we had better say, when the other powers evolve their shape-giving qualities, human form is bound to be in abeyance. And looking more closely at such genuine representatives of soul-force as Bodvar, we can still, despite the fact that the story has been reft from its living soil, discover the birth-marks. The name of Bjarki is nothing else but bear, and the story of his origin still holds, perhaps, some shadowy trace of his having belonged to a bear clan, which had established a state of frith with the bear, as had the Ylfings with the wolf, and cultivated this frith as their mutual luck, by constantly assimilating something of the animal's nature in themselves. His father's name was Bjorn (bear), his mother was called Bera, which means a she-bear, and his father went about in the shape of a bear at the time the son was begotten. The story of his father's unlucky fate when he was bewitched by a step-mother on account of his virtue, is spiced with romance and imagination, but there is a bear in the story from early times. If the form in which it is handed down to us is nothing more than a mediæval tale, the story is moulded over a type of family legend familiar to our ancestors. It is not at all unlikely that Bodvar may have had his mark somewhere about his body, as the Merovingians had their boar-bristles down the back.

In late times, when the ancient reality was weakened into something half imagination, and literature fell under the influence of mediæval poetry, the *hamr* was sometimes described as a pelt into which the shape-shifter slips and which he leaves behind when he returns into his own body. But this conceit sits loosely on the original idea that comes to light everywhere in the living language. Originally the *hamr* was, as the poet of the *Atlamál* is still half aware, the very soul itself, the hagr or hamingja. The man who has suffered *scathe* in his luck, and thus no longer has his full *megin*, is *hamstoli*, i.e. robbed of his *hamr*; he cannot remember, understand or dream. When a man took on his *hamr* he assumed all his strength and put all his powers into requisition. Not all had this power to “ham” (*hamask*) in the same degree; the strong man, he who had much and powerful luck and could therefore send his will as well as his hagr abroad in mighty shapes, was called *hamramr*, i. e. strong of soul. The common people have, on this point, preserved the ancient faith that strong characters are able to show themselves in several places at the same time, and

according to the unmistakable evidence of viking times, to be hamramr meant having the power to take on another shape and appear as an animal — this is the highest degree of the power in question, — but surely too it was a quality which made itself apparent while the man was in his normal bodily form, as violence in battle, as invulnerability, insensibility to pain, and increased bodily strength. “Then they took their swords and bit the edges of the shields, went round the ship, along one bulwark and back along the other, and slew all the men; afterwards, they went howling up on land,” — this is the Bodvar nature, acting in the full light of day. Such grim warriors were called *berserkir* and *ulfhednir*, because they wore bearskins and wolfskins as an outer garb, and this accoutrement no doubt has to do with their strength and ferocity. Of a man called Odd it is told that he crossed Iceland in a single night from the extreme northern point to the southland, when his sister needed his aid sorely; whether he trotted along as a bear, whether he flew, or used his legs, we do not know; one thing is enough; it was the fact that he was hamramr that gave him the speed.

In Christian times the word hamramr was degraded to serve as a branding adjective, and in its decline it shared the same fate as *fjölknungr*, later used of those individuals who kept to the ancient practices and thus became sorcerers. Properly, *fjölknungr*, or “much knowing”, meant nothing more than: able to use one’s luck in manifold wise, as a man would naturally be when possessed of knowledge of things past, and of such insight and sympathy as enabled him to draw strength from the souls about him.

At the time when Olaf Tryggvason scoured the country to carry the light of Christ into all Norwegian homes and hearts, there was a man in the extreme North called Raud, who stoutly defended himself against royal conversion by setting storms to guard the coast. For a whole week the king’s fleet battled against the wind in the mouth of the fiord without making headway, but at last the pagan gusts were overcome by a liberal application of candles and crosses and holy water, and the king succeeded in capturing Raud and despatching him to hell when he proved too obstinate to change his faith on the spot. The sturdy heathen was derided by the king’s followers — or by his pious biographer — as *fjölknungr*; but Olaf, who defied the storm till it obeyed him, who sent forth his luck to aid his friends and take the wisdom out of his enemies’ thoughts, or even at times appeared bodily to turn a deadly weapon aside from his servant’s head in danger, must have been as hamramr and *fjölknungr* as any, as is but natural in a man who comes of good kingly stock. And the by-name *fjölknungr* is returned with proper justice by the adversaries of the most Christian king, when they were mysteriously overpowered by his “luck and hamingja”. Both parties were right. In the case of strangers whose powers and ways are of another kind, *fjölkyngi* must really be witchcraft, and it is thus no twisting of words when Christians and heathens accused one another of underhand practices. When Christian hamingja and the Christian god remained in possession of the field, the men of the new faith naturally turned the word wholly against their enemies and made it a by-word of reproach for people of the ancient faith.

It is thus clear that there is no contradiction between the neutral life, the spiritual power which a man radiates out to his surroundings, and the personal soul which sets forth on its own legs and grasps at things with its hands. The two are



only opposite poles of the same luck. We have seen how a man's hamingja can go out and lay itself like a fog upon another's mind, shadow his far-sightedness, stifle his initiative and suck the strength from his plans; and we have no need at all to imagine the active agent as a man, stifling with hands, sucking with lips or treading with feet. The king's hamingja passes like a warmth from his hand into the warrior whose hand he grasps; his hamingja enters as a force into men and fills their bodies, penetrating to the outermost joints, and from these over into their weapons. Foresight itself is hamingja, that rises up from the depth of the soul and spreads out in him who prophesies; "I know of my foresight and from our *ættarfylgja* (that is, the hamingja of the clan) that great sorrow will grow for us from this marriage" — thus warns Signy, in the *Volsungasaga*, when the marriage with Siggeir is proposed. But at any moment the hamingja can spring up in its full personality; — but a slight turn in the mode of observation, and it changes from a something into a someone. In the same way, the Northman's *hugr* often passes from the idea of mind, will, desire, thought, to what we understand by soul, in all its shades of meaning, so that such a manifestation of the man outside himself as that described in the legend of Gunnthram, can well be set down in the words: "It is, a *hugr* we have met." "Those are *hugrs* of men," says a man who has seen his enemies in a dream, and this, in sober words, means that the souls of those enemies steal about him, watching, lying in wait, preparing.

Neither is there any contrast between the *hamr* and the *mód* and *megin*. The giant is instantly recognised when he puts on his full giant's *mód*, the wild, raging soul of the ogres, just as Thor is able to out-tower the mighty swelling of the river when he puts on his god's *megin*. The metaphorical expression, that the spirit bears the body bound up in it — if metaphorical it be — is in danger of thrusting upon truth an appearance of profundity; but when we have done everything to remove the temptation of taking the words as a piece of modern wit, they contain just what must be said. And we have undoubtedly the right to use just such a form of speech as this, that the neutral luck bears in it personality as a quality among all its qualities, or better perhaps, that it is impregnated with a personality, just as it is impregnated with victory and fruitfulness and wisdom.

Life is a homogeneous whole, but it is distributable into parts. The soul can be strewn about in small particles. If one has a great soul, such as made a man a king, then he can share out his soul among his warriors, so that one part goes east to quell a revolt, another westward on an expedition at sea, a third upon some peaceful errand elsewhere. Undoubtedly people would have regarded it as a sorry sign of lacking spiritual force in their prince if one of these souls sent out — whether he had at the time three or seven armies in the field — lacked sight or hearing, wisdom or the power of action. Every one of his "redes" — or powerful thoughts and counsels — indeed, must be equipped with eyes and ears. The entire soul-mass is impregnated with humanity in the same way that a stone is with hardness, the tree with treeness, so that the man is mortally vulnerable in every little part of his honour. It is possible to kill a man bodily by slaying one of his "redes". If a chieftain be divided temporarily into four parts, then no doubt his body will be present as a whole with one of these tetrarchs; but this does not imply that the other three must remain incognito or invisible, or that they are in the least degree inferior to the whole man in fulness of qualities.

Each one of them can very well assume the waving hair, keen eyes, fresh complexion and stately limbs of the chieftain's luck. We can, if we will, credit the man with four souls. But each of these four nevertheless contains at every moment its fellow-souls, and is responsible for them in every point. Indeed, in the deepest foundation of the matter they are not separated at all. Separation in space counts for nothing, or almost nothing.

The words *megin*, *mód*, *fjör* and the others do service by illustrating the ways and conditions of the *hamingja*, but it would be wholly arbitrary to limit the description of the soul to enumerating a string of "animistic" terms. The same comprehensive meaning of "life" as "soul" resides in all words describing processes of mind. Icelandic *heipt* means enmity or hate, and it is hate felt, as well as inimical thoughts and wishes sent out to enter into the foe's mind as an oppressive force, or despatched to lie in ambush for the hated man; it manifests itself as battle and mighty blows. *Munr* (Anglo-Saxon *myne*) means love and pleasure, but it is love as a manifestation of the soul; when the hero in his barrow mourns — as Helgi in the Eddic poem — that he has lost joy and land (*munar ok landa*), *munr* is not to be understood as the joy of life, but as life that is in itself joyful. And in other places we cannot catch the weight of the word without rendering it as soul or life. Ydun who kept the apples of youth is called by a poet: the maiden who increased the *mun* of the gods — who by administering the immortal food preserved the gods from old age and weakness. In reality, not a single word denoting mental processes can be adequately rendered in phrases of modern psychology without being either unduly widened or unduly narrowed.

## CHAPTER X

# THE SOUL OF MAN IS THE SOUL OF THE CLAN

The ancient view of life necessarily leads thought beyond the individual; one always looks about among the family to find the sources of his will and his fate. That honour which the individual bequeaths to his successor with the prayer to have it raised on high like a banner in the light, is after all only an individual's share of that honour which all the kinsmen combine to guard and unite in enjoying. This grandiose manner in aim and fate and will, to be never content with less than a kingdom, ever constrained to know one's fame the greatest within the horizon, — this is indeed, no less than the keen eyes, something appertaining to a whole circle of men. The father's eye is gladdened when he sees himself and his kinsmen again in his sons, when, as the phrase runs, he can "see the luck of the family" in his son.

They all had one *hugr* in common, shared one mind among them. The walls of the brain formed no boundary for thoughts; what was warmed in the mind of one kinsman did not come to the others with the cold of strangeness. They were one body as far as their frith and honour extended. The kinsmen were identical,

as surely as the single deer leaping across the path was identical with all its fellow deer, and bore in itself the whole nature of deer, the whole great deer-soul. And the pain that ran round the fence of kinsmen when one stave in it suffered a blow was something more than a spiritual suffering. Limbs as well as higr gave notice when a misfortune had chanced, long before any messenger came running with the news. Thesame peril of death threatened them all. They had one life together. It may be said of two contemporaries, father and daughter, that they had one life and therefore died on the same day. This community of life is but a stronger form of that which is found among all kinsmen. True, the whole family would not die with the father, not immediately, at any rate, but we know already well enough how fatally the falling away of one affected the future of all members of the family, how careful all had to be in regard to their spiritual health, how eagerly they sought after increase of soul, "restitution". The frith-fellows of a dead man were "fey", and their life could only be saved by energetically combating the germs of death in the organism of the clan.

In a Welsh story, the king says to an unknown kinsman: "Who are you, for my heart beats toward you, and I know you are of my blood." These words might be the simplest expression of an everyday feeling, and date from a time when every kinsman knew by experience the peculiar beat of frith in his breast. "The higr told him," a Northman might have said, for he felt by the movements in the luck within him, that luck of his luck was approaching, as also he would perceive the approach of an enemy by an alien luck "lying upon" his and disabling it. A good woman, Orny, the daughter of the distinguished chieftain Geitir, had been seduced by a guest from Norway, and when the child was born, her brother ordered him to be carried out and left to his fate. But the boy was found by a neighbour and adopted by him, and in his early years he ran about the homesteads, and might also come as a guest to Krossavik, his mother's home. One day, he came running headlong into the room, as a child might do, and fell full length on the floor; then it chanced that his grandfather burst out laughing, while Orny burst into tears. Little Thorstein went straight up to Geitir, and wished to know what he was laughing at. But the old man said: "It was because I saw something you did not see; when you came in, a white bear ran before your feet, and it was that you stumbled over, because it stopped suddenly at sight of me; I should fancy you must be of higher birth than you are taken to be." This sight of the boy's fylgia was enough to awaken the feeling of kinship in Geitir, and when the boy was about to go home in the evening, the old man bade him come again often, and added: "I should think you have kin here."

Kinsmen make one soul together — and yet they were naturally so or so many individuals. The clan is not a whole in the sense that it can be compared to a being with many heads. Nor do the kinsmen stand as shareholders in a fund of life which they agree to administer. The community lies far deeper, so deep that all conflict between the individual and the clan as a whole is out of the question. Nor can we find the truth in a compromise which reduces the claims of one side or the other. The individuals are each a separate reality, each is a person, and both reality and personality are so marked that they can come to stand against each other as will against will. But the personality which makes the one kinsman a character is the same which gives his brother and his son their silhouette-like

sharpness. The kinsmen own one another, they are one another, every single one of them encloses the whole soul in each of his acts.

The only way to re-experience the peculiarities of this common soul is probably to see how the unity of life affects men's practical doings. In the kinsmen's social state of mutual dependence, as in their individual independence, the thought is vitally and faithfully illustrated. The old community allows the personality no importance whatever in itself. A man thinking and acting alone is a modern conception. In former times, the solitary had no possibilities. His ideas, even though amounting to genius, would perish, just as he himself perished, leaving no trace. The fir that stands alone decays, neither bark nor leaf clothe it, says the *Hávamál*; and the words bear this literal meaning, that the tree which stands alone in the field can *only* fade, it uses all its force to delay the decomposing action of wind and rot a little while. The individual could not exist save as thrall or niding, in whom only the animal part of human life remained, and barely that. A freedman was the imperfect creature he was, because he had not properly any clan. The man of family is free; because he stands in the fence of kin, he has no weight crushing him from above; it is otherwise with the freedman, he stands alone, and therefore must have a power above him.

And to stand in the fence of kin, means forming part of a solid order, which no genius and no strength of mind can change. We have really no word to measure such habits as bend the will of every man the way it would not go, as if it were acting of its own accord. What we want is a word to express a law that works its will not by hindering or repressing the plans of the individual but by lending itself as a force and an initiative in the thoughts and ambitions of every wilful single man who is under the sway of the rule. Frith lays the regard for kinsmen into the plans while they are still in process of conception, and when it happens, as it may very well do, that a member of a clan is inspired with a spirit of opposition against the nearest of kin, his refractory desire comes into the world with the will of his antagonists imbedded in it as its innermost self. A change in the inherited honour, that which one's forefathers had regarded as right and useful and needful — whether the change were one affecting relations with men, or an alteration of what we call methods of working, sacred customs — such an alteration was hardly to be effected by one man's will. In a sense the laws governing our relations to our fellow-men are stiffer and less plastic than the social rules of ancient society, but they correspondingly leave a way open to artifice and persuasion. We can get round the law if it is too narrow to have room for conscience, we can render it lip-service and without breaking it save our souls; we can maintain our position in humanity by living an official outward life, and thus save ourselves from spiritual isolation, and gain that contact with the neighbouring community which is necessary if a man is quietly to get on with his own work. In those times, a man could not, whether by craft or defiance, break through the constitutional laws of life without getting strangled in the process. A man stood in the fence of kinsmen, and only that which could be attained without breaking the chain was attainable at all.

But on the other hand it would be rash and contrary to all experience were we to conclude that the clansman is necessarily duller and less of a character than the isolated individuals of modern times, or that he has fewer possibilities of

working out what we call his personality. As long as the strength is turned outwards and does not attack the unassailable frith and honour, the clan has no choice save between defending the unruly members and cutting them off from itself, and a healthy stock will be slow to bleed itself. As long as the undertakings of the individual are inspired by the honour and "fate" that is within him, and his ambition is the prolongation of his ancestors' deeds, he can let himself go and drag his kinsmen along with him. Frith lays the kinsmen at the mercy of the individual — and his initiative. He can screw up honour as far as he pleases; the others have no choice but to follow; they cannot force him down, they have nothing to trust to against him beyond the power of words to persuade; they may try to talk him over, but if he be not amenable to reason, then they are obliged to enter into his undertakings and make themselves participants both in the responsibility and in the risk. The fact of his being a part of the soul himself enables him to coerce the whole soul. The man who has a tenfold or hundredfold soul not only possesses an inner strength that is lacking in a man whose life is confined to his own single body, but he also has deeper opportunities of becoming a rich and many-sided character.

Frith was a constitutional law harder than we can easily find nowadays, but then again, it was a power that could be used, both for good and evil. A man can force his way into the centre of luck and appropriate luck to himself, he can assimilate the souls of others and make them dependent on his own, and then fling men forward toward whatever object he pleases, as long as he is sure of himself and his luck. There is hardly any formal authority which the strong man can take up and inspire with his peculiar gifts, his courage, his initiative, his craft, his wit, his insolent self-reliance; but he has that which is better; he makes the others parts of his thought and will, and digests them as it were, into his soul; the strong man uses his fellows as his own limbs.

The authority in such a clan-society is of a peculiar sort, it is here, it is there, it is everywhere, and it never sleeps. But there is no absolutely dominant power. The circle may perhaps have its leader in chief, but he cannot force anyone to his will. In Iceland, this lack of subordination appears in the crudest light. Iceland had men who gladly paid out of their own purse for the extravagances of their restless kinsmen, if only they could maintain peace and prevent futile bloodshed; but their peacemaking was an everlasting patchwork. There was no power over those who did not seek the right. To take firm action against them was a thing even the most resolute of their kin could never do, for it was out of the question for the clan to disown its unruly members and leave them to the mercy of their enemies. When Chrodin, a man of noble stock, was chosen, for his cleverness and god-fearing ways, to be majordomo in Austria, he declined with these significant words: "I cannot bring about peace in Austria, chiefly because all the great men in the country are my kinsmen. I cannot overawe them and cannot have any one executed. Nay, because of their very kinship they will rise up and act in defiance."

Primitive soul is generally described by European historians as something exclusively belonging to mythology and religion; but to catch its true character we must recognise that it is a psychological entity as well. It is so far from being dependent on speculation and belief that it is first and foremost an object of experience, an everyday reality. The thrall has no soul, our ancestors say; and

they know, because they have seen that it is lacking in him. When a thrall finds himself in a perilous situation, he goes blind, so that he dashes down and kills himself out of pure fear of death. How a soulless man would naturally behave we can learn from the story of the fight at Orlygsstad, where the wise and noble chief Arnkel met his death. When Arnkel unexpectedly found himself attacked by a superior force he sent home his thrall to bring aid. On the road the messenger was accosted by a fellow-servant — and willingly fell to helping him with a load of hay. Not until the evening, when those at home asked where Arnkel was, did he wake up and remember that his master was fighting with Snorri at Orlygsstad. There is no need of any hypothesis as to soul and life to make clear the fact that the thrall lacked *hugr* and *hamingja*; his soullessness is discernible by the lack-lustre of his eyes. The only possibility for a thrall to rise into something like a human being is by inspiration of his master's luck and life, and thus faithfulness and devotion are the noblest virtues of a bondman.

An excellent illustration of the way a thrall is able to reflect his master is given in a short story from *Landnáma*. One autumn a body of men who were shipwrecked on the Icelandic coast sought refuge at an outlying farm belonging to Geirmund, a noble chieftain of royal birth. The bondman steward invited the whole company to pass the winter as the guests of Geirmund, and on being asked by Geirmund how he had dared to fill the house with strangers he answered: "As long as there are men in this country people will not forget what sort of man you were, since your thrall dared do such a thing without asking your consent."

Absolute unity, community of life within the clan, must find its justification in absolute unlikeness, essential difference from all other circles. "Our" life is not only peculiar in character, it has its own stem, its own root, and drinks of its own wells. There seems but one inference possible viz. that our ancestors narrowed humanity down to their own circle and looked upon all persons outside their frith as non-human; but this inference that presupposes our pale but extensive category humanity, does not hold good in ancient or primitive culture. The question as to human beings and non-human beings, human life and non-human life lay outside the plane where their thoughts moved; the problem could not be set up in the form it involuntarily assumes for us, still less could it be answered.

The ancient world was divided differently from ours. The difference lies not so much in the fact that the boundaries ran otherwise, as in the fact that they were of another sort. On one side, man was separated from nature by a deep sense of strangeness, which he might break through at certain points, but could never overcome. On the other hand, when he has bridged the gap between himself and the souls of his surroundings, the strangeness is converted into close friendship. If he has overcome his aversion in regard to this or that animal, he at once goes to the other extreme and calls the beast his brother, and this with an unfigurative earnestness that plainly shows he does not regard human dignity as a class privilege that shuts certain two-legged creatures out as a caste apart and assigns to them a standing over and above all other creatures. He does not feel the distance between himself and the bear as greater than that between bear and wolf; each of the three is an independent existence, and their relations one with another can thus never be expressed in any fixed constellation as with

us 'who invariably set man uppermost and never between the two. The living and non-living things of the world do not form a scale starting out of the inorganic world and rising through degrees to man as the crown of the creation. Nature is to primitive man a realm filled with free self-existing souls, human and non-human, which are all on the same line of existence and can enter into all sorts of combinations through bonds of friendship or kinship. Among primitive people a worm is no farther and no nearer to man than a tiger — no being is classed beforehand as low in the scale. The thrall does not stand outside humanity in our sense of the word, only he has no life of his own and so does not count as a soul. His existence is so faintly marked that he cannot even do wrong and cannot be summoned to account, whereas animals, on the other hand, are not excluded from the honour of being called upon to defend their actions and suffer judgement.

When we cross the frontier that separates our civilization from primitive culture, we pass into a different world altogether. The world inhabited by souls does not form a wide plane in which creature touches creature edge to edge as in our universe, where things and beings are viewed chiefly from without as space-filling bodies. Our fathers' horizon was apparently far narrower than ours, thought reached earlier to the walls of the world; but the smaller circle held far more than we could crush into a corresponding area. In reality, the capacity of Middle-garth is unlimited, for this folk-home consists of a number of worlds overlapping one another, and thus not dependent on space for their extent.

In Middle-garth, the animals do not run in and out one among the rest crowding for elbow-room. The wolf is called heath-walker, because the heath is part of its soul, but this does not necessarily make it akin to the deer, that is called heath-treader. The haunt of the wolf is not necessarily the same as that of the deer, however closely they may coincide geographically. The heath, as heath, was a thing by itself, an independent soul as well as a space; but when we say heath-walker, or heath-treader, we only get to it through the animal that fills out the foreground, now through the grey, carrion-eating, "bold" wolf — when the heath is an attribute of unluck, —now through the "antler-crowned", "oak's shelter-seeking", "head backward-curving" deer — and the heath is then a soul-quality.

In the sphere which is dismissed summarily by us with the formula day and night there was room for a number of souls meeting one another as independent beings whole to whole instead of limiting one another. First day and night live there. Day is the light or shining one and the beautiful one, but he has other characteristics, as the Anglo-Saxon language intimates by calling him noisy or the time of bustling, the time of men being astir. Independently of light and day the sun has his going among men, and his individual nature is expressed in the names: ever-shining, terror of the giants, fugitive. The sun drives his steeds, Arvagr and Alsvinnr, with the same right as day drives his Skinfaxi — to emphasise their mutual independence in the mythical language. The essence of night is darkness and blackness, sleep and dream, but its nature also includes anxiety and the uncanny — therefore it is derived from the home of the giants. But its soul goes still farther; dominion over time must have been part of night's luck, since our fathers reckoned by nights. Moon, too, is a hastener, but it has other powers of its own; it counts the years and wards off evil thoughts; and thus it is wholly different from the other light.



Next to these great gods must be added a series of smaller divinities, which to us are only names save for some shreds of myths. Ny, the waxing, brightly shining moon, and Nid, the dark moon or the moonless night, live as “dwarfs” in an antiquarian’s catalogue of minor mythological beings. We should not wonder at finding the phases of the moon as beings apart from the moon itself and having their own nature; their former independence has left its mark faintly in the verses of the *Voluspá* about the gods who gave Night and Nid their names, and in the teaching of the *Vafthrudnismál* as to the gods who set up Ny and Nid as a means of counting the years. Of Bil and Hjuki, two beings connected with the moon, we should know nothing if they had not slipped into history because in literary times men could remember a legend of their past, when they went to the well and were stolen away by the moon. It is possible that Bil represents the relation between the moon and woman’s weakness — though this is nothing but a guess suggested by the myths of other peoples.

Under the heavens fare roaring storms, driving snow, and these are not merely servants carrying out the will of a greater, any more than Ny and Nid; they are independent souls whose nature is indicated by such names as: boisterous traveller or breaker of trees, and they have their own origin, being called Sons of Fornjot. Nevertheless, heaven itself has as its megin both light and wide extent, clouds, storm and hard weather, clearness and drift and close heat, as we see by the names applied to it in poetry; possibly too the sun formed part of its power. And in the same way the moon, as the reckoner of time, included the hours of light and day in itself, without encroaching upon their independence as souls; this side of the moon’s personality is expressed in a myth that makes Day the son of Night by Dellinger.

For a modern mind approaching the question in the assurance that the parts of existence are dovetailed into one another, it is dangerous to venture out into Middle-garth. If one cannot change one’s being and become as one of the natures in this kingdom, then one is crushed between the soul-colossi that fill that little space. The souls come, growing apace, with an unlimited power of filling new spaces, and overwhelm the inexperienced from every side. So great is the independence of every soul, that the recalcitrant souls are not even fused together by having a common origin; if ever anything came into being — if not rather all things simply were from the beginning — then day and sun, moon and night alike arose independently. The *sine qua non* for finding oneself at home in Middle-garth is to see everything, each thing by itself, as world-forming and world-filling, and not as part of a world. Neither animal nor tree, heaven nor earth is regarded as occupying a greater or smaller portion of space in existence, but as a great or a little world.

In the same way, the souls overlap one another among men. Each clan contained the luck and soul of neighbouring clans, and was in turn contained by its friends, without in the least hazarding its independence as a person. Where people meets people or tribe meets tribe they are not men-filled surfaces cut across by a political or linguistic line; the two circles have an earthly boundary between them, but this line of demarcation is only the upper edge of their mutual contact. Below it stand friendship and enmity, intercourse and feud, with all the shades that the character of honour and luck gives to these relationships. For one who, himself a soul, regards the others as souls, friends are not

something outside him; their self, their honour, their work, their forefathers enter into him as part of his nature. And the others again possess him and his, not as tributary or subject, but as contents of honour. Each people — larger or smaller according to the intensity of intercourse — is the world, its folk takes up the earth, partly as inhabited land, partly as waste land, and fills it out to its farthest bounds. Our folk is Middle-garth, and that which lies beyond is Utgard.

Moreover, the earth itself is not an area in which many tribes are huddled up, but as we have seen, a living being conceiving from the plough and the sower, a woman and yet the broad, green expanse of soil and “roads”. And this broad, teeming, immovable earth is part of the soul of each tribe, not a common mother of all, as is seen in the legends and cults, when every tribe tells its personal story of the origin of earth without questioning the right of their neighbours to give their account of how the world, or rather, how their world arose. So it is among primitive peoples whose cosmogonies are better known, and so it was among ancient peoples in the north, as the spirit of their myths and the diversity of their traditions bear witness.

The question as to human being — non-human being thus disappears in face of the simple fact that all which is not our life is another soul, call it what we will. Foreigners have no legal value. In later times they were accorded only an illusory recognition in law and judgement, in older times their life and right was a matter of indifference. One does not kill an animal, or cut down a tree, out of sheer idleness, without some reason or other, whether this consist in the harmfulness of the thing while living or in its use when dead, and to understand these strictures we must remember that primitive men are far more careful about destroying souls than men of civilization who feel no responsibility whatever towards the creatures round them, because they recognise only their value as things. In the same way formerly one would hardly strike down a barbarian for simply existing. But killing a stranger did not differ in character from violating one of the innumerable non-human souls in existence.

Within the misty horizon formed by the hordes of the mumbling or speechless men, stands a community where the individual has a certain legal value, characterising him as a being of the same sort as the being who attacks him. The member of a community has the right to possess his own in peace. His life is costly. But within the narrow circle that is held together by a common law-thing, common chieftain, common war and peace, homicide is after all not a crime against life itself, not even to be reckoned as anything unnatural.

On the other hand, from the moment we enter into the clan, the sacredness of life rises up in absolute inviolability, with its judgement upon bloodshed as sacrilege, blindness, suicide. The reaction comes as suddenly and as unmistakably as when a nerve is touched by a needle. With this slight movement from society over to clan we have crossed the deepest gulf in existence.

Such is life in primitive experience — not a mere organism, not a collection of parts held together by some unifying principle, but a unique soul apparent in every one of its manifestations. The being is so homogeneous and personal that all its particles, as well as all its qualities and characteristics, involve the whole creature. When a man grasps a handful of earth, he has in his hand its

wideness and its firmness and its fruitfulness; we may explain the fact by saying that a grain of the soil contains its soul and essence; or we may say that the fragment is the whole — both expressions are right and both are wrong insofar as the fact is not expressible in our language, but only to be got at by resurrection of an experience foreign to us. When a man eats an animal, or drinks its blood, he assimilates beariness or wolfness, and by his act he not only assumes the ferociousness and courage of the beast, but its habits and form as well; the bodily shape of the animal enters into his constitution, and may force itself out in some moments, even perhaps to complete transformation. You cannot mimic the gambols of an animal but an inner adjustment takes place, any more than you can behave like a woman without inducing a mood of feminine feeling, for by the dramatic imitation the dancer evokes the being which expresses itself in those movements, and takes upon himself the responsibility of giving it power to manifest itself. It is told of an Icelander that he killed a man-eating bear to avenge his father and brother; and to make the revenge complete, he ate the animal. From that time he was rather difficult to manage, and his nature underwent a change which was nothing else but the beariness working within him. And similarly, by striking up friendships, men are vitally associated, more or less strongly, with their fellow men; as the brethren of the clan are not only one soul but one bone, one flesh, in a literal sense that escapes modern brains, so the soul of the clan is really knit with the souls of its neighbours and friends, to quote an expression from the Old Testament, which has now lost the force it originally carried among the Israelites as well as among the Teutons.

## **CHAPTER XI**

### **BIRTH**

In the circle of friends, the soul exhibits its features and its strength, but the hamingja of the clan is not restricted to that human fence which now encloses the sacred field. The soul is not a thing born with each generation and renewed with each brood of kinsmen that steps in. It reaches forward; it will, as surely as anything is sure, flow through those sons' sons which all good kinsmen hope and expect will follow one another. And it reaches back over the known part of the past, embracing all former kin, and extends behind them into the primeval darkness whence their fathers came.

The soul which works restlessly in the present generation is a legacy from the forefathers who made it by always letting it have its own way, never suffering it to hunger, but willingly gathering honour together so that the hamingja was for ever growing beyond its former bounds.

Whence had Harald Fairhair obtained his kingly luck, his kingly soul, with its wide-spreading avidity, its plans for a Norway united into one, and with the power to carry out his will? The question has been put forward in the past, and has also — at least in part — been answered. According to the legend, his soul's foundations were laid with luck of many sorts. He himself was a son of

Halfdan the Black, a prince of considerable distinction in a small way, victorious and very lucky in harvests. Halfdan was first married to a daughter of Harald Goldbeard of Sogn, and on the birth of the first son, the mother's father took the boy to his home, gave him his name and his kingdom and brought him up. This Harald died young, about the same time as his namesake, and the name then passed — together with the soul — to his younger brother, despite the fact that the latter was born of a different mother, who was a woman of the powerful race of chieftains from Hadaland. Thus, from several different sources, was gathered together the foundation of Harald's great luck as king. We have every right to say that the first king of Norway was a highly complex character.

The race of Halfdan became the greatest in Norway, because its members had understood how to draw other sources of life into their own and fill themselves with hamingja to overflowing.

The old forefathers lived in their posterity, filled them out with their will, and wrought their achievements through them anew. A scornful reference to the departed actually strikes a living soul; for whereas the soul transmigrant merely repeats itself, and, saves itself by again and again coming into existence when he slips from one body into another, the kinsmen actually are their fathers and their fathers' fathers, and maintain them by their being. Since it is the same soul which animated the ancestors and which now makes bearers of honour and frith out of the living generation, the present does not exclude the past. The identity of hamingja which bears the clan includes all the departed.

There is indeed really no question here of past and present in the same uncompromising sense as with us, who always move with faces half buried in a dark cloud, and a clammy feeling about the neck. Time lay spread out about those people of old. The past was north to them, and that to come was south, time present was as east and west: all in a way equally near, all in a way equally present. And to the right as to the left, straight ahead and behind, the horizon was bounded by the luck of the circle; time was penetrated throughout by its flood, as it flowed about men and through men, filling them and space about them; always and everywhere with the force of movement in it, always and everywhere with the fulness of expansion, again and again crystallising into a human being, who lived his time in the light to fall back again and be kept until another time. For the hamingja, present and past are not strata superimposed, but a double existence, through the spirit walls of which man passes to and fro without hindrance.

When a new man came into the family, the Northmen said expressly: Our kinsman is born again, so and so has come back. And they confirmed their saying by giving the old name to the young one. Thorstein consecrates his son to life with the words: "This boy shall be called Ingimund, and I look for hamingja for him because of the name." The soul and luck of the old grandfather, Ingimund, is now to enter into life again, to new activity in the light. Later in the story we are told that this younger Ingimund brings about the reincarnation of his uncle Jokul, by uttering these prophetic words over his second son: "This boy looks as one who will be quick to undertaking: keen eyes he has; if he lives, he will surely gain the mastery of many an one, and not easy to get on with, but true to friends and kin — a great champion, if my eyes can see; should we not

now call to mind our kinsman Jokul, as my father bade me, — surely he shall be called Jokul.”

The firmness of this custom in the matter of names shows that the ancients meant what they said. Names were not spent recklessly; the family had a certain stock of regular appellations which were borne in turn. The children were named after a deceased relative, and took over the vacant name. It is a thing quite conceivable in itself that Olaf Geirstadaalf was buried at Geirstad and later, about 1020, visited his own grave, or, as we may also put it, that Olaf the Saint had once been called Olaf Geirstadaalf and, if he wished, could remember his dwelling at Geirstad. Men asked Olaf once, when he rode past his kinsman's barrow, if it were true that he was buried there; rumour declared that he had there uttered the words: “Here I have been, and here I went in.” — The same unecclesiastical mode of thought obtained in Iceland. “Kolbein is come again,” we hear folk say, with an intense delight of recognition, when they saw the prowess of Kolbein's' nephew, Thorgils Skardi; here they had the whole of that much-admired man before them, his friendliness, his generosity, his delight in feasting— his chieftainly character altogether.

While the Northmen in naming new kinsmen after the old lay stress on the individuality of the re-born, the remaining Germanic peoples follow a different custom, the scion of a race not being called directly after his predecessor, but given a name which assimilates portions of the kinsmen's name-material; and from all appearances, the Nordic method is due to a restriction of the underlying principle. The clan had two or more appellatives in which it saw expressed its will and honour; the kinsmen bore one or another of these family signs, extended to form a name by the addition of a word such as strong (*bold*), mighty (*ric*), lucky (*red* and others) or *berht*, *i.e.* radiant, to be recognised from afar. The princes of Kent were called Eormenric, Eormenred, Eorconberht, Eorcongot and Æthelberht, Æthelred, their women Eormenbeorh, Eormenhild, Eormengyth; *eormen* and *eorcon* are both words indicating something great or imposing in the luck of the Kentish stock. The proud and ancient race that held the throne of Essex called themselves after the *sax*, or short sword, after *sige*, victory, and *sæ*, which is probably nothing other than sea; there were Sæbeorht, Sæweard, Seaxred, Seaxheald, Sigebeorht, Sigeheard, Sigebeald. Among the West Saxons, we find *coen*, *cuth* and *ceol* predominating, indicative of progress, renown and seafaring — *ceol* is probably keel or ship —: Cuthwulf, Cuthgisl, Cuthred, Cuthwine, Ceolric, Ceolwulf, Ceolweald. The Northumbrian kings proclaimed their gods — os — and their holy places or things

— *ealh* — in their names: the men were called Oslaf, Oswulf, Oslac, Osweald, Ealhred, Ealhric, the women Ealhfrith, Ealhflæd.

In the *Beowulf*, the memory of the ancient Scyldings is preserved: Heorogar with his brothers Hrothgar and Helgi, and the later generation of Heorowearð, Hrethrek, Hrothmund and Hrothulf; these had for their name-mark the sword, *heoru*, and renown, *hroth*, *hreth*. The Frankish house of the Merovingians was proud of its *chlod* and its child, renown and battle.

The mark of the Ostrogoths was, as far as can be seen, first and foremost the ancient sacred *amal*, but in addition to this there was the kingly sign

*oftheod*, not only meaning people, but also in a wider sense indicating greatness, that which surpassed ordinary measure: Theodomer, Theodoric, Amalaric, and women such as Amalafred, Amalaberg. From the first century, the very dawn of North European history, we find, through the medium of southern annals, a couple of names handed down among those born by the royal family of the Cherusci: Segestes, Segimundus and Segimerus are the names of three kinsmen in their Roman form; we may perhaps in these names discern the word for victory.

The difference between the ancient, pan-Germanic method of naming and that of the Northmen indicates perhaps a breach in the mode of thought, a revolution, whereby the individual was brought forward and given a free hand to make — in course of time — the most of himself. But in all spiritual changes the new is contained altogether in the old and the old unimpaired in the new; the difference at the outset lies in a slight shifting of the accent. The contrast between the two systems certainly means nothing more than a dissimilarity in the emphasis laid on personal and general. The period which fostered the new system of nomenclature would hardly have been preceded by a time when the deceased ancestor was not recognised in the new-born child at all. Then, as well as later, men believed in man's living on after death; but in the re-birth of the family, the thought dwelled more on the idea of its reincarnation, than that of *his* coming again. The dead continued their life until they were forgotten, or so to speak dissolved in the luck, and meanwhile, the regeneration of the inexhaustible went on.

On the birth of a child, the luck of the kinsmen breaks out again in a new individual. Possibly the event may have an external occasion in that a portion of luck has fallen vacant; but death and birth, to the deeper insight, do not stand in any so straightforward relation one to the other. The living cannot by simply plunging into the reservoir of soul make its waters ooze forth in a successor. When one is born, it is the well-spring, of luck overflowing, and if a dead man is to bring about such overflow, it must be in virtue of all that honour he has in himself, or which the avenging of his death brings with it. When the race increases its honour, then kinsmen rise up and make the fence wider. The will is not shared out among a greater number of individuals, but grows, so that there is more will and need of more implements for carrying out its work.

When the men of a race are rich in honour and luck, their womenfolk bear children. The luck must pass through the mother to gain strength for life; but the fact that the woman brings forth her child is not enough to inspire it with life and give it a share of luck. In the North, the child was at once brought to the master of the house, and accepted by him with a name. We read, for instance: "This boy shall be called Ingimund, after his mother's father, and I look for luck in him because of the name." Or "This boy shall be called Thorstein, and I wish that luck may go with the name." The meaning of this "look for", "wish" lies midway between an "I know", and an "I decree, I will, I give him hereby such and such a definite portion of luck, I hereby give him birth." The father can say this, because he has, with the name, the soul itself in his mouth, and breathes it to the child; he inspires him with that luck, that character and will, that strength and that appearance which lie in the soul that hangs over him. With the name, luck and life, and thus also frith and the dignity of a kinsman entered into the child.

Not until then had it a living soul. Here and there in the laws we find indications of a time when the life of a child was reckoned from the day it was given a name. In England, even after the law had advanced so far as to place the little child equal to the grown man, it was necessary to invalidate expressly all earlier distinctions, by adding: whether it have a name or not. Among the Franks, the child not yet named was still kept in a category by itself, with a smaller fine for its killing than for real human beings.

It would be regarded as a vital injury if another acting on his own responsibility gave a name to the child and thereby stamped its mind and body and fate; and in the Germanic consciousness of law and right there is a firmly rooted hatred of him who dares to give a man a nickname and thereby plant new soul qualities in him. On the other hand, it may be said that a cognomen brings luck, in that it increases the honourable distinction of the receiver; the depth of this pride is still discernible in the "superstition" of late times that a man with two names lived longer than a man with one.

A boy who started his career with a rich and powerful name, one that his father or grandfather or another kinsman had filled with honour and progress, had a great advantage to begin with. Sincere Christians such as King Magnus and his true man Thorstein Siduhallson have not lost 'an iota of their confidence in the blessings of a good name. Thorstein comes on his homeward way from a pilgrimage to his king, when the latter lies at the point of death, and has already set his house in order and given gifts to his men. Nothing is left for the late-corner, but Thorstein himself cares not for goods: "But this I would, that you should give me your name." The king answers: "You have in many wise deserved of me that which is best, and I give you gladly this name for your son. Even though I have not been a very great king, it is still no little thing for a simple yeoman to name his children after me, but since I see that it means something to you, I will grant your prayer. My hugar tells me, that there will be sorrow and honour in the name." The child receives with the name a fragment of the king's luck, but this he must know, that the king's luck is strong, so strong that an ordinary mortal would hardly have power to carry it safely through.

The act of the father is clearly just 'as much an act of birth as is the mother's delivery. The little empty possibility had in itself no part in the race, had no claim to be called kinsman; and if he showed evil tendencies, in other words, appeared likely to become a niding — as might be discerned from such sure signs as deformity, or physical qualities alien to the stock,— then he would simply not be allowed to enter into the luck, but was placed outside life, until the trifle of mobility in him also disappeared. He was carried out to perish. The Germanic father would have looked askance at so unreasonable an accusation as that he had carried out a living being; and if the matter were touched upon at a moment when he chanced to be inclined to discuss it, he would undoubtedly have set the phrase-maker's errant wits to rights with a blow of his axe. He knew well enough what life was worth. If the child had had the least share in frith, then its separation must have caused a breach that demanded careful and precise attention.

So effective a part is that of the father in making a human being of the newly born, that one might be tempted to regard the consecration as itself the real



birth. What can be the value of simply being born, when the child, until adopted by the father or male kin, is after all but a thing one does not even need to kill, but can merely thrust out as not belonging to humanity at all? It may be difficult enough for us to harmonise the father's absolute veto with the ancients' praise of noble origin, and their frowning suspicion of men who had to cry aloud their father's name that their mother should not be mentioned.

For the Northmen, high birth was the only qualification for honour and respect, or in a deeper sense, the sole condition which enabled a man to possess the skill and self-assurance which honour and respect presupposed. No false pretender could remain long undiscovered; the changeling could not hide the fact that he lacked a soul, as witness Queen Hagny's vain attempt to exchange her two ugly, black sons for a fair slave child. The two spurious slave children lay one day playing in the straw upon the floor, while Leif, the changeling, sat in the high seat playing with a finger ring; then said one of the brothers: "Let us go and take the ring away from him;" the other black mite was ready enough to try, but Leif only cried. In this little scene, Bragi the Scald finds sufficient indication of the real state of things; he tells the queen: "Two are in here, they please me, Hamund and Geirmund, King Hjor's sons, but that boy Leif is the slave woman's son, not yours, woman, — a wretch beyond most".

In this story, we find that which was the silent foundation for the Northmen's judgement of men emphasised with polemic force; in everyday life, it is apparent in the scorn of the low-born, wonder at the ability of an upstart, and most of all, in the unconditional respect paid by free men to one with tradition behind him. This much is certain: no man could be brave and skilful unless he came of a brave and skilful stock. He who was born of a great luck, had a guarantee for his life which one who saw the light in poorer circumstances never could have, he could grasp with fuller hands, without fear of letting fall. He was sure of having such and such qualities of luck — those which pertained to the hamingja of his race and he would always choose with unfailing certainty the one decision which was the only right and only possible one in any matter.

Glum, the old man of luck, had once an experience which taught him that a fault of birth, even though well hidden, can always break out at the critical moment and upset one's thoughts. In the Thvera clan, which traced its descent right back to Viking Kari, one of the great commencements in the genealogy of Norway, and was connected on the distaff side with Norway's kings, there had come a strain of slave blood; a man whom Glum had given his freedom, and who had somehow or other managed to raise himself to a position of wealth, had married a kinswoman — her name is not stated — of the man who had freed him. Their son, Ogmund, was a promising young man, whom Glum took into his house and regarded as the equal of his own sons. When the time came, Ogmund also went abroad, on board his own ship, as fitted the cadet of a great house; and in fitting wise also, he announced his arrival in the Norway fjords by ramming a longship and sending it to the bottom. The ship belonged, to Earl Hakon, who was naturally incensed at the news, and did not exhort the survivors from the wreck to deal gently with the offender. Ogmund received a blow that kept him to his bed the greater part of the winter. And now it seemed as if he had suddenly lost all his nobility. He saw his kinsman Vigfus Glumson as one of Hakon's retainers, and knew the earl would take vengeance on him if

anything happened to one of the Norsemen; and he could hardly reconcile it with his duty to Glum to bring misfortune upon Vigfus. So he argued, and left the blow unavenged. Vigfus, however, thought otherwise; his retort shears through Ogmund's justification right down to the diseased spot: "Neither I nor my father care to have you looking after me if I do not do so myself; it is other things that teach you to be so cautious; as might be expected, you take after the thrall stock rather than after the men of Thvera." And Glum's bitter outburst against Ogmund after his return is a stronger antistrophe to this: "What call have you to guard him if he did not guard himself; rather had I seen you both dead, and you avenged." And he calls to mind the old truth that unfree race is ever short of manhood. — It was the mark of birth of the thrall's descendant, that he saw the lesser thing first, and it grew in his eyes, whereas men of the true Thvera stock saw only the thing that mattered.

The Northmen had a keen eye for psychological signs of mixed race; a saying often on their lips was: "Who is it you take after?" And we have no grounds for supposing that it was only the one side that counted. Thorolf's opponents, the Sons of Hilderid already mentioned, never got over the disability in their birth, that their mother was of an inferior stock to their father's; it was a fault plainly seen in every word they spoke, when they stole into the hall from behind as soon as Thorolf had strode out of the front, and explained and interpreted the action of their enemy, while Thorolf let his act carry its own interpretation. The sagas also have an argument, to the effect that a man's rascality is due to the mother's blood.

Among the other Germanic peoples it may be difficult perhaps to find any testimony directly showing the judgement of the day in regard to the half-breed. Even in King Gunnthram's day, however, a bishop, Sagittarius, whose eyes had been opened by adversity and loss of office, can realise that the disregard of birth was a factor in the moral decline of the people: "How should a king's Sons ever come to rule when their mother came straight from the thralls' bench into, the king's bed?" This was his everlasting theme when the talk turned on matter of serious import. The experiences of poor Sagittarius were just of the very sort which generally gives the sufferer the most unprejudiced view of his adversary; he had been deprived of his office without having any righteousness of his own to set up against unrighteousness. Gregory, on the other hand, who has found a place for his eccentric brother-prelate in his panorama of Frankish society, looks more historically at the matter: "Sagittarius did not reflect that nowadays all who can call the king father are reckoned king's sons, whatever their mother's birth." But even if we had not the opportunity of hearing judgement passed in definite words, we can read it in the practical behaviour of men. It does not take long to perceive the importance of birth, outside Scandinavia as well. This refinement of feeling would naturally appear in its strongest form as public illwill against marriage with inferiors. And we are told, indeed, of the Saxons, that they made equality of birth a legally indispensable condition between parties entering into matrimony; no marriage was suffered to bridge the gulf between noble and free, any more than between free-born and freedman, or freedman and thrall. Our authority here, a clerical biography from the ninth century, compiled by a monk whose ethnographical knowledge is restricted to a good page of excerpts, is one of those sources whose sentences are not to be estimated word by word, but taken *en bloc* at discretion; whether the words refer to a written or an

unwritten law, whether they apply to many of the Saxons or only a little clique at some given time, must be left open. At all events, such pedantry of class is not a general Teuton characteristic, but the Saxon caste feeling may probably point indirectly to a marked regard in our forefathers for the importance of blood. And the Saxons elsewhere show themselves as finicking formalists who would doubtless be the first to make a sound dogma out of refinement.

There are two things in which all good Germanic stock is agreed: that a free woman surrendering herself to a slave becomes a prey to the unreality of slave existence and loses her soul, and that an unfree woman gives her children spirit of her slave spirit. In Sweden, the church, with its hate of adultery and its disapproval of slavery, had entered protest against the prevailing view. Then the law may run, that true marriage always ensures freedom of the child. But on all sides of the paragraph extends the old conception of the man as the one who is borne by and has his validity from a clan and the honour of a clan. The words happen to stand in the same chapter with an old sentence in which an earlier age expressed its condemnation of the woman: the woman who enters into matrimony with a slave shall go backwards, or rather back foremost, out of her clan; the word backwards indicates an unlucky mode of exit involving disgrace and loss of human status.

A free man has of course the right to use his slave woman as he pleases, but children begotten in the slaves' corner will be unfree, without right to walk, sit or inherit with the children of a free woman. That child sits in the corner and eats from its bowl among the thralls, as is said in the law of Norway; the same thing may be expressed as in Denmark: If a man have begotten a child with his woman thrall, and the child not freed, then the father shall not pay more in fine for his deeds than for those of any other thrall. It is the woman who stamps her child; we find this also in the words wherewith the Lombards have rendered the idea of a man's right to marry his own female slave; he must first give her her freedom, and raise her to the standing of a rightful wife; then her children will be legitimate and free to inherit; the word used by the laws to indicate her new standing, whether it be *viridibora*, noble born, or *orviderbora*, re-born, plainly embodies the thought of her moving from one existence into another, into one that is really life.

In all Germanic law, as far as we have any evidence, distinction is made between children born in wedlock and the illegitimate, even though the latter be both free-born and recognised by the father. Among the Lombards, as among the Northmen, both Danes, Swedes and Norwegians, the rule for the illegitimate child runs: not as the others, not entitled to equal share of inheritance, or more strongly: let him have a gift from his father, and go content with that to his own. Whatever may have been the position of the free-born illegitimate in the clan among different peoples, there is a deeply rooted feeling that he lacks something which the others have, or a fear lest he be not so strong as his kinsmen, not the rock that unconditional faith can build on without fear, or that an inheritance would not be safe in his hands. Possibly such feeling of difference was not always or everywhere suffered to make the decisive factor in the social arrangement of a bastard's position, but it has everywhere contributed to the judgement passed upon him, if not as fear, then at least as caution. There is in an Icelandic saga an everyday scene and a passage of

words that point out the essential weakness in an illegitimate daughter viz, that she may possibly not be able to pass on to her husband the full frith and honour of her father. In the last battle between the two Helgis, Helgi Droplaugson and Helgi Asbjornson, the latter was faithfully supported by his son-in-law, Hjarrandi. The other Helgi tauntingly shouted to his young and lusty adversary: "Hey, how you would have laid about you, if it had been a free-born daughter of Helgi Asbjornson you had taken to wife." The words surely had their sting, for they goaded Hjarrandi, so that he fell to still more violently. Though the speech is altogether Icelandic in its form and not to be drawn upon too indiscriminately, it plays upon an uncertainty which is present beneath the legal provisions which set the place of the bastard at the extreme limit of the line of kin. On this point, the church, in its endeavours to lower the status of the bastard in order to strengthen monogamy, had an ally in the old thoughts, and this moreover, a strong ally acting from strong, half-felt instincts and thus capable of effecting great and rapid changes.

Surely enough, a man is born to be what he is. Between marriage and the looser relations, between children whose parents were of equal rank and those whose mother was not a wife proper, between birth and half-birth is drawn one of the sharpest lines in Germanic thought, a limit never veiled. Whatever Tacitus may have imagined out of his own head as to the solemnity with which a barbarian woman took her bridegroom's hand and mentally reviewed the perils she was determined to share with him, his description of the marriage contract is at least in agreement with all later authorities in emphasising the marriage ceremony as a principal act in the life of our forefathers. The contract was an event, the social and legal influence of which was emphasised by detailed ceremonial; it was concluded with the same thoughtful care as a treaty of peace, where the foundation was securely laid by welding together two whole clans and their luck; it was prepared with caution by a series of solemn acts, the formality of which was in proportion to the legal importance of the proceeding.

We cannot gain a real understanding by harmonising and squaring the facts. Again and again it will be found that our words are too narrow or that the ideas which the words call up in our minds are incongruous with the thoughts that bore the ancient institutions. We give the act of bringing forth an absolute validity that the moment did not possess in the old times, because our conception of life as something purely physical is totally different from the primitive idea of a human being. The modern word birth must be stretched to its utmost possibilities so as to embrace the whole weighty conception of race, breeding and family. Birth is not solely parturition and not solely the ceremony of naming, but something more extensive — it is the past breaking forth anew.

The child's social state depends on the complete process of its coming into the world, and into the world of its kin, a process that begins with the mother's birth-pangs and ends with the father's solemn recognition of the infant as admitted into the clan. It is impossible to conclude directly from the cry of a woman that a child is being born; but the distinction is not between delivery and giving soul, but between the double act of giving birth and naming whereby a human being is born, and the insignificant bringing forth which is no birth at all. The only place where one can see what takes place is in the clan itself, and standing there, as a kinsman among kin, we have, in the one case, the happiness of seeing a

kinsman come into the world, in the other, we are merely spectators of a happening of no importance, whereby an individual passes before our eyes, out into nothingness, into the unreality of thralldom, or perhaps into a reality with which we have no concern.

The son inherits birth and luck from his mother, but his maternal birthright is not derived from that little moment when the mother acts and the father waits; it depends fully as much upon the life which his father names into him. Going back through history to find the moment whence the act of birth derives its weight and its power, we pause first at the evening when the pair solemnly commence their life together; the fact of their openly going to rest together is more than a merely legal sign that their connection is to have all the effects of a marriage. But then too we shall find that the intercourse before the leading to the couch, the "ale", is emphasised as a sure sign of the depth and genuineness of the alliance. From the ale we are led further to the bargain made beforehand, the legally binding contract sealed with gifts, and given to understand that this buying is the sign that the two are married in truth; the high social state of the mother depends on the fact that she is honourably bought with the bridal gift. But even here we are not at the end of the matter, the nobility of a truly wedded woman shines out on the morning after the bridal night when the husband honours his spouse by giving her the portion of a true wife; very rightly, the "morning gift" is reckoned in the Lombardic law as the concluding blessing which releases a bond-woman from her state of thralldom and makes her a "born" wife. Each of these ceremonies can by itself be taken as the fundamental and the decisive one, without in the least detracting from the importance of the rest; for all of them stand as proofs of the fact that a change has been effected in the minds and the souls of the parties concerned. Before the alliance was made, the two family circles were strangers, now, they are united by a fusion of luck and will; on both sides there has been an assimilation by each of the other's soul, so that the hamingja of both is strengthened by the bargain. At the moment the father takes to himself luck of another's luck and unites it with his own, the foundation of a legitimate son's life is laid. And so indeed the boy can be called a string, a close-twisted string; but he is not twined of two strands lying loosely beside each other; his luck is one throughout, that of the father and that of the mother in one. In reality, the hamingja which now inspires the son is fully active in the father; the father with his clan already resembles the mother's kin and takes after them; and he must do so, as surely as he has so much of his kin-in-law's honour in himself that he can suffer with them and stand with them under one shield. The principle of birth and naming in the North is thus fully explained in the simple scene where the father, or whoever names the child, decides upon either one of his former kinsmen or one of the wife's circle, and fixes the child's position in the clan by uttering the blessing: "Let the boy take his name and luck!"

But to understand fully the effect of lawful marriage it is necessary to bear in mind that the right and power of calling a child after the brothers-in-law is not, cannot be restricted to the man who has actually married a woman of the other clan. The fusion of soul and luck and history that is effected by one of the friends mating must go through the whole race and work a change in all the members who have one soul together. In other words, the child is not named

after his mother's father or brother, but in him the whole clan regenerates the hamingja of their brothers-in-law.

Hence it comes naturally that the genealogies of the ancient families were in themselves a history or an epos, and at the same time a portrait of a character. And though the registers are to us but catalogues emptied of the rich memories that clung to the names for the original bearers, we can still in the crossing and clustering of names old and new catch glimpses of life and growth, and even re-experience something of that earnestness which for the race itself made the reckoning up at once a serious business and an edification.

History knows little about King Penda of Mercia, and still less of his father, King Pybba. We must content ourselves with a few facts from ecclesiastical history, just such as might go to a verse in the Book of Chronicles, of a king who did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. Only a single trait of human expression is preserved in this mask; heathen as he was, he used no weapon against the Christians but scorn, when they did not act according to their faith, we are told, and in this scornful grimace we seem to recognise one of the marked characters, who might rightly find a place beside a Harald, an Earl Hakon, a Chlodevech. But even though Penda was the founder of a kingdom, and one who, like Harald, elevated a chieftainship to kingly rank, he perished with his fathers; culture threw him down, with its unwavering judgement, as one of those who was not borne on by the tide, but left high and dry by the current of civilization. In England, the new age and the new spirit were not, as in Norway, built into the old; every stake there hammered in to support the new served at the same time to keep the old from walking. With the last of the heathens fell the kingdom itself, and if it rose again, it was with the first Christian king of Mercia. But if the kingdom of Mercia stood fast after the fall of its king and his culture, if it passed unscathed through the crisis that follows upon a period of creation, when maintenance must take the place of the natural equilibrium of progress, and if, after the crisis, it asserted itself as a great power, then it was because these ruthless warriors, Penda and his kinsmen, had also been men wise in counsel, who laid the foundations of their kingly luck sound and deep. This race had, like that of Halfdan the Black in Norway and that of the Merovingians in the Frankish realm, the wit to lead the great luck of the surrounding world into their own souls, and give birth to their hamingja again and again, not only stronger, but also richer, by impregnating their house with the war-luck and the ruling-luck of new regions. One sure sign of the power these princes of Mercia possessed to support their spiritual growth by acquiring luck from without is seen in the alliance with the royal house of the West Saxons. When the two families first intermarried is not known; only this is certain, that Penda's sister was married to King Coenwealh of Wessex. And now we see that one of Penda's brothers was already named after his brother-in-law; he is called Coenwealh, and despite the fact that the peace was soon broken between them, when the West Saxon cast off his wife, Coenwealh's branch of the family still continued to use only West Saxon names. Furthermore, the new hamingja was transmitted to two of Penda's grandsons, Wulfhere's son Coenred, and Æthelred's son Ceolred, despite the fact that one's mother was from Kent, and the other's a Northumbrian.



Northward also we can follow the aspirations of the clan; Penda's fierce conflicts with the pious kings of Northumberland, Oswald and Oswiu, are in some way connected with the fact that two of his sons had married daughters of King Oswiu. And even in the same generation there appear in the Mercian genealogy those peculiar Northumbrian names which tell of a family that was proud of its gods; Penda's brother Eowa calls his sons Alwih and Osmod. The *æthel*, too, which appears in the name of one of Penda's own sons, Æthelred, is of old standing in Northumbria, but owing to its general character it is not a distinct family mark.

Another ambitious race whose list of names still bears witness to the enriching power of luck, is that of the Merovingians. Its first historical name is Childeric. This king comes nearest to ranking as the Harald Fairhair of the Franks, and like the Norse founder of a kingdom, had part of his luck from a neighbouring realm. It is related, in story form, that he stayed for some time in the East, in "Thuringia" at the court of King "Bisinus", and that the queen of the East, won by admiration of his gallantry, followed him to France and became the mother of the next great man in the race, Chlodevech. What this myth may mean, translated into modern historical proportions, we do not know, but that it has some significance is indicated by the names of Childeric's daughters Audefleda and Albofleda, since we find elsewhere an *alb* and an *aud* pointing back to the same mystical Thuringia with its even more mystical King Bisinus. Later, Childeric allied himself with Theodoric the Great, and gave him one of his daughters in marriage; Chlodevech, as one historian expressly states, looked for great things from this alliance, and hastened therefore to incorporate the luck in his family by naming his son after the great king of the Goths. The following generations are distinguished by the alliance with the Burgundian royal house; names with *gunn*, as Gunnthram, and *chrote*, as Chrotesind, are the symbol of the union. What the remaining name combinations, such as Ingomar, Chramn, or Charibert, signify in the history of the race we are unable to explain; one might say at a guess that they appear in the annals of the family partly as a memorial to the rival Frankish clans which were gradually swallowed up by the conqueror's line. All these adopted names indicate firstly alliance, but thereafter the usurpation of luck and will; with so much Burgundian soul in them as had the Merovingians, men could safely seat themselves in the alien places without fear of luck failing them in the strange land.

In face of these old realists, who absorbed alien luck and alien right into their own flesh and blood, our faint conceptions of acquisition by marriage and inheritance prove inadequate. Our words and thoughts permit us only by a very roundabout way to reach the sort of soul-history which lies in these family registers; but when once we have allowed ourselves to be led so far, genealogy does leap forth as the expression telling all, and telling all in the right manner, as the authentic illustration of birth, which cannot be fully replaced by any other, for the very reason that the succession of names is a series of landmarks left by the very flow of life. And the symbol it calls up before our eyes is not a father who from his place in the order of the race casts a searching glance along the two roads that meet in him, in the hope of its finding some one that can furnish a name for his child; we see a man sitting, inspired by a luck that is truly his, whether he himself or another have brought the latest addition to it, taking this hamingja and determining the "age", or fate, of his son.



"I 'wish' this boy luck of the name;" this is a saying potent to effect just what lies in it according to the old mode of speech. He who utters it knows that he can make his words "whole", or real. The ancient idea had no respect for half or conditional results; if the father could not give his child real life, and life unimpaired, then he had effected nothing. He might indeed also take something of himself and of his soul to give birth to a human being after it had grown old. When the Icelanders relate the story with a purpose which tells how Harald Fairhair forced Æthelstan to adopt one of his sons, by letting the messenger set the child on the knee of the English king, these words rise of themselves to the lips of the narrator: "The child is now taken on your knee and you must fear and honour him as you fear and honour your son." Whatever the author and his circle may have meant by these words, the force of them goes back to the experience that an act such as that which the Norseman tricked Æthelstan into doing really twined a thread between the man sitting there and the child seated on his knee; this ceremony might effect a change in the parties concerned, not only creating new responsibilities, but also giving rise to entirely new feelings of frith and kinship.

Undoubtedly the soul could be renewed in a man, so that he was born into another clan than that to which he originally belonged. By such adoption, the new member acquired a new luck, new plans, new aims ahead of him, he had memories and forefathers in common with his new kinsmen, received their frith into his mind, their will to vengeance, their honour. Even through the pompous Latin of Cassiodorus we can hear an echo of the Germanic reliance on one so adopted; this quill-driver of Theodoric's touches casually on the memory of Gensemund, "a man whose praises the whole world should sing, a man only made son by adoption in arms to the King, yet who exhibited such fidelity to the Amals that he transferred it even to their heirs, although he was himself sought for to be crowned. Therefore will his fame live for ever, so long as the Gothic name endures."

Obviously then, the man must have been re-born completely, and received an entirely new soul. A change must have taken place in him, a birth which not only affected his mode of thought, but also what we should call his character.

The half-born was, then, not excluded from the chance of being fully born, he could be renewed, nay, born, so thoroughly that there was in reality nothing left either of the old body or of the former soul. Such re-birth lay in the act of adoption, the seating on the knee, or as the Swedes called it, seating in the lap. When the Uppland Law in one paragraph admits legitimate children to full honour on the subsequent marriage of the parents, but in the heading of that paragraph calls them "lap-children", we have here again one of those characteristic instances of contradiction between the old-time words and the thoughts of the Middle Ages. In the Norwegian laws, we find adoption described in its full dramatic content; a three-year-old ox was slaughtered, and a shoe was made from the skin of its right foot; at a solemn feast the shoe was placed in the principal part of the room, and one by one the members of the family set foot in it; first the father adopting, then the adopted son, and after him the remaining kinsmen. From that moment the son had in himself the full life of the family, as may be plainly seen from the legal consequences ascribed to the act; he inherits, avenges, brings lawsuits, is one of their own. The formula whereby the

father confirmed this kinsman's dignity contains, in old words, that unity of soul which we expressed by luck and honour and frith: "I lead this man to the goods I give him, to gift and repayment, to chair and seat, to fine and rings, and to full man's right, as if his mother had been bought with bridal gift."

The same thing may be expressed in Swedish by saying: Until a man is adopted, he may not stand among jurors, may not close a bargain, and all that is done to him is done as to a slave; but when he has been duly adopted, when the kinsmen have uttered their solemn: "we take him into clan with us," then he may both attack and defend himself at law, and may take his place among the compurgators when his family bears witness in a process between men. And when the adoption has been completed in due form, then the adopted one is born as fully as one who has lain naked and kicking between the knees of a high-born woman; whatever he may have been, slave or free man, no one can distinguish between him and others of the race. He does not differ from his brothers in being born of a father without a mother, for in the case of a complete adoption the luck of the wife and her kinsmen was included in the soul which the father named into him. The adopted member has received a whole soul and a past.

In Norway, it was required that all kinsmen should be present at the adoption ceremony, and step into the shoe, in order that they might one by one hand over to the new man right to life and a share in the rights of life; infants not yet of an age to take part in the ceremony by themselves, confirmed the adoption of their brother by sitting on their father's arm when he stepped into the shoe. The same condition for the validity of adoption was probably required by other Germanic peoples, though we cannot conclude from this that it always restricted the right of the father in the same way as in Norway. The main object of the ceremony is not to announce the change in the new man's state, but to make the change itself real, so that it could face the world as a fact which all must feel. The child did not sit on its father's arm to figure as an announcement; he radiated luck into his new brother, and he would, when he came to man's estate, feel the kinship which he had unknowingly established. Consequently, the public announcement at the law-thing, required by Danish and Swedish law, was not in itself more effective than the act a father undertook himself, when he had great luck concentrated in himself.

Beside true kinsmen there appears to be a class of men who have life, who act in luck, whose honour is guarded by the clan, but who yet lack something. When the slave-woman sent for the father at the time of her delivery, and he consented to come, in order to receive the child and name it, as did Hoskuld with his son Olaf, then the boy was free, and might, as Olaf did, rise to fame; but he was after all forced to stand aside in the division of inheritance, with nothing but his gift, that which his father had given him out of the whole. And so the laws actually describe the condition of the illegitimate son, both in south and north. The father might, if he chose, set up his son in life, but after his death the bastard had no claim on the property of the family. From the Germanic standpoint, there is apparently something unnatural about this class of kinsmen, who do not inherit, but can yet receive a portion of the inheritance as a gift; who have honour enough to take oath, who take part in the pursuit of a cause, and have a share in fines as well as in the giving in marriage of their kinswomen, but

always at last, by themselves, with a portion inferior to that of the rest; kinsmen who may indeed be entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining the family honour, but only when no better man is left alive. Their position is a compromise against the spirit of the age. We must, however, pause at the fact that such a halfway position was possible in societies based on the ancient culture, and living on the ancient honour as the foundation of all humanity. We can perhaps read the fate of these half-born and the cause of their weakness in the old words used in Norway with reference to an adopted son when he undergoes the full process of adoption: "That man shall be led to the laps of men and women." If the meaning is that he is thereby fully established on the mother's as well as the father's side, then the sentence indicates surely enough the psychological disability which distinguished the unadopted from his brothers. In the legal terms of the Lombards, the legitimate son is distinguished, *asfulborn*, from the illegitimate but recognised son, and since the word plainly dates from a time when the difference was a reality and not a juridical distinction, we cannot get away from the literal meaning: fully born, in contradistinction to incompletely born. The words "led to the laps of men and women" did not, perhaps, carry the meaning that the ceremony included the bodily assistance of the wife, but they imply that the adopters have asked the consent of their brothers-in-law to introduce the new kinsman into the full right that the matrimonial alliance seemed to themselves.

Because birth means an infusion of hamingja there are several degrees of birth or adoption possible. The Scandinavian bairn-fostering was in its innermost essence an act of adoption, though the act was not carried through so far that it severed the link which connected the child with the race of his father and brothers. The fosterson felt frith towards his foster-father, so that he would feel an injury to the latter as an injury to himself, and maintained his right whatever others might think of the character of that right. Vigfus Glumson's piety towards a Hallvard, whose character can at best be described as doubtful, is no exaggerated example of the intensity of this feeling. Hallvard was regarded as a grasping nature, and it was whispered that he had few scruples as to the means he employed; there was much to suggest that half a score of sheep and a fat hog had found their way to his homestead, and it is certain that they never found their way thence again. His end was a wretched one; when the son of the offended owner came to him on an errand of the law, he saw at the first glance that the thief's head was loose on his shoulders, and wisely spared himself the trouble of summoning him. Glum let him lie on the bed he had made, without an honest fine to ease his pillow; but Vigfus, who had been abroad while the matter was decided, could not rest till he had met the slayer of Hallvard, and given his foster-father vengeance in his grave.

Where frith has been drawn in, hugar and mind must surely follow after; the assurance, or rather the experience, of this soul-change is petrified in the proverb: a man takes after his foster-father to a fourth of himself.

Adoption full and complete involves a radical change in the son, so that all his thoughts are given a new direction, and the fate, or aldr, that was implanted in him at his first birth is exchanged for that of his new friends. His former past, even to his ancestors, is wiped out, and a new descent is infused into him through the hamingja which now envelops him. But the weaker forms of

adoption only imply an addition of past and present to the hamingja which has come down to him through normal inheritance. Hakon Æthelstansfostri did not renounce his right to the luck of the Norwegian kings, and probably the adoption of Gensemund into the family of the Amals was more nearly related to the Scandinavian bairn-fostering than to the Swedish setting in the lap or the Norwegian leading into the shoe.

We must without hesitation accept the thought that a human being could be born several times; and the consequence which our thoughts teasingly put forward, that an individual would then have two or even more fathers, we may safely grasp; the words do not burn. The fosterson felt that the man in whose house he had grown up was his father, and he felt that in the home where his brothers were, he had also a father. But he did not regard the relationship in the same way as we; he did not say what we say, because it did not occur to him to take the two together and say: one-two. And if we would know how his thought ran, we have only to listen with understanding when the son calls his father, and the father his son, by the name of *freónd*, kinsman. This name was the fundamental note in all closer family designations, in the same way as we on the other hand now have father, mother, son, brother, according to circumstances, as the fundamental note in the word relative. Kinship consists in having a share of the hamingja, not in having been born, and therefore the fatherhood was overshadowed by frith, and derived its strength from the bond uniting all members of the clan; the begetter did beget in virtue of his kinship, and thus it comes that "kinsman" has a ring of intimacy and is the word best suited to express the feeling of trust and pride in the begetter towards his begotten. An Icelandic or Norwegian father will introduce his warning or encouragement or praise with the intimate "kinsman"; "Thorstein, kinsman, go with your brothers, you were always one to know where gentle ways were best," says Ingimund to his eldest son, when Jokul dashes out of the house with anything but gentle intentions.

In all externals, the life of Hakon Æthelstansfostri is a forcible illustration of the power of form. Harald Fairhair had begotten him with Thora Mostrstong, it is told. When the mother felt that her hour was at hand, she hastened northward by sea from Mostr to Sæheim, where the King then was. The child was to be born in King Harald's house and into his hands. But she did not reach so far, for on the way, when the ship put in, as customary with coasting voyages, to stay the night on shore, she gave birth to her child on a stone by the landing stage. In place of Harald, it was the king's close friend and brother-in-law, Earl Sigurd, who planted the name in the child, and he called him after his own father, the old earl of Halogaland. The child was thus born straight into the mother side of the Harald family, and never, perhaps, became properly related to Thora's kin. Later, Harald undoubtedly recognised the boy as his, and accepted him with full validity as his kinsman, since he let him be brought up at the royal courts with his mother. When Hakon, a youth of fifteen, professing Christianity, came home from the mysterious sojourn with his foster-father Æthelstan to crave his right of inheritance, his first thought was to go straight to Earl Sigurd, and throughout the whole of his troublesome reign the earl of Hladi was everything to him that a kinsman could be. Sigurd's solidarity is unconditional, it is independent of moods, unassailable by anything that could come between, even at the moment when Hakon's new faith stands in sharp opposition to the old mode of thought in

the earl and his circle; the earl's assistance is not limited by any possibility of his adopting a different position, and when he remonstrates with the young king for alienating the proud yeomen of Norway by his excessive zeal for Christ, his words are never edged with any suggestion that he himself might pass over to the king's opponents. When Earl Sigurd's eldest son was born, Hakon baptized him and gave him his own name; and the boy grew up to become that Earl Hakon who for a time succeeded in filling the throne of Harald Fairhair.

## **CHAPTER XII**

# **DEATH AND IMMORTALITY**

In the unity between the individual and his kin, all thoughts of death likewise meet. For the Northman, a name, a reputation was enough to take away the bitterness of death, because fame after death was a real life, a life in the continued luck and honour of kinsmen.

There has entered a touch of something modern into the Northmen's cry for life; we feel a new time through it. The word fame has acquired a spiritual ring in the viking age, and it cannot be denied that fame after death has bought its delicate sheen at the cost of inner, substantial life; it is risen so high as almost to rend the roots which gave it earthly nourishment. And as always happens when a culture begins to purge its values to super-spiritualism, the ideals ended in something overstrained and vacillating; the cry for fame becomes more and more strenuous, as if the crier were trying to outcry himself. In place of the old-time heroes of honour, we have now athletes in the field of honour, who rush about the country seeking renown, and groan in weariness of life when they can find none with whom to measure their strength. The strained tone in the cry for fame during the centuries verging on the Middle Ages suggests that the roving warriors had partly lost touch with the realities of life. And yet they were not so modern as to grasp the idea that the true and only immortality consisted in people's speaking of one after death. The fame and honour that was to console a man in death must have a compelling force, not only to beget songs, but also to beget a successor in whom the honour shone out anew.

Another trait of the viking ages is the budding anxiety for individual re-birth. In the opening of the Vatsdoela saga we are told how the famous family of Ingimund was founded by the welding of a Norwegian clan with the luck of a royal race of Gautland farther east. The union is dated from a fight between the Norwegian youth Thorstein and a scion of the Gautland kings called Jokul; before dying, Jokul requests his slayer to marry his sister and revive the name in the offspring of this alliance, "and I look for blessing to myself from this", he adds. Thus it comes that the name Jokul runs in the Vatsdoela family. The same theme occurs in another saga, the Svarfdoela, where Thorolf, a brave youth from Naumudal, who on his very first viking expedition receives a mortal wound, in his dying moments asks his brother Thorstein to transmit his name to posterity: "My name has lived but a little hour, and thus I should be forgotten as

soon as you are gone, but I see that you will increase the family and become a great man of luck. I wish you would let a son be called Thorolf, and all the lucky qualities (*heillir*) which I have had, those will I give him; then I think my name shall live as long as men dwell in the world." And Thorstein answers: "This I will gladly promise you, for I look that it shall be to our honour, and good luck shall go with your name as long as it is in the clan." He keeps his promise, and the new Thorolf becomes like his kinsman.

These tales are conventional romanticism, and as far as the Vatsdoela is concerned the story is nothing but an afterthought to explain the actual alliance between a Norwegian and a Gautland house. But this romanticism reflects some tendencies of the saga age. There is undoubtedly in Thorolf's and Jokul's longing to have their name and fame restored to the light an egoistic passion, something approaching the anxious hunger for a future and a hope, which we know from other times and places. But their greed of life is satisfied in the assurance that their honour and luck will not be suffered to 'wither away. They are fully content to re-live their life in another man, and the question of their own identity simply cannot penetrate through the mass of the old premises. In Thorolf's words: "To him (his namesake that is to be) I will give all the luck I have had; then I think my name shall live as long as men dwell in the world," we have in a way two different modes of thought laid one above the other; the old ideas of luck and soul form the pattern into which new thoughts about the hero's personal immortality involuntarily fit when they come to demand expression.

Immortality, accordingly, consists in remaining in luck and honour and knowing it safe; let the thought of one's own well-being arise as potently as it will, it cannot take this form: what is to become of *me*? As long as life is inseparably bound up with a whole, so that the individual cannot exist at all as individual, the sting which should set the thought of one's own incarnation in motion is lacking. The dead as well as the living kinsman lives in his kin; he thinks their thoughts and their honour, he wills their will, he feels their feelings, he is their body. He is warmed through by the heart-refreshing honour founded by himself, he is fed with luck, and he acts with them, thinks and counsels. And thus the dilemma: to be or not to be, is disposed of beforehand.

When a man has received the assurance that his luck and honour are in safe keeping, and he closes his eyes, he sets off to the place where his kinsmen dwell, — "sets forth to visit his kinsmen" as Egil says of his son — and arrives there in his whole, full person, with body and soul and entire equipment. Not as a spirit which has laid its case aside and comes with chattering teeth stealing down the road to Hel, but as a human being, with human nature. The whole man simply continues his life, under somewhat different conditions, but always in luck, probably somewhat less than before, perhaps also in certain respects a little stronger. He rides his horse and carries his sword, which he flashes at the armed council where the dead assemble, and for his restless goings about he has need of a solid equipment, a well forged weapon nicely balanced to the hand, such as he is used to. He is a solid person, that one can feel and fight with. We should not, it is true, characterise him altogether from the comically dreadful ghosts which go haunting about in several of the Icelandic sagas, fellows who twist people's necks, or perhaps even run about with their own head in their hands, using it for banging at people's doors. Indirectly, however,

these ghosts do reveal something of the nature of the dead; this Glam, who rides on the roof of a house till all the beams creak, and comes near to breaking Grettir's arms and legs; this Thorolf Boegifot, who runs after the herdsmen and beats them black and blue, have little reality about them, but they have a reality behind them; they are descended from tangible departed ones, who were quite capable of coming to grips with living men, and perhaps would not give in until their backs were broken or their heads cut off.

On a single occasion — in the story of Hermod — we read that the dead tread far more lightly on the bridge of Hel than do the living. When Hermod is despatched to fetch the god Balder from the dead, his firm steps on the bridge leading into the valley of death fill the bridge keeper with wonder. "Yesterday," she says, "four hosts of dead men rode over the bridge, but they made less noise than your single horse's step; nor is your face like a dead man's face." But this observation is probably only relatively valid. Judging from the experiences of the living who have ventured into the underworld, both roads and bridges were fine and solid, evidently built with a view to good sound footsteps, as against the true spirit-worlds, where everything is a-quiver. The poet of the Lay of Eric attains his introductory effect by perfectly legitimate means, when he lets Odin start up from sleep at the resounding steps of Eric Bloody-axe and his men: "What dreams are these? Methought it was in the dawn, when I made room in Valhal for those dead in arms; I woke the einheries, bade them arise, spread straw on the benches and rinse out the ale-mugs; the valkyries should carry wine around, as if it were a king that had come." The dream was not an illusion, this he knows from the way it warmed his heart, and he cries out: "What is this heavy sound, Bragi, as if a host of a thousand or more came moving forward?" "The walls groan from gable to gable," comes the answer, "as if it were Balder returning to the halls of Odin."

In the verses where dead Helgi is visited in his burial mound by Sigrun, the idea of the viking age as to the reality of the dead has found its ideal expression. Sigrun's slave woman went one evening past the barrow, and saw Helgi riding to the mound with a host of men. She told Sigrun what she had seen. Sigrun went into the mound to Helgi: "Lifeless king, a kiss first, ere you cast bloodstained mail. Your hair is thick with rime, Helgi. You are soaked through with the dew of blood. Your hands are clammy and cold. Tell me what I must do." — "Now we will taste the cup, though I be driven from lust and land, and none to sing a plaint, though the wounds gleam red on my breast; now is the woman come — and closed the door behind her — into the burial mound to me who am dead." — "Here I have spread a good couch, Helgi, sorrowless; I will sleep in your arms as gladly as were you alive."

This Helgi and this Sigrun personify, in poetic transfiguration, the thoughts of viking times as to the relation between death and life. Men thought of the dead as like Helgi, and like Sigrun men maintained a practical footing towards them, even though of course it would be only the exceptions who felt any call to go to bed with them. All that these two say to one another is marked throughout by the romantic, anything but Germanic love tenderness which brings them together. It is, one might say, a new feeling which gives colour to the words, but that which gives them life, and which renders the meeting of the pair so natural and straightforward, is the poet's unreflecting ideas of the dead. There is



nothing in these verses to suggest that he is outwardly repeating a literary lesson.

A man remained the man he was in regard to form and shape — somewhat reduced, perhaps, but not changed. And in the same way, of course, he would retain his freshness of soul, as surely as he was an honest dead man; he remained like himself, with the same full honour, the same prejudices, the same family pride and the same family restrictions, as well as the same respect for the realities of life. Here lies the weakness of the comical Icelandic ghosts — they differ from their forefathers in having lost something, and this something is nothing else but humanity; the honour and luck that shut up the activity of the dead in the circle where surviving kinsmen move, and attune the doings of the dead to the aspirations of the living, have faded in them. The author of the *Eyrbyggja* saga is on surer ground. He tells how a body of men that had been drowned out in the fiord, incommoded the living by coming nightly to sit by the fire. At last a wise man hit upon the device of using the force of law against the intruders. The dead men quietly heard out the son of the house while he brought the summons for unrightful entering of the house, but as soon as judgement had been passed upon them one by one they rose from the warm seat by the fire and walked out into the cold. — The dead man retained his loyalty to the home and his interest in all that went about the homestead. Quite naturally then, he would choose himself a good dwelling place with a wide, free outlook over the neighbourhood and his home. Or he might wish to be as near as possible to the house, so as to be able constantly to attend to his customary work. Thorkel Farserk was a very powerful man, both in spirit and in body; he had voyaged with Eric the Red to Greenland, and once, when Eric came to visit him at his house and no seaworthy boat was in at the time, he swam out to an island in the fiord to fetch a sheep for food. No wonder that he went peaceably about his homestead after death, and made himself useful.

A good illustration of the dead man's unity with his past is found in the one-sided but clear light of the humoresque, when we read in *Grettir's* saga of Kar the Old's activity after death: he dwelt in a solid barrow strengthened with baulks of timber, and from here led the little war with the peasants of the district, so that, in company with his living son, Thorfin, he extended the family property from a single homestead until it covered the entire island of Haramarsey, near South Moeri. Naturally, none of the peasants who enjoyed Thorfin's protection suffered any loss. Kar was pursuing an exclusive family policy, only with the higher means now at his disposal.

And that which was the free man's mark of nobility, his "gladness", went with his luck into the higher existence. One might hear the dead man singing from his barrow or his ship about his wealth and his renown, in verses such as that known to have been sung by the barrow-dweller Asmund of Langaholt. This distinguished man had been buried in his ship, and the family had with thoughtful care given him a faithful thrall to share the grave, but this company proving by no means to his taste, he begged to have the grizzler taken out. And then he was heard to sing with the proud boastfulness of life: "Now I alone man the ship; room better suits the battle-wont than crowding of base company. I steer my ship, and this will be long in the minds of men."

"What life really is, we only rightly learn by seeing its dissolution. It is the nature of health to be coldly unapproachable, and it is thus of necessity, and not from inclination, that the psychologist goes to the sick mind in order to learn what is moving in the sound. If we did not know the ideas of different peoples with regard to death, we should in most cases probably be unable to ascertain their views of life. Dissolution shows us, not only what life is worth to them, but also in what this life consists.

We do not find, among our forefathers, any fear of the ending of life. They passed with a laugh of defiance through the inevitable, we are told; or they faced the thought of an earthly ending with a convinced indifference, plainly showing that they did not attach great importance to that event. Life was so strong in its reality that death simply could not count against it, and could not in any way exert the slightest pressure upon its demands. Defiance was part of honour and of what was demanded of a man, and we are thus constrained to seek the roots of this contempt for death deep down in the soul. And the Northern appreciation of life is fully and entirely shown in the picture given by Tacitus of the young men: "If their fatherland grow idle in long peace and inaction, then most of the highborn youths seek their way to such peoples as are at war, because these men are not by nature given to peace and quiet, and because it is easier to win renown where perils play one against another — undoubtedly one of the least romantic of Tacitus' psychological descriptions, and most genuine as to its contents. These "high-born youths" then, would hardly have lived in an environment where death was regarded as an object of dread, a thing that stole up behind men and breathed coldly down their necks.

When a man had received his final wound, and realised that his time was come, he strode with firm steps to the barrow, and settled himself there for the future, well content with the equipment his kinsmen had given him there. But is he not after all become a man of less moment than he was in the flesh? Naturally, he would need to have his luck unimpaired in order to continue his life within the portals of the grave, but this does not imply that he took it all with him. Does he after all become weaker in bodily strength? Will his wisdom, his foresight, sink? Will there be less activity in him? The answers to our questions are perplexingly contradictory. We find indications that death could give a man deeper wisdom and higher insight in the future. Why should Odin go out and question the dead sybil, as he does in the Eddic poem *Vegtamskvida*, if it were not that the dead at times stood at the highest stage of insight? And Odin's voyage to the kingdom of the dead was undoubtedly modelled on real life. Old Kar seems to have increased his vitality after settling in his grave, but at other times it is clear that a strong man shows a rather marked falling off after his decease. Sometimes life in the transit fell to a decidedly lower measure of happiness. When Helgi meets Sigrun in the barrow, he speaks as if this meeting with all its joy were something he stole from life; he will have happiness, even though he be driven from lust and land. But on the other hand, the pictures of Valhal suggest a tendency to reverse life and death, and regard the after-state as an enhancement of the sense of life. On the fields of death there grows an inexhaustible crop of honour; this must be the meaning of the daily battle outside the gates of Valhal, and thus we have the clear and strong expression of the conviction that existence does not lose in quality. In the halls of death the joyful intercourse is continued, life in

honour and frith with gladness; all that we have found that life, in the eminent sense, depended on, the hero takes with him through the doorway of the grave.

Valhal belongs to a particular sphere of culture. The active, boisterous life of the einheries is hardly imaginable without the exalted and over-hasty pace of life in viking days, where such ideals as honour and fame after death were forced up to such a degree that the root could no longer support them, and they flowered to death. But Valhal could not be built up loosely above the earth, it must have its foundation deeply laid in popular feelings. Prior to the poetical consecration of a heaven of battle there must be a direct faith in the future, and this not a faith vaguely in the clouds, but a sure conviction that man finds himself again in the burial mound. From the story in the Eyrbyggja of the end of Thorstein Cod-bite we can form an idea as to how the einherie dogma appeared as a family myth. It is told that the same evening Thorstein was drowned, a shepherd saw Helgafell open: in the interior of the hill burned great fires — as in the hall, of course — and there came a sound of merriment and the rattle of drinking horns; listening carefully, the man could distinguish voices bidding Thorstein and his companions welcome, and inviting him to be seated in the high seat opposite his father. This herdsman brings us a message from an everyday world and an everyday habit of mind, which but for him would have been lost without a trace. He gives us at the same time the means of understanding what it is that makes the einheries such powerful figures, and the stories of their life with Odin myths instead of poetry. But on the other hand, it is easy to see why the belief in Valhal came to be something entirely different from its premises. The confident faith has become conscious of itself. Before the joy of the warriors in fighting and drinking in the hall of death — *mandream* — could become an enhanced enjoyment of life, there had to come a reflection whereby the value of life was loosed from life itself, and regarded independently. The undismayed attitude towards death has undergone the same process as honour and posthumous fame; from being realities, they became ideal values, and ended as qualities of a virtuoso.

And now on the other hand, Helgi's touching lament for what he has lost! The scene belongs rather to Germanic Middle Ages than Nordic antiquity, we may fairly say. The hero's sentiment, his wistful dwelling on his loss and longing is mediæval in its tone. But the wistfulness is nevertheless warranted in the thought of the old régime. The modern element lies in the fact that the contrast between past and present breaks out into a lyrical mood. The contrast does not come in with the Helgi poet, but it takes on a new aspect, because men become conscious of themselves and their feelings. We cannot dispose of the contrast altogether by arranging the stories into historical perspectives. In reality the brighter and the darker view of the state after death are not so wide apart that they can face each other in hostility; they supplement each other, they take it in turns to overlap each other. The difficulty which we feel does not lie in the answers, but in the question. It is natural to us to put the problem generally: is death a boon or a calamity? will death improve the condition of a man or not? and we transfer our problem into the discussion of primitive and ancient peoples and their "view of death". The Teutons had no permanent ever-valid solution, because they had no everlasting problem; death is to them only a variety of life dependent upon the forces which act in the light of the sun. The dead man lives

in his kinsmen, in every sense of the word: his luck is incorporated in those who survive him, and the life he leads in the grave and in the neighbourhood of the grave has now as formerly its source in kinsmen's luck. It means a difference, certainly, if a man loses "land and lust" so to speak without compensation, and merely glides over into the shadow, or on the other hand, fills himself with honour, luck, and life in the very moment of death, falling in a circle of down-stricken enemies, with whose warm blood he has sprinkled himself, and whose honour he has used as food for his own. But when all is said and done, the hero who takes a host of enemies with him into the grave cannot himself determine whether he is to enjoy his wealth. His power of utilising the abundance gained depends on how far the surviving kinsmen can assimilate the surplus and save it from rotting in stagnation.

A man, then, died as his power of life enabled him. The great man of luck slid with a little bump across the reef, and sailed on. Inferiors, poor folk, might find themselves stranded, to sink and disappear. He who had great store of soul could, according to human calculations, live for ever; the poor in soul stood in sore peril of using up his stock in this world.

The faith in the luck running in the clan can lead to a class organisation, as soon as external circumstances direct the human tendency to draw conclusions towards a social system. The proud men of luck find unity in a common feeling of kinship in life, the lower types join, or are thrown together, in a spiritual middle class, and midway between the two there may perhaps arise a buffer estate of intermediate nobility, aiming upward, but moving inevitably downward. And with this class organisation follows a fair distribution of life here and life hereafter for both high and low, in close agreement with the qualifications of birth. Along this road it is possible to arrive at a system firm and clear as that which obtained among certain of the South Sea Islanders, before European democracy stepped in and ruined

it. Among the Tonga Islanders, immortality ceased midway between the first and third orders of rank; that is to say: the first class, the chieftains' families, would be fully entitled to life in the underworld; the second class of life hereafter would depend upon a sort of personal nobility in the case of the male head of a family in actual service at court, with succession vesting in the eldest son after the father's death — almost in the English fashion. Our authority states, it is true, that among the excluded there were some who preferred the uncertainty of trusting in themselves to the safe and ordered exclusion; the old system, then, was not altogether overcome.

The Northmen never attained to a system of immortality arranged on such beautiful lines. We find here and there an incipient class-formation, as for instance when certain laws set a sliding scale of fines for manslaughter, according to the social position of the slain; the chieftains could perhaps be called men of godly descent, but the great would yet hardly anywhere have reached so far as to occupy their position in virtue of belonging to a category. And the process of development had certainly nowhere advanced to the stage of establishing state control and regulation of the life to come, when that development itself abruptly ended. The arrangement current in viking times of kindly halls for men slain under arms, for drowned men, for honest tillers of the

soil, has its roots in the popular belief: it was taken for granted that men in the life hereafter would find one another, drink and pass judgement with one another, and had not lost the need of definite forms and recognised custom which had regulated the gatherings at the law-thing; but the idea of a realm for the dead never went beyond the imagination of poets fired by contact with the Christian eschatology. Each had to arrange for his own future, and would receive hereafter according to his means and power while here. He had still to depend on the luck of the clan. The king lived a kingly life in his barrow; the day-labourer's slender luck would probably but just avail to win him some little span of shadowy existence in the grave. From all we can learn of the thoughts of everyday life in the North, each clan had its own private Hades; and if a clan were not powerful enough to procure a suitable dwelling place for its departed, there were certainly no public halls open to admit homeless souls.

The king sits as a king in his burial mound, and rules in all probability as king from there, just as in life he sat in his hall and by virtue of his kinsmen ruled from there, at the same time letting his clan-luck act upon the neighbours about him. He is king in death by virtue of what he is, not of what he was. And what he is depends entirely on the activity of his kinsmen.

## **CHAPTER XIII**

# **THE NIDING**

Death was not dangerous — for those who had something to live on.

Death held more possibilities than it ever can embrace with us; it opened up prospects of broad well-being as well as every possible degree of bodily and spiritual poverty, it opened the vista of power as of total extinction. In face of so arbitrary a master one might think there would be room for many kinds of feeling, for the boldest confidence as for the most miserable wailing; but all the evidence goes to show that the fluctuations were not great, and we have full authority for speaking of serenity in face of death as a mark of Germanic culture. There is nothing to suggest that the feeling ever sank below the dispassionate taking things as they come. In all the monuments preserved there is, as far as I know, no trace of any dread at the change, still less any shriek of horror. From the equanimity of the Germanic attitude, where life and death weigh so nearly equal that a transposition can hardly bring about any violent concussion of the soul, there is, then, a far cry to dread, or rather illwill towards the great change which stands out so crudely among many other peoples, an unwillingness towards death as something unnatural, a thing only to be explained as arising out of malice on the part of other human or spiritual beings. On closer scrutiny, however, there is after all a nearer relationship between the two modes of regarding death than would appear at the first glance. They can after all be traced back to the same soul stratum. The gladdest of the bold admit to the wretches who run about trembling for their lives, that the actual transition from one state to the other involves a certain risk.

The ancient language has a special word for the man who has the germ of death already in him, one whom death has already touched: he is called "fey" (Anglo-Saxon *fæge*, Icelandic *feigr*). A fey man does not make a good comrade; there is no luck in him. Such an one is known, indeed, by the fact that his counsels turn awry, his wit fails him, he cannot even make use of the wisdom of others. When the enemies of Njal rode up in sight of his house, the old man ordered his sons and his followers indoors. Skarphedin, who did not like being shut up in an inflammable building instead of fighting in the open, shakes his head at his father's demand: "Our father is marked for death now" it seems to him, and he adds resignedly: "still I may well humour my father in this by being indoors with him, for I am not afraid of my death." To this may come even one so wise in counsel, so far-sighted, one whose resourcefulness never failed before; the approaching death so dims his eyes that he cannot foresee the house being fired over his head. In a former chapter it has been told how the proud woman Thurid, the Great Widow, brought about an unlikely revenge on the slayers of a kinsman of her husband's; her deep schemes were hurried on by the colossal blindness of her adversary, Sigurd; he would have his brother Thord marry her in spite of all scruples, and he would visit her in spite of all urgent representations. "You must be fey, to rush on like that," says Thord resignedly. The uncanny character of feydom is also plainly evident in the close relationship it bears to outlawry the two words are often classed together. Thus fey naturally comes to mean unhappy, useless and craven — in fact: luckless.

Death is earnest, this the Northmen give us plainly to understand. And even the merriment at the arvel, or feast of succession, is in itself evidence of danger near. The time of death amounts to a crisis, which may lead to the worst results, unless due precautions be taken. All those who were joined in frith with the departed stand poised on the verge of misfortune. Contempt of death is based solely and entirely upon the fact of having all measures for surety in one's power. The scorner of death is at one with him who fears it in regarding death itself as an irruption into luck, an offence against life, which must be repaired as soon as possible. And when there is none who can be called to account, it may happen that fear takes the form of fury, even to the point of rushing headlong against the invisible. The dirge of Egil contains a soul-stirring confession that terror stands just without the gate and can at any moment make itself felt as the superior.

In normal cases, death means a stranding of life, and if the individual stricken by the change, as well as his kinsmen, shall get afloat again and sail on without harm, there must be reparation of some sort or another, to remove the germs of unluck. If it were a death that called for vengeance, and vengeance were not taken, then the future loomed dark for the departed.

The terrible menace lurking in death is made manifest in the story of Hjarleif, who was murdered by his own thralls shortly after having settled in Iceland. The Norwegian youth who landed in Iceland together with his foster-brother Ingolf, might claim to be reckoned among the great men of luck. He was descended from a family of high standing, and had himself increased his inheritance of honour by yearly expeditions throughout his youth. Immediately after landing in the new home he built himself a house and remained there quietly through the winter; but at the commencement of spring he began to cultivate the land, and

having only one ox, he set his Irish thralls to pull the plough. They wearied of the work, and killed the ox in order to lure their master away in chase of the bear supposed to be prowling about the place. While he was alone in the forest they fell upon him and killed him, and his body was left lying in the open until Ingolf came and made a grave for him in spring. "Wretched fate for a brave man, that slaves should be his bane;" this lament of Ingolf's tells us that a great misfortune has happened, but if the saga writer had left the matter here, our farthest-reaching guess would hardly have reached the full extent of the grief that weighed on Ingolf. The land was desolate when Ingolf found it, the thralls having fled after committing the misdeed, and desolate it remained for a very long time, for Hjorleif became an evil sprite haunting the neighbourhood and making it unsafe — unheore — so that none could dwell there.

It may be, then, that in our asking after death we have not touched the true goal, in using the word death in our own sense, as implying the stillness of the heart. We have only reached the possibility of death, not death itself. To exist in a clan meant to have a share in an individual life, with its sum of enjoyment and activity; and the common possession of life was thus not broken by the conclusion of one's existence in this light, if the dead man left kinsmen behind him to keep up his honour and maintain connection with all his fellows, both those here and those elsewhere. But the fellowship could be sundered. The isolation of the niding was a thing which rent the vital artery in twain and uprooted every hope; and looking now, we can discern enough of the fear of death among our forefathers, enough of that barren terror of death that stifles all there is of nobility in man and leaves only the panic cry of the beast in him, or perhaps brutalises him beyond the beast.

The niding is he who rightly should bear the name of dead, for he is the exact opposite of the living human being. In his life, the human hamingja turns its wrong side out. His weapons have no bite. His ship can never find a wind. The current of power that gave success to the tilling of the soil stops: his fields burn dry, his cattle drop dead.

In the curses upon those who have sinned against life we find the picture of the niding clearly translated. "Let the ship never stride that strides under you, even though the wished-for wind blows from behind. May the horse not run that runs under you, even though you be fleeing leap on leap before your foes. May the sword you draw never bite, save when it swoops down on your own head." Thus Sigrun says to her brother Dag, when he has slain his brother-in-law.

A corresponding dedication to the "life" of a niding is found disguised in the first book of Saxo, where the curse is invoked upon Hading by a woman, after he "with many strokes had slain a beast of unknown sort": "Whether you stride on foot over the land or hoist sail at sea, the hate of the gods shall follow you, and everywhere you shall see the elements oppose your aim. On land your foot shall stumble, at sea you shall be tumbled about; an everlasting storm shall howl about you where you go, and never shall the ice thaw from your sails. No roof shall give you shelter — if you creep under one, it shall fall before the gale. Your herd shall perish of frostbite. All things shall fade and moan that your breath has touched them. You shall be shunned as one stricken with the plague, — no sick man shall be more foul than you."



The story, as it stands here, is not clear to us; possibly the fact was that Hading and the beast, or more probably society and the beast, had mutual obligations; Hading's "unluck" would then consist in his having, willingly or unwillingly, broken in upon something inviolable, upon which life and welfare in that land depended. At all events, the description of the effects of the deed give as good a characterisation of the external curse of villainy as could be given: luck in battle, in industry, luck of the wind, all are gone. All that the man touches falls to pieces, for in place of life, death goes out from him.

The niding's plans are futile. Even though they appear sound and wise enough, and seemingly laid with all cunning, all the tension is gone out of them. It will prove in the event that in despite of all human calculation they, like his weapons, strike back upon his own face instead of forward. This reality of spiritual death bars the point of such a curse as that the old crone calls down upon Grettir in his outlawry: "Here I declare over you that you shall be forsaken of luck, of fortune and blessing and all guardian strength and wit, the more for all your length of life." "When Grettir starts up at the words as if stung by a serpent, it is not so much because he knows that one may expect all sorts of arts from such a witch-wife, but rather because she, with devilish insight, strikes with her mighty words at his vulnerable point, and with one poisonous sting paralyses his resistance against all witchcraft. She begins by summing up quite soberly his present state: "These men (Grettir and his brother) might yet be luckless in their boldness; here good terms are offered them, but they thrust them aside, and nothing leads more surely to evil than being unable to accept good." Roughly translated into modern speech: "You can see what is the matter with him; he is out of his wits, he is branded." Here she hits the outlaw, the man society has declared a niding, and all she needs now to do is to leave the words fixed in the wound and let them act of themselves. When in a young saga we read that a certain outlaw saw everything in advance, but could do nothing for it, this is but a new proof of how instinctively sure an understanding man had in Iceland of what was handed down: the sentence contains the negative to the proud luck of the sons of Ingimund.

To the eyes of the niding, all things are wrapped in a mist. He does not know what will come of his doings. His acts are not charged with the lucky power of will which guides them to their goal. The mark of the niding is that with him, boldness and luck, power and success no longer go together. When a man loses his footing and is on the point of slipping from human life, his moral habitus is aptly expressed in the words: "He was brave enough, but no man of luck."

But the cleft in the niding goes deeper still, it cleaves the soul, so that will and higr cannot reach each other. We read in an Icelandic saga of an outlaw who himself could say: "It goes against my will to share in plunderings and harm with these ill-doers" — and yet he stayed with them. The source of luck is dried up altogether. The niding has no hold on himself. He has no honour, and so all moral judgement is void. He becomes a coward, and he grows malicious. All that an honest man eschews will be habit and custom to a niding; to break oaths and promises, to slay women and the unarmed, to murder in gloom and dark, to betray those who trust him, to violate frith. He has no frith. All are his enemies. His friendship is like that of the wolves, who run in bands together, but

rend one another in time of need. The Anglo-Saxon Gnostic verses describe his state, putting with a peculiar yet natural lack of distinction between outlawed man and outlawed beast, the position thus: "Friendless, unlucky man takes wolves for his fellows, the treacherous beasts, often his comrade rends him asunder. It buries dead men in itself and howls with hunger. It sends up no complaint, no wailing of woe over death, the grey wolf; nay, ever it wishes more." Or, as we find in the Old Icelandic with even more marked emphasis of the lack of frith feeling: "Are we to bear ourselves as wolves, quarrelling one with another, as the dogs of the norms, the gluttons, begotten of the wide waste?"

The niding hacks about him in a blind fury of destruction. Old Swedish records of judgements show him still in all his horror as the etos-forsaken beast he is, when he flings his spittle full in the face of the living God, swears as if he had all the devils at his call, and challenges all without respect of person. There was one such on a time who forced a priest to give him ale, and rode off to the churchyard with the mug, to drink to all the devils he could name, and offer to fight them. It is related of another that when captured, he freely admitted all his mis-deeds, and was only plagued by the thought of all the evil uncommitted which he was now prevented from accomplishing; if he could only have managed to gain his freedom for a single week, to arrange matters so that he had something to die with, he would have been content. Such a madness of evil is the state of the old outlaw; and though its symptoms among the peasantry of Smáland in the 17th—18th centuries may be regulated by somewhat other conditions — Christian if we like to call them so - the, nature of the madness yet remains unchanged.

Compared with the frozen despair of this unheore niding horror, the Icelandic outlaws appear almost to pale. As is but natural, a saga is not written about a specimen of human refuse; no pathos is to be extracted from vileness and bestial cunning; the pathos of life itself is, as the records of judgements distinctly say, too hard for any idealisation to work in it. The Icelandic robber stories originate in feelings of kinship and friendship, depicting, or glorifying, the human element in the outcast, and approaching more and more the modern type of bandit legends, in which the exception claims a certain romance purely and solely by virtue of his exceptional position.

The greater, then, is the effect upon the reader of the discovery that the narrators *cannot* clear their heroes from the brand of Cain! So deeply rooted is the feeling that the transition to the state of outlawry is an alteration of character, that the Icelanders, even in the romantic days of epigon art, cannot hold a character unchanged through its passage beyond the boundary. No healthy Norseman behaves as Gunnar of Hlidarendi when he went about Iceland as an outlaw who had broken his own promises: he accepts Olaf the Peacock's invitation to seek safety at his homestead, and when the time comes, he remains at home, simply because he lacks the will to go; or, expressed in terms of literary history, no story-teller would think of ascribing to a man of luck the instability which was characteristic of the niding. And an admired popular hero like Grettir loses ethically — in the old sense of the word, of course — in the course of his outlawry. In the light of beautifying sympathy, the tragic element only appears more bitter, when a man enters upon base robbery and

villainy with mingled feelings in which the two components: self-scorn and recognition of the futility of resistance, accentuate each other.

Self-assertion is only found where luck is, where there is an honour to fight for, and where the fight leads to an increase of honour. With the niding, who lives but a fiction of human life, battle and defence are but a blind biting and snapping and snarling as of a beast, or rather, as of certain beasts, the niding beasts. The more he toils, the greater dishonour he brings upon himself. Not even the last resource open to any living man, of gaining honour in defiance by his death, is here available; there is not sufficient honour in him to make him worthy of vengeance. To slay him is merely putting him out of mischief.

Without frith and without joy — here we have the end of the niding's saga; these two “withouts” fix the gulf between kinship and nidinghood. Without the life that consists in the feeling of kinship, in the tacit recollection of kin-luck's history in oneself and one's kin, in the family pride's faith in the future, none can have the signs of life: the well-being of converse when stretched on the bench, and the half scornful, half rejoicing boisterous laughter, produced, apparently, by the mere movement, when a man “proud of his strength” breaks out into a run. A man cannot fill his lungs for a burst of laughter when the arteries close their valves. In the niding, the vital artery is sundered, and therefore, all power of joy rapidly ebbs away.

Death, rightly considered, means a state without luck. We must remember that the word is to be taken absolutely, so that there is no room for intermediate states and the thought of a transition form cannot find a way in. The poor men of low degree had but a very slender luck, so slender that seen from above it might perhaps be invisible altogether, but none could be called a man of unluck as long as he owned house and home and kin, and still felt himself as the defender of an honour. *How* poor a man might be without falling out of humanity I do not know; the boundary lay probably now higher, now lower, according to the state of things in society. But even the very poorest must, as surely as they were alive, possess a luck on which they lived, and which they cultivated with religious intensity. Not even thralls can be taken as a sort of transition form, for they are wholly and completely outside all forms of luck. They have no life in themselves, but are inspired by the power of their owner, and remain in equilibrium as long as it is suffered to act through them. There is no other intermediate state but that in which young men found themselves in the time intervening between the slaying of their father and the taking of vengeance; a period when they went about as shadows, in all the ghastriness of a shadow-life, making wide circles to avoid any meeting of men. The transition, which with the sureness and inevitability of time completes itself merely by being left to itself, is the only intermediate state between luck and unluck.

In the modern languages, misfortune has something positive about it. Our civilization has imbued calamity with a sort of nobility, or at least clothed it with a sentimental pathos. But in ancient times, unluck, or lucklessness, as the Icelanders call it, was altogether evil, a denudation, and a negative where all ideality sank through without finding foothold. The fearfulness of death consists in its annihilating humanity and setting something else in its place. The niding is not a mere nothing which one can pass through unscathed, as one cleaves a

spirit. To the Germanic mind he was abhorrent, the most contemptible of all beings, but he was even more feared than abhorred.

Mighty powers are let loose in him. He could not tame them if he would. But he will not. He who is bereft of honour has no will in the human sense; but then there is another sort of will, or rather an impulse, that holds him and rules him. Our forefathers found the opposite of will not in slackness and lack of will-power, but in something which must rather be called witchcraft, the meaningless, mad wickedness which is accompanied by mysterious powers of mischief. We know from the sagas what an atmosphere of dread environed these real wizards and witches; and we know that the devilish element in them lay not in such simple arts as that of acting at a distance, sending their will through the air, changing their shape and travelling through time as well as space. Whether their actions and movements are externally more or less akin to those of human beings is really immaterial, because they invariably take place in other dimensions than the human, and are inspired by other and alien motives. The characteristic feature of the wizard is the evil aimlessness that marks his whole mode of action, in contrast to the man who is conscious of his aim in all he does, whether for good or ill. A man's weapons may indeed have the peculiarity that no wound from them can heal; but it is luck which gives the power, and luck may be gained from the blood of the owner, when he is slain in revenge. A wizard, on the other hand, has poison of the soul both in his hand and in his weapons, and his blood is a pestilence that one should beware of touching with one's hands or one's clothes. This is why his eyes are so evil that a glance from them is enough to scorch away the fertility of a region, and it is this perverse nature of his soul which makes his mere presence give rise to optical delusions in all bystanders. He can be exterminated, but poisonous as he is, his destruction must be prepared and carried out with the greatest care, so that one can go home afterwards with the assurance that none of his venom has been left in one's garments, and that he is altogether effaced from off the earth. Men try to burn him to dust, to pile a mound of stones upon him, transfix him with a stake to the ground, or drown him far out from land — no precautionary measure is too great.

The fear of the wizard, the nature of the hatred, the eagerness to have him exterminated — all these are applicable to the niding. The peasants have still retained their fear of the uncanny vagabonds in the human world, whose mere presence brings misfortune. When a thief, a murderer, a whore, a witch, that is to say, in the old tongue, nidings, look at the naked breast of an infant, the child will fall into a decline; or, still nearer the old mode of thought, if a whore strike a man, he will never after be able to defend himself against an enemy; all that is in him is poisoned by the pest. The curse of Hading lies not only in the fact that wherever he goes he carries with him misfortune that falls upon others by mistake, — he simply exhales pestilence. The infectiousness of the niding is the reality of life behind the law's anathema of the outlaw. None *may* have intercourse with him, sit or sleep in the same house with him, and this prohibition arises out of the deeper fact that people will not allow his company to poison their bread and sleeping place.

The distinguishing mark of the niding is that one never knows what he will do; in him appears the same unreliability that stamps the demoniac character of the

giant. Nothing in him, nothing about him is what it seems, but always something else. Outlaw, or breaker of peace, and unheore are words that suggest one another when people talk. When the Anglo-Saxon poet comes to describe the fate of Ishmael, who was the opponent of his own kin, he calls him unheore and battle-wild. The man of unluck is regarded with the same mixture of hate, contempt and horror as the real giants of Utgard, for no other reason than that he belongs to the host of the monsters. An essential change has taken place in him; the healthy blood has dried up, and dangerous fluids have taken its place; venom instead of blood flows in his veins, as with the giants.

It is related of a strong man called Thorstein Oxfoot, that he had a nasty tussle with a giantess, and after that time he was a little strange, with a touch of something uncanny about him. The narrator leaves it an open question whether his misfortune arose from his having swallowed some of her spittle during the fight, or if it was a sickness dating from his earliest days, when he was carried out to perish as a child. It is of interest to note that the state of a child who has not been regularly born into a clan is placed on a line with the powers that are abroad in the world of the night.

Utgard, then, is not only a power standing without and pressing upon human life; it thrusts itself into house and home if men are not careful. No wonder that the fight against a thing so horrible should be waged with the greatest force. If the evil one be a king, then so much the greater peril for his surroundings that he should lie at the very centre of luck like a venomous worm brooding over the treasure of kings. It is a matter affecting all when his luck is dissolved, and — as we read in Busla's curse over King Hring — "mountains stagger, the world is disturbed, the weather turns ill, and those things happen which should not." To avoid being stifled in the breath that goes out from him, and seeing all possessions withered in frost and rime and barrenness, there is no other way but to efface him from the earth. And he was indeed torn up by the roots.

## CHAPTER XIV

# THE REALM OF THE UNHAPPY DEAD

In the army of the dead then, we find all in whom life is found wanting. There are those who are luckless by nature - cripples, cowards and fools for the first essential of luck was a sound body and sane wits. Even in modern times, the peasants of the north have been inclined to place the deformed in the same ill-omened class as thieves and honourless murderers; and when in olden times care was taken as far as possible to avoid the entry of such wretched beings into existence at all, it was because any lack of the full external human character was regarded as a crime, and not as a misfortune in the modern sense. Others again, were born lucky, and then one fine day before they were aware, came the giant thrusting his head up in the midst of their luck. Death could leap out on a sudden, so that the man without warning felt his soul sundered. A defeat was peril enough. If the strong man met a stronger, who drove him suddenly out from land and luck, then he sank down, surely and

beyond help, into the base estate of a niding, gradually losing both will and power to assert himself. Among the defeated and captured, all nobility was forced out by servile fear and inactivity. There is a force of reality in Fafnir's words when he reminds Sigurd that his father fell unavenged, and that his mother had been taken as a slave: "Had you grown up in the circle of kinsmen, one might see you in mighty strokes; now, you are a thrall and a captive, and men know that one in bonds is ever trembling." — When the Norwegian poet, filled with the Christian conviction of the uncertainty of earthly things, seeks an instance from life showing the falseness of riches, he says: "They did not believe, Unnar and Sævaldi, that luck could fail them, but they became naked and bereft of all;" and the thought of its own speed tears him headlong into the concluding line: "and they ran as wolves to the forest."

We can hardly wonder, then, at the restless eagerness with which Earl Hakon the Younger thrusts aside the thought of lucklessness when Olaf spiritually follows up his victory over him by saying: "It is no lie that you kinsmen are handsome men, but there is an end of your luck (hamingja)." "Nay," answers Hakon, "nay, this is no unluck (unhamingja) that is come upon us, it has long been so, that chieftains have taken victory by turns; I am as yet hardly grown beyond child's years, and we were not prepared to have to stand on the defence; we did not look for strife, and it may yet come about that we prove more fortunate another time." The feverish breathlessness of these words betrays a lurking fear, which the experiences of the past have stamped down into the soul. And on the other hand, if the wreck of life were not so unmistakable a fact, there would have been no room for the paradox that men at times lost their freedom and yet seemed to retain something of their luck. "She was the queen's washing maid — or slave woman — and yet not altogether luckless," says a Norse version referring to Alfhild, Olaf's mistress and mother of Magnus the Good.

Or the fall might come stealthily, as when powers and fortune in some inexplicable fashion withered away, and a man felt his leap and his blow fall ever wide of their mark. In the *Beowulf's* description of King Heremod we feel the growing uneasiness of the body-guard, as they watch the niding grimace day by day showing through the features of the prince: "He did not grow up for the joy of the Scyldings, but for slaughter and bitter death to the Danes. Swollen with ire he caused the undoing of his board-fellows, his shoulder-companions, till he passed, the proud king, lonely from this joyful world. And yet the mighty God had raised him high above all men and strengthened him with power and blissful command, but in his breast grew blood-fierce thoughts. He gave no rings to his Danes, as was due. Joyless he bided the time when he gathered the harvest of his deeds: long-lasting war in the land," — when he, as it is actually stated, "fell among giants", the rabble of Utgard, and ended his life as a niding.

From Iceland, we have, in the *Grettir* saga, the story of a man in whom barrenness grew from early times. He was strong and quick-witted enough to all appearance, fearless and active, but his counsels and his actions always went apart, so that the results recoiled upon himself. It would seem as if his great struggle with the monster Glam formed the commencement of his unluck, and this is also a good old thought, which naturally finds expression in the curse of the dying creature, when he declares that his conqueror's every plan shall from

thenceforward turn to misfortune and dishonour. But even before this fateful event the marks were visible in Grettir. There is a record of the words his uncle spoke before the combat with the monster: "It is truly said that luck is one thing, quickness another," and again: "There are men who see a little way ahead, but cannot guard against what they see." And far earlier even yet, wise men such as Thorarin the Wise had seen enough to beware of the wild fellow with his iron strength; when his foster-son Bardi has engaged Grettir's help for his great expedition of vengeance, Thorarin earnestly protests: "True enough, Grettir is a man far beyond others, and weapons will be slow to bite on him if his luck holds, but I have no faith in that luck; and it were well for you not to have only men of ill luck in your following." And it was settled as Thorarin advised.

As Glam had prophesied, so it came about. When Grettir once, at a critical moment, saved the life and health of his companions by swimming across to the mainland of Norway and bringing back fire to the outlying rocks where they were near to perishing, he brought about, against his will, a misfortune that gained him many bitter enemies in Iceland. When he came rushing into the house, covered with ice, the people thought him a monster, and laid about with sticks and brands from the hearth, so that he barely managed to escape with the glowing embers he had taken, but the sparks had caught the straw on the floor, and in the morning nothing remained of the place but a heap of ashes. And among those burned to death were two sons of Thorir Skeggjason of Adaldal, a powerful Icelandic yeoman. Grettir obtains permission from King Olaf to clear himself of suspicion by the ordeal of fire, but in the carrying out of the test, his "unluck" runs away with him, and he strikes a boy who jeers at him, knocking him down, and this in God's house. Again the melancholy word is spoken of him: "You are a man of sore ill luck, Grettir, and it will not be easy to amend it." And now he drifts irresistibly into endless outlawry, farther and farther into nidinghood, till he ends as the miserable victim of witchcraft.

This showing of the growth of nidinghood in Grettir is one of the greatest and most poignant pieces of evidence as to the power of mortal fear upon men's minds. One might go so far as to admire the freebooter, but one could not wrest the thoughts and words in which admiration must be clothed up out of the deep soil of uncanny gloom in which they were rooted.

Typical too, of northern modes of thought is the disinclination to stop at a certain deed as the starting point of nidinghood; men felt constrained to hark back and find the symptoms in earlier acts. Thus when Sigurd Slembi, the Norwegian pretender of the 12th century, came to claim the crown to which he considered himself sole heir after the killing of his brother, his unlucky deed at once sets folk thinking of his birth: "If you are really a son of Magnus and Thora, then your birth was unlucky, and so also it has fallen out, if you have slain your brother." True enough, the single act, or refraining from action — a murder, cowardly behaviour, breach of oath, unavenged killing, stealing — form an absolute beginning, giving birth to nidinghood in the life of the person concerned; it is the source of his unluck, as men say in Norway. The Northman would thoroughly understand, and heartily agree with, the utterance of the Anglo-Saxon anent those retainers of the king's who by their base flight brought shame upon their race; when he says: "No more shall any of their clan now grasp joyously at the gold", this "now" would strike the Northman's ear with all its fateful weight. But



the "source" sets thoughts on the look-out for earlier symptoms. It was the man's misfortune that he failed to take vengeance, but why was no vengeance taken? Well, there is not time to ask for an answer, for all remember at once something that happened long ago. The niding's whole past is raised up to witness against him, because nidinghood, when all is said and done, is but the outcome of an inner flaw in luck. He would never have committed this first villainy of his, if he had not been inwardly marked by his constitution. What the Northmen mean by source is really this: at this moment the villainy that lay hid in him came to light in this act, and from this act his whole life was infected.

Moreover, death can just as easily strike from behind upon the doer of quite harmless acts. If the clan have not strength to carry through their kinsman's cause by force of arms, or at worst by a fine, and therefore buys peace by sacrificing the culprit, then he becomes a hopeless niding and a wolf-man for such honourable acts of aggression as homicide or open violent attack upon his neighbour's goods. And the peril lies in wait for a man beyond the grave as well as here. A hero who prefers death to a life in shame, and buries himself under his honour and his luck, has not by any means ensured his existence for ever. If he be given up by his kinsmen, or fall as the last of his "people", so that none is left to take up the inheritance, then there is every danger of his turning evil, and haunting men and beasts as a demon the more terrible in proportion to his might in the days of his life. It is not only the thoughts of the living that are bewildered by pain when the clan is obliged to leave one of its members unavenged — when they must let him lie unholy, as the Northmen said, with a word intimating that the unavenged is deprived of his dignity and worth.

The dead man sickens and pines away with the living, and the future before him when life stops is so horrible, that the fear of the family's dying out can throughout many centuries compete with all the terrors of hell and deprive them of their power over men's souls. And the danger will at all times be equally great, however many happy years the dead man may have behind him. There are nidings yonder, out in the world of night, who were once honest dead; they have not found reincarnation, because the clan declined and became extinct; they have not been kept alive by clever and careful kinsmen, and then comes the time when men learn who it was that lived on the place in former days.

There is no terror in the dweller of a barrow when he can be proved to be a kinsman. In the saga, Hervor goes out confidently to her father Angantyr's barrow and greets him as one of her own; and the dead warrior has not forgotten his frith and his honour; he gives friendly warnings and hands out his wonderful sword as a free gift. If, on the other hand, there lay strangers in the barrow, whom none living could reckon as kin, then the place was simply unsafe and unheore. In the dragon stories, we find, under the somewhat foreign dress, homely experiences of the fact that every lonely or forgotten hero takes on habits of ferocity. The cruel dragon that proved the death of Beowulf lay brooding on the remains of an extinct clan. The last man of the tribe hid his treasure in the cave with a lament for the noble heroes whom death in battle had carried off to the last man but one; there he ended his life, and the old enemy, the walker in the twilight, lay down upon the gold guarding the treasure that was no use to himself. We can safely conclude that at first, the hider of the treasure himself, or those nearest to him, once so noble and bold, filled the

place of the monster. The Northmen are quite familiar with the idea of a dead man turning into a troll over his goods, and jealously guarding the gold with his niding's venom.

The simple separation from family and land is enough to imperil life itself; no man could live more than a certain time upon the store of soul in himself. "It is ill to live in unland," said the men of the north, and the word carries with it more than an indication of the character of unease. The ancients had no doubt their homesickness, but such a popular word is not calculated to give any idea as to what it was that rose and fell in the mind of an exile when he sat, like Hengest — in the *Beowulf* — far from his ancestral seat "and thought of home".

The Icelanders said that *landmunr* was at play in the guest, and with this word, the longing for home is at once drawn in upon a definite cultural background; for this *munr* (Anglo-Saxon *myn*) contains in itself not only the meanings of love and will, it denotes a whole which these qualities fit: soul, life. And we are brought still nearer to the reality by the Anglo-Saxon use of *feasceaft* of an exile. The joylessness that lies in this word is not of the gentle melancholy type that inspires poets, it is a sickness of the higr, which makes loneliness a thing simply ugly and nothing else. *Feasceaftis* a word that fits equally well applied to the outlaw, and to the monster Grendel himself, the dweller in Utgard.

Banishment was an amputation, only the worse in that it was not a limb, but the whole man that was amputated; and a man from one of the Germanic tribes taken by force from the circle of his kin and set down in some civilized inland town as the guest of the Roman people — as the Sigambrian chiefs were by Augustus — might well arrive at the point of preferring death. Or did he perhaps take his own life for fear of death, because he saw no other way of slipping back into life again, than by letting his soul return to its proper environment? The southern peoples understood but little of the feelings of a couple of native chiefs, and did not care to understand more; they knew that the barbarians could not endure the state and killed themselves "from disgust of life", as Dio Cassius says. But their sufferings become more acute when we have the sentence translated into the language of those cast out.

Outlawry, then, is a terrible weapon in the hands of society against criminals who will not do right. The weapon hits so hard because it strikes the very nerve of life itself. The outlaw is thrust out, not from society, but from life. But then again, the effect of the sentence depends entirely upon the condemned man's kin, whether they will execute the curse by severing his vital artery. For though the whole known world excommunicate a man and declare him given over to all the evil spirits, it has not the slightest effect upon his spiritual welfare as long as his kinsmen maintain him and suffer him to drink of their source of life — always provided the kinsmen themselves have a luck strong enough to ward off the mighty force of words that pours in upon them.

Among our forefathers we may find lofty examples of submission to the general will, side by side with astounding contempt for law and order. Their social conscience was more active, and therefore more elastic than it can ever be among people who seat a judge upon a codex and place a regular policeman behind the offender, ready to deal with him according to instructions. Nowadays

the ideas of right are more or less uniform throughout the whole of a population; the fear of justice hardly attains to anything that could properly be called veneration, and defiance dwindles for the most part to an uncertain taking advantage of circumstances and searching for loop-holes in legal paragraphs. In the Germanic society, the means of law were legal adaptations of everyday forms and drew their force from the inner experience of the parties at law. Consequently the feelings of men face to face with legal condemnation were of a wider and more plastic character than nowadays. Men could feel themselves enslaved by a word, and they could with sovereign contempt disregard the most solemn anathema; one would be stricken numb by a sentence of outlawry, while his neighbour regards it as a mere insult, possibly even of too slight a character to awaken his interest. If the means of law take root, then they hold with a terrific strength, but where they fail to grasp honour they drift empty away. Obedience to law and defiance of law — words only applicable in the looser sense are alike in power, because they come from the same stratum of the soul; they do not annul each other, but can exist side by side, even in one and the same person, without any sense of schism.

We know that far into modern times, the common people have preserved their old estimate of outlawry. The kings were generally progressive men in league with the ideas of law and royal rights that were propagated by western civilization and the Roman church. The peasants stuck to the old law that lived in the hearts and not in books. No wonder that the king's conviction that right is right and must be right comes fiercely into collision with the peasants' failure to get beyond the fundamental morality that right must be felt to be right, or it does not exist. The slayer sits at home under shelter of old-fashioned kinship, and the king sits in his court in the light of modern culture, ransacking the language for words strong enough to use for these obstinate fellows who let a decree of outlawry pass over their heads without moving from the spot. "It is insufferable that they should prosper in their unrighteousness," says Hakon Magnusson in 1315. And in 1315, the king is right; the peasants are in process of becoming defiers of the law, not because their feeling and sense of right have altered, but because the law has changed; it has at last been liberated from the tutelage of experience, and placed under the mighty protection of logical conclusions. But yet the peasant had no feeling of being wrong, because the experience of the ancestors was still strong within him. A man is no outlaw as long as there is a body of kinsmen willing and able to keep him; not until he has been severed from life does he become a dangerous being, driven out and shunned.

But when the curse has been uttered, and the clan has renounced the condemned man by taking part in the oath whereby the law-thing "swears him out", or the thing-men by clash of arms have assumed obligations among themselves against him, the outlaw is dead. He is flung out from the life of men, and may be hunted "as far as men hunt wolves", because he is a wolf, *vargr*, "void of luck and pleasure". As an outlaw and a niding he bears the "wolf's head", that is to say, originally, he is transformed into a wolf, running wild on the heath and rending carrion. And yet he can, by one step across a threshold, enter into life again, if only he can find a circle willing to receive him into its own life and regenerate him into a brother. The moment he is greeted in a house and offered a seat, the bestial nature falls from him, and he is once more a man.

The words uttered by Gudrun in the Greenland *Atlamál* as to her own and her brothers' achievements in their youth, might indeed be spoken with the literal earnestness of prose: "We freed from the forest him we wished to save, we gave him luck who nothing owned."

If life and death were the two schematic magnitudes they are sometimes reckoned in a practical sense, they would fill out all existence without leaving space for a thought to lie concealed, and they would then be the safest words to translate from and into any speech. As it is, they are not quantities, but qualities, and the task of interpreting them from one language to another may prove the occasion of years of study. We have inherited the word "to die" from our forefathers, and we use it of the same process as they did, but in reality, its meaning has undergone so great a change that linguistic continuity hardly suffices to unite the two ideas into one personality.

In the Old Scandinavian, it is possible to frame such an expression as this anent the underworld: Men die into that world, and without commenting on the genuineness of this form of speech, we may take the word as a useful hint, indicating that death then was a more complex idea than it is now (or seems to be, for our words are complex in their way, and when we say that a thing is simple the words mean nothing but that we ourselves are placed at the focus of the thoughts concerning it). There was always, in a way, the need of a more precise definition of what men died into. The terms of life and death, which now appear so unconditionally opposite, were rather two groups of states and their reverses, linked into each other. Now, the process means cessation of life, whereas in those days, it was a transition from life to life; now, to die means the great cut into existence, but to the ancients the transition from one state to another that left the life of luck untouched, could never rank as a catastrophe. If then we would not relinquish the essential part of our word, its bitterness, its reference to the end and altering of plans, its regard to the thinning of ranks, its absolute "halt!" then no etymology can help us to equivalents in the ancient tongue. We must give up hope of finding an exact counterpart in that culture, but in the transition from luck to unluck we come nearest to the irreparable conversion, which we denote with that stern word.

This death could befall a man in living life, and he could just as well meet it in the kingdom of death, or at the transition between the two. In this possibility, that to expire might mean the passing of the soul, lie the seriousness and the peril which made the change a crisis, not only for the departed, but also for those nearest to him. Those left behind took all precautions, we may imagine, though we do not know very much about the ceremonies attending death. In the Icelandic literature, we do not find any other precautionary measure directly described beyond the *nábjargir*, the saving of the corpse, which appears to have consisted chiefly in pressing the nostrils together, but we may doubtless take it that earlier times had a more comprehensive ritual. There was no doubt something of ill omen about a corpse not yet so treated, not least when the catastrophe had been caused by violence, so as to leave vengeance due. Presumably a kind of inquest was held in order to arrive at the cause of death; when the wounds had been counted, one of the assembled kinsmen would solemnly assume responsibility for setting matters right, and place himself at the

head of the undertaking by carrying out the *nábjargir*. In other cases also, where anything unusual in the manner of death might seem to suggest that an unluck had fallen upon the house, there might be reason for care in dealing with the body of the departed. When Gudmund the Mighty, the chieftain at Modruveffir, froze to death from within on hearing a man relate a strange dream, the mistress of the house forbade any to touch the corpse until his brother Einar had inspected it; the latter's wisdom at once discerned the cause, that it was the power of the dream that had turned his vitals to ice, and thereupon he attended to the body. —People who had been slain by monsters were more than others apt to “walk” in an uncanny sense, and the same took place where a pestilential sickness raged. Balance and security were not restored until the funeral feast had been solemnised with due rites and ceremonies, and the dead man had been “shown” to his place, — “shown to Valhal”, as the phrase runs in later language, by a modernising of an ancient formula. Nevertheless, we must not lay emphasis solely on the uncanny side; for with people who were firmly set in their luck, this interregnum was after all only a brief pause, wherein life was brought to a standstill for a while; there were sure means of re-establishing safety both for the dead and the living. In doubtful cases, on the other hand, where vengeance was uncertain, where luck stood but indifferently on its feet, there was death in the house.

The idea of annihilation has shown itself a hard one to grasp, and thought still fumbles without being able to discover pure nothing or sheer cessation. Our forefathers had practical reasons for trying to effect an absolute death. To live in a district with demon souls was not to be thought of; they were too uncanny and too massive. Somehow or other it was necessary to conjure them over into the wilderness of demons, where they had their kinsfolk and acquaintance. But after all, Utgard lay very near to the world of men, and one never knew when these ill-boding creatures would be at one's doors again; none could be sure but that he might find himself squeezed one evening late. It was better perhaps to bind the spook bodily, by heaping stones on him or driving a stake through him, or moving him over to some outlying reef where the excess of moisture would reduce his mobility. But it happened often enough that all precautions proved vain, however thoroughly they might be carried out. Then destruction was heaped upon destruction, the head, perhaps, first chopped off, then the whole body burned and the ashes strewn in the sea, in the hope of thus reducing the soul to atoms so small as to be practically non-existent. But the cessation of existence itself, as the last and decisive opposite to life, was never reached. Thought and hand thrust their object out to a boundary and dumped it down into a mist, but this mist was after all nothing but forgetting. Renown contains, as we have seen, in a literal sense the highest form of soul and the strongest pressure of life, and thus it is also literally true to the ancient sense that the opposite pole of life is a deep forgetfulness where none knows one's name or one's place.

## CHAPTER XV

# THE STRUCTURE OF THE CLAN

Against this background the old poet-chief of Borg, Egil Skallagrimson, stands out in his true tragical grandeur, when he keens for his drowned son and defies the wench of the sea as he sees her erect on the headland or fiercely rocking the dear corpse in the deep. In a world where all is hamingja, his words find their true violence and their true sadness. Not for nothing does the word titanic rise to *our* lips in regard to his challenge of the heavenly powers; for titanic defiance is our highest expression of human helplessness; a titan, in our world, is he who has renounced the task of moving the world, and purposely crushes himself in order to demonstrate that our heads are only made to be broken against that which is stronger. But the contrast between our world and that in which Egil moves, is brought out sharply when we compare the modern titan who is set outside the world as a unit against the dumb and blind powers of the universe, with an Egil standing as representative of a world in which man is the core and ties nature to himself by strong bonds of soul. It is not titanic obstinacy, not defiance, not megalomania that inspires the old chief, but the simple reality that man's hamingja is large enough to include the sun and the moon and the whole world, and can challenge gods on equal ground without any titanic hint of magnificent absurdity. Perhaps there is a modern touch in his despair; Egil belongs to an age in which contact with western Christianity called forth strange revolutions in the minds of men, but at the very moment when the spiritual community seems to link up between him and us, the character of his melancholy severs all intimacy. He is helpless because the luck and hamingja of his family has failed; he has few behind him, so runs his plaint, and that means that there is a paucity and lack of strength within him. It is not because his foes are gods and he but a man that he despairs, if he were but enough he would stand by his word and take up the combat with the powers who have stolen his son.

It would seem that even if all other ideas that issue from human brains will always bear the restricting stamp of time and place, the sphere of numbers should be a common ground where folk of all races and tongues could meet. And yet even here we do not escape the Babel of culture. To have many kinsmen and many children was a necessity of life under the old regime, a numerous clan was a sign of great luck. This seems easy enough in alien words, but the thing no alien speech can express is the intensity of this need of kin. Tacitus can say of the Germanic type that the more kinsmen he has on his father's and mother's side, the happier an old age he can look forward to. But for the Roman, the many were stronger than the few, whereas the Germanic idea held one of many as stronger in himself than one of few. We add the numbers up one by one to a total, our primitive cousins see the number as something that puts force into any member of the numerous clan.

But after all has been heard, and the question: what is the family? has been answered, we come to the next: where is it? We have described the contents of the soul, but the problem remains: how far does it go, which people belong to it, and which stand without?

Several investigators have wrestled with this problem in one form or another, when they moved in regions where the population marched up against them in tribes and clans and families. And they have perhaps often enough given up the task, contenting themselves with a definition which at best covered the bulk of the facts and left the remainder to find a place for themselves. They have perhaps had to deal with a tribe, a clan or whatever it may properly be called, which was united by the bond of blood and by vengeance to an indissoluble whole in face of all the rest of the world; and the savants have seen with dismay that this indissoluble whole suddenly fell asunder in two parties which bravely enough by internecine strife helped one another to keep manhood and the feeling of blood alive, when peace became too oppressive about them.

Facts will continue to contradict one another, and the problem will remain unaffected by all solutions, as long as we — like the Neo-Europeans we are — start by supposing that a solid whole must be expressible in a definite figure, and take it for granted that the family must be transposable into a reckoning up of generations.

The secret of primitive society is to be sought not in outer forms but in the energy of the clan feeling. The one and unchangeable reality is frith and solidarity, and this reality is so strong that it makes one body and one soul of the kinsmen; but the extent of the soul is determined by the needs of the moment. At one time a body of men will act as a homogeneous clan, next time they will split up into a couple of conflicting groups. The secret of the force contained in the principle of frith is not that it demands a fixed number of men to be effective, but that its power of tension acts unswervingly on the circle so far as the occasion gives it scope to act.

It is, then, not the construction of the soul that makes the difference between them and us. The life of modern man too has many axes and rotates in different circles. One day he is a family man, next day a citizen of his country; one hour he acts as a member of a corporation, another moment as his own very self, as an individual, and his thoughts and feelings vary in force and content according to the task allotted to them. The difference between modern individuals and primitive clansmen lies in the character of the circles and in the intensity of feeling. In our lives, the single self of the isolated individual is the strongest and most vivid of all selves, and all the other modes of life draw their power of thought and their warmth of feeling from the experience of the soul when it is alone and concerned with its own private happiness. The true religious man is he who cares immensely for his own salvation, and thus learns to take an interest in other people's souls. In primitive culture, the current works the opposite way. The circle can never be narrowed down to a single soul, and the most potent motives in the individual arise from the life he has in common with his brothers. Sympathy in us may be strong and comforting, but it is too vague to need definite forms, and it is too inarticulate to be able to create social institutions; in primitive man, sympathy is so overwhelming and so fundamental that it will determine all the forms of society without exceptions, and life within the different circles is so intense that it will realise itself in outward forms and laws.



The problem of primitive society cannot be solved by our hunting for a typical nucleus of society, either family or clan or tribe or horde, and explaining the manifold forms in existence as variations or evolutions of a fundamental system. The question before us assumes this form: how far will the inner force work in an actual culture? How small can the circle be, and what is its extreme possibility? What can the clan include and what is excluded beforehand?

If we watch the recurrence of names throughout the clans we can gather an idea of the possible extent of kinship, because a family could not appropriate a name without the right involved by spiritual alliance. In the customs of name-giving as they shaped themselves in Scandinavia, we find some indications of the plasticity of the soul. The habit of naming after former kinsmen shows that to the soul belonged first and foremost blood-kin in the direct ascending line. Often grandfather and greatgrandfather are resurrected in the infant, when their demise occurred prior to his coming into the world, and with the same frequency grandfather's and father's brothers are called into life once more as soon as they have gone away. Furthermore the luck of the brothers-in-law is eagerly drawn into the clan, the child being named after its mother's father, mother's brother or more distant kin on the distaff side; but the naming is not restricted to direct regeneration through the person of the mother. All the hamingja that belongs to the allied family lies open to the clan. Very often younger brothers and sisters of the bridegroom or the bride will appear as living witnesses to the bridal pact between the two families, their father will freely remember his newly acquired brothers-in-law in children born after the marriage of his son or daughter. And even more prominent is the tendency to name children after people whom we might call secondary relatives-in-law, perhaps even in the third or fourth degree. After the alliance, the clan drew as a whole upon the brothers-in-law as a homogeneous whole.

In several of these respects the Vatsdoela family provides a comprehensive illustration, filled out as it is by family traditions which, whether historical in our narrower sense of the word or not, show what men thought of their own names. The first man of the family standing forth in the full light of history is Thorstein, a Norwegian who according to family tradition won a bride from the kingly house of Gautland. When a son was born to Thorstein he wished to nail the luck of the Gautland nobles to his family at once, and called the boy Ingimund after his wife's father. The fundamental truth of the family-legend is vouched for by this name, which is decidedly not Norwegian but has a Gautland ring. Ingimund continued the two strands in his children. First he remembered his own late father Thorstein, then in his second son he raised Jokul, the brother of his mother, and when a daughter was born to him he called her Thordis after his own mother, the Gautland princess. With his son Thorir he sealed his own relationship with the renowned earls of Moeri in the west of Norway; Ingimund was married to a daughter of Earl Thorir the Silent. And with his other children he reached out far into distant circles of kinship. Through an Icelandic branch of the Moeri family he became related to a prominent chieftain, Thord Illugi, and when an illegitimate son was born to Ingimund he called him Smidr after Thord's son, Eyvind Smidr. Now Thord Illugi belonged directly through his father to the widely spreading family which was proud of tracing its descent back to Bjorn Buna, a petty king in Norway, and when another daughter was born to Ingimund he remembered a Jorun of that ilk. Finally his son Hogni is witness to the fact

that Ingimund felt all the relations of the Bjorn Buna descendants as his kin, for one branch of that house intermarried with the descendants of a famous house of Norwegian kings in Hordaland, rich in legends that find an echo in Half's saga, and in this clan Hogni the White was a prominent figure immediately before the time when Iceland was colonised. Thus the Vatsdoela family gathered up luck and hamingja through a multitude of channels.

But the circle is not completed with mother's and father's side. The step-father's family may contain a fund of luck to which one would gladly have access; such a custom accounts for the fact that Erling Skjalgson, who married a daughter of Astrid and Tryggvi and thus became brother-in-law of King Olaf Tryggvason, names one of his sons after Astrid's subsequent husband, Lodin. Erling's daughter was named Geirhrud, and there is a strong probability that this name, which is unprecedented in Norway, is derived from a queen Geira whom Olaf Tryggvason is said to have married in Vendland during his exile from Norway. So also former marriages may have laid the foundations of an honour which it was desirable to preserve for oneself and one's kin. When the poet Hallfred took unto himself a Swedish wife, he called their son after her former husband, and thus kept up the luck of the deceased Swede. The unruly Icelander Glum had a daughter, Thorlaug, who was married several times; in her last marriage she gave birth to a son, and she renewed in him the curious name of her former husband, who was called Eldjarn.

Name-giving would undoubtedly reveal still further possibilities for the healthy greed of the soul, if our material were more extensive, or at any rate, in several respects allowed us to link up a connection between the dry registers of names and the history of the bearers. We may regard it as certain that both adoption and fostering have left their traces in the family archives, but indisputable instances can hardly be cited.

As far as these possibilities go, so far kinship has weight, and the moment frith is appealed to, men enter into a compact body in which no account is taken of far and near, but all are simply kinsmen to one another. Before a court of law, the individual's oath was valid only in as far as it carried with it the will of a whole family, and had therefore regularly to be supported by a circle of „compurgators“ who confirmed with their conviction the assertion of the one who swore as principal. Here, the law can safely be content with demanding so and so many men of his kin, trusting that life in each individual case has beforehand determined who shall be included under that heading, and that the name of kinsman always covers a man who can take his place in the chain of oath.

The action of these kinsmen inwardly shows very soon that they are not a loosely assembled troop, held together by a vague feeling of opposition to all others. The unity they form has sufficient practical firmness to carry out the functions of a social organism. When it is a question of arranging life for a minor or giving away a kinswoman in marriage, then one of the clan stands forward as bearing the responsibility, viz. the natural guardian, or, if he should fall away, then the nearest of kin — son after father, then brother, and so on to the more distant kin, as the rules may run. But behind the individual we discern for the most part a definite circle of men, and we constantly find, in the indications of

the laws, the kinsmen stepping forth out of the gloom, revealing themselves, not merely as interested parties in all important undertakings, but also claiming respect for their participation. When it is hinted that wards can seek protection among their kin against unwarrantable interference on the part of the guardian, or that the clan can step in where a guardian is found to be plundering instead of guarding, this precautionary right is only a pale survival from a time when the clan exercised the guardianship and the individual, even the father himself, only acted as the representative and executor of the kinsmen. The Anglo-Saxons express the full reality when they bring forward, at the ceremony of betrothal, the kinsmen of bride and bridegroom respectively as negotiating parties promising with one mouth everything that is to be promised, at the same time singling out one person, called the director of the bargain, to act on behalf of his party.

And now, in the matter which most of all moved the soul of the clan, the matter of loss of life and revenge, the whole is moulded into one as far as frith has yet any hold upon men's minds. In the everyday pictures of Icelandic life, the living sense is still effective before our eyes; the individual feels called upon to grasp a favourable moment as it comes, without thought of wasting time in reckoning out degrees of kinship near or far. Here and there we find mention of family councils, where a leader of vengeance is invested with the full combined will of the clan as a proxy to take the responsibility for bringing the matter to a satisfactory conclusion; and whether such custom in early times was general throughout, or merely a form among others, it arises directly out of the clan feeling. On the other hand, under normal conditions the choice always fell upon the one who was nearest by birth to the right and duty in question, he who stood to the slain man in the relation of son to father, father to son, or brother to brother. The responsibility of the kinsmen increases in weight the nearer they stand that centre where the slain man lies. However difficult it may be to combine a common, unconditional obligation with foremost rank in responsibility for a single individual or a small group, when considering the world from the point of individualism or from the circle of communism; for a man who lives his life in a hamingja and under social conditions shaped under its power, the two facts coincide well enough.

In matters of such moment to the clan as marrying or guardianship or revenge, a fixed definition was needed excluding all save those concerned, and this definition is everywhere among the Teutons contained in one single word: kinsmen, nothing more and nothing less. No other words howsoever precisely circumscribed could express more concisely which persons were concerned or which persons felt the responsibility, because the qualification depended on an inner solidarity and not on a reckoning up of degrees. Life itself would in any actual case point out the men who were kinsmen of the deceased or of the orphan.

When we pass on to discuss the structure of the clan in particular we cannot probably do better than take the rules for payment and recaption of the weregild for our guide. In Norway, the fine for homicide consisted chiefly of three „rings“. The first ring was paid by the slayer to the nearest of kin of the slain: son and father; the second was called the brother's ring, and with this the slain man's brother was indemnified; the procuring of it was also a matter for a brother in

the attacking circle; in the third, the two cousin-circles, father's brother's sons, paid each other. The terms still suggest a time when rings were the usual forms of valuables. Lack of representative for one or another group did not affect the fine; the right to receive and the obligation to pay would in such case vest in one of the others, so that, to put an extreme case, the slayer himself paid all three rings, and the heir received the entire fine. Payment of the three rings, however, was not sufficient to acquit the slayer and his nearest of kin from their obligation; before them were still three further classes of kinsmen, each of which demanded a fine for the slain kinsman; from the degrees above cousins and below brothers — uncles and nephews on the male side — they thinned out through mother's brother and sister's sons to distant relatives on both sides. And when all these have taken the greater or smaller fines due to them from the ring men, they have still to reckon with some gifts from the corresponding circles in the clan of the slayer. Not until the whole of this network of fines has been drawn through the clans is frith declared from one side to the other.

In Denmark, the slayer and the slain man's son stand face to face, with their paternal and maternal kinsmen as a compact host on right and left. The fine is divided into three equal parts, and of these, the slayer pays, or his nearest of kin pays for him, one part, the two others pass from and to the two sides of the clan, and at the assembly of kinsmen, the obligations are divided into smaller and smaller claims, according as the kinship ebbs farther and farther out. The two sides answer each for itself; as long as a single man is left on the paternal side the maternal kinsmen have no duty to pay more than their own share of the blood money; but if the branch be altogether withered, then the others must bear the double burden. And if it so happen, says Eric's Law in sure, oldfashioned speech, that no kin are to be found on the mother's side, and he who was begotten of the slain should be slave-born or out of the country so that none knows his kin, and if the father's kin have taken one part, and another thereto, then their kinsman shall not be unpaid if he were a free man, for in full he shall be paid — and the kinsmen on the father's side take all the fines. At the final peace meeting, where the slayer paid down the total amount of the fine in the presence of his kinsmen and of the slain man's family, the head man with twelve of his family promised him full frith and security.

The corresponding system obtaining among the Franks is unfortunately not clearly expressed in the laws. What was done when all went off as it should, this was known well enough, and it was not found worth while to enter such common-places in the law book, but what was to be done in the case of a poor fellow who had not the wherewithal to pay, was a matter that called for writing down, — and this is consequently all we learn. Our position, then, is that of accidental spectators of an action reserved for extreme cases of necessity, forming their own conclusions as to the ordinary course of life by observing what people consider most urgent to do when matters have been brought to a dangerous pass. The paragraph of the law introduces us into the midst of a scene, where the slayer has thrown all he owns into the scale without being able to make up the amount of the fine; he then solemnly, in the presence of his kinsmen, enters his house, takes there a handful of earth, and throws it upon his nearest of kin, thereby casting the responsibility from himself upon one who can bear it, before he himself takes his staff in hand and leaps the fence, that all may see how denuded he is. If his father and brothers have already contributed

all they could and this the law appears to take for granted that they would — then the handful of earth falls upon the nearest of kin outside their circle, and can thus pass down the ranks; three kinsmen on the father's side and three on the mother's, each, of course, representing one branch of the family. If all have been obliged to let it lie, then the slayer shall be brought forward at the law-thing, to the end that any man feeling obligation towards him can step in, and not until he has been three times so received at the law-thing in silence has he forfeited his life as one who failed to produce his fine.

There we are left, wondering. Seeing that the ancient Franks did not play out their parts for our benefit, but were acting for their own poor selves, they have naturally left much in the dark, without so much as a single informative aside to the spectator. Whether the law here presumes that the slayer paid the whole of the fine, or if it be his own ring he could not manage to procure and had to leave to his kin, — as to this, the spectators can, if so inclined, find matter for discussion for the remainder of their lives. But we are told in one passage in plain words that the fine is divided into two equal parts, one going to the son, the other to the kinsmen, further that these kinsmen are represented by three on either side, father's and mother's, and that the three divided their share with decreasing parts according to the nearness of relationship. And a kinsman has no rights save as he has corresponding obligations — or once had such.

Between the Northman sitting with his kinsmen reckoning out sums in fractions of rings and fractions of kinship, and the Frank who makes his last leap over the threshold out of house and home stripped to his shirt, there is more than a difference of circumstance. But the national peculiarities cannot hide profound unity in essentials. And the first thing, perhaps, which strikes the spectator is the common responsibility. The Northmen's geometry in the matter of fines may denote sharp heads, - it certainly does mean also a pronounced need to see and feel family whole against family whole; in every imaginable way the degrees are intercrossed in fine and counterfine, class against class and man against man. The kinsmen are divided into groups, and the obligation falls according to class, but above all division stands the common responsibility. The fine must be procured, and if one side fail, then the others must step in to fill the gap; if one link be lacking in the chain of kinship, then the burden falls upon the next; the entire weight can roll over upon the kinsmen if the culprit himself be unable to pay, and it can fall back from a vacant place among the kinsmen upon the principal himself. And as a single side may often have to make additional sacrifices, so also, as receivers, they take any part unclaimed, for the principal point is that the fallen man shall be fully and duly paid for; "for their kinsman shall not be unpaid for, if he were a free man, in full he shall be paid for", to quote once more the weighty old-world phrase of the Danish law book. A remarkable indication of the honour due to a slain man from the slayer's kin is furnished by the law of Gothland. In this island, men had in Christian times set aside three churches as asylums, and "when it so happens that the devil is at work and a man kills another, the slayer shall flee with father, son and brother and take refuge in the sanctuary, but if they are not living their places must be filled by other kinsmen". All must bear revenge as long as any portion of what is due remains unpaid, this is the fundamental principle among all Teutons, a principle that reveals its strength by forcing kings and prelates to contradict it in decrees and anathemas without end.

Only against the background of this elastic unity can the legal limitations which here and there occur be properly seen. There was often a need, at any rate in later times, for some rule as to where kinship might be held to cease, as also for a limit within which responsible men could always be found. When then three kinsmen on the father's and three on the mother's side were appointed as a permanent staff, or when "third degree" or seventh man were fixed as the extreme limit, the decision was naturally arrived at in the way life set it to be; the point chosen was where kinship generally ebbed out, or where it glided over into a wider personality, only to be felt by heavier pressure from without. An interesting hint is given in a Danish law book: the share of the fine to be paid by each kinsman is continually halved for each degree the payer is removed from the slayer, but the share cannot fall to a lower amount than one ortug (one third of an ounce)

thus the question of the bounds of kinship is solved automatically by an ingenious device. A mere outline of the actual facts, this is all the law can be; and much that in reality left a more than superficial mark upon the life of the community finds but an imperfect utterance in the schematic average of the laws. By chance the Lombard edict includes foster-brothers among those entitled to make oath; probably the solidarity of friendship was brought forward into a prominent place to supplement the clan ties which were loosening among the Lombards; but if the decree is inspired by the anxiety of the lawgivers to uphold the ancient legal system which required compurgators, it will be no less weighty as evidence of the intimate union of sworn brothers with the clan in earlier times. In Iceland, we know that the aid of foster-brothers was invoked in matters of vengeance, and it is thus in accordance with the old spirit that certain Norse systems assign to them a right of receiving fines. In Christian times, when baptism created an intimate relationship between sponsor and godson, the spiritual affinity entered upon the rights and duty of the ancient institution; in England at least, the sponsor was entitled to blood money for his godchild. In reality, the limit was far too individually variable for any legal edict to deal with it without itself suffering dissolution.

But in the midst of the great circle we soon become aware of a smaller group of men who are always found to be more restless than their surroundings; on the one side the slayer and his house, on the other, the heirs. Even though of course the nearest of kin outside must step into the place of the culprit, and "take up his axe" if he himself, his father and his brothers should be lacking, the obligation of the proxy cannot efface the picture of a minor hamingja, which the kinsman first and foremost feels as his soul, in which he ordinarily lives and moves and has his being. In this soul-kernel are included those whom we should call the nearest of kin, but even this inner circle was not always or everywhere the same. On this point, the rules for payment of fine cannot give more than a rough idea, and the only way of using the laws psychologically is to lay chief stress upon the discrepancies. In Denmark, and also, in the southern countries, as far as we can judge from the scanty indications, it is a sort of family group, father, son and brother, which occupies the central position; on Norse ground it seems rather as if the soul extended crosswise through the clan, the strongest light falling upon son, brother and cousins. The lawmen of the Frosta-thing even include father's brother and brother's son together with cousin and cousin's son in the narrowest community, thus reaching out a hand

towards the Anglo-Saxons, who at any rate regarded the father's brother as a mainstay of the family. Or again it may happen that father and son overshadow the brother to a certain degree, while elsewhere, the brother stands out as a particularly near kinsman, responsible for the important second ring.

Within this narrow circle there seems some trace discernible of daily intercourse in the steam from the common fleshpot and the smoke of the common hearth. It would then give a pretty theory if the great family represented the group of houses that stood back to back the better to resist storms and hard weather. But we do not find anywhere in Germanic society a pattern of so broad and simple a design. The partners found one another in the battle and arranged themselves in order of clan and kinship, it is said, and who would not believe it? And that the kinsmen kept more or less together locally, in those restless times as well, when the people rather washed to and fro about the land than stayed firmly seated each group on its own plot, is also more than reasonable; Cæsar indeed, says of the Suevi that they changed their fields from year to year and their headmen portioned out annual holdings to the tribes and clans according to their superior wisdom. No one who can put himself in Cæsar's place as he stood looking at these human hordes, will, however, think of taking the words as sentences based on results he had arrived at by an investigation of family relationship within the separate groups, or venture to conclude from such general statements that the local lines anywhere exactly coincided with the family figures.

Naturally the structure of the soul had its counterpart in the social order. There is no doubt that clan feeling normally presupposed neighbourly sympathy as a corroborating force, and certainly intercourse in the house during adolescence was also one co-operating factor and that a very strong one, but habitual companionship does not suffice to explain the soul unity that existed between kinsmen, nor is the force of frith dependent for its strength on acting in daily communion. When men entered a friendship of absolute solidarity, they might seal their covenant by promising "to act and avenge as were it son or brother". This old and significant formula must be supplemented by another old-fashioned phrase about two friends who have shared all things bitter and sweet together "as if they were born of two brothers"; these words vibrate with an experience that does not necessarily coincide with the feeling of having been brought up together. But the innermost community of life was not restricted to descent from a common father. The rules for paying blood money show abundantly that some of the mother's kinsmen, especially perhaps her brothers but also her father and her brothers' and sisters' sons, formed a ring near the centre of the clan, and any supposition that the maternal kinsmen owed their place to later changes in the family runs counter to the collective evidence of life and laws. Everybody who is fairly well read in the history and literature of the Teutons will know how directly the invocation in case of need went out to the mother's kindred, and how readily her friends came forward to assist their kinsman. The solidarity is confirmed by one legend after another, when for instance the hero is sent to his mother's brother for good counsel, or when his taking vengeance for his mother's father is made the principal task of his life, the deed that shall set him up as a man of honour. It is indicated also in proverbs such as that to the effect that a man takes after his mother's brothers most, and Tacitus himself



understood as much, since he finds himself constrained to interpolate the observation that a particularly warm affection exists between uncles and sister's sons.

The clan is not an amplified family, but on the other hand, any theory that would square the facts by reducing the group of father and sons to insignificance is doomed at the start.

## CHAPTER XVI

# GENEALOGY

The most thoroughgoing attempt to enter the kinsmen into a comprehensive system was made in Norway. In its rules for the payment of wergild, the Gulathing's Law arranges the participants into three groups of men, each of whom has to pay or receive one of the principal rings, but to these "ring men" are added three classes of other kinsmen who are called receivers — *uppnámamenn* — because they can lay claim to certain additional fees. In the first group of receivers are gathered such as father's brother, brother's son, mother's father, daughter's son; the second group is composed of brother's daughter's son, mother's brother, sister's son and cousin through father's sister and mother's brother, and finally in the third group meet mother's sister's son, cousin's son, father's cousin, mother's mother's brother and sister's daughter's son. Apart from these receivers there are some additional parties to the cause called *sakaukar*, additional receivers; among them are counted the son and brother whose mother was slaveborn, and half-brothers having the same mother. But the enumeration is not yet complete. The law still adds a new group consisting of men attached to the clan by marriage; the man who has a man's daughter, he who has his sister, further stepfather and stepson, sworn brother and foster-brother.

These tables are complicated enough to produce something of a roundabout feeling in a modern head, unaccustomed to following family mathematics beyond sums with two or three factors. What a relief, then, to be able to settle down among the Norsemen's less ingenious brothers, with the reflection that artificial systems must have their root in artificial forms. But simplicity — that is to say, something convenient to the pattern *our* brains are built on — is unfortunately after all no infallible criterion of age. Complications also arise when a complex feeling, which in practice always goes surely, has to reckon out all its instinctive movements in figures, and struggles with itself until it stands agape before its own inscrutability.

Before accusing the Norwegian lawyers of modern tendencies or of innovations we must first make sure that their ingenuity has effected a system running counter to ancient clan feeling and affirming a modern family conscience, but the rules for distributing the fines are particularly designed to place all these people in categories running athwart all calculations in lines and degrees. They are herded together — father's brother, brother's son, daughter's son, mother's

father by themselves, mother's brother, brother's daughter's son, sister's son by themselves — in groups that certainly cannot have been invented for the purpose of schematising nearness of kin according to our genealogical principles. And it ought to give us pause that the lawyer in another place, after having struggled to gather the rules of inheritance into a regular system ends with a resigned appeal to individual judgment of actual cases: for the rest each must manage to make it out for himself, "so manifold are the ways of kinship between men that none can make rules for all inheritance, a cause arising must be judged as is deemed best according to its nature". The group arrangement is undoubtedly based on a principle having broad premises in the Teutons' mode of thought.

It is obvious that here is a man who struggles to force refractory ideas into a system that was not made for them. And this is the difficulty more or less of all Teuton laws, that they are put to the attempt of transposing clan feeling into a reckoning of kindred in degrees and generations that was foreign to indigenous ideas. Latin civilization made history grow like branches or twigs on family trees, and in the relations of men one with another it recognized only the formula: father begot son and son begot son's son. The Icelanders learnt the art of making chronological history and genealogical trees, and even rose to be masters of the profession, their wits being considerably sharpened by the revolution in all family matters that was the consequence of their emigrating with kith and kin into a new country and their minds being enlightened by intimate intercourse with people of the western isles. Thus it comes that the family history after the colonisation of Iceland is a system of clear genealogical lines, while all history before that event is conceived in another spirit and expressed in myths, as we call a form with which we are unfamiliar. On the emigrants' island, the simplest peasant knew every detail of his status by descent and by marriage from the first settlement in the country, whereas among the first settlers themselves very few knew more than their grandfather, and all the prominent figures of history are introduced with a father and at most a grandfather.

Even in the royal family itself, Harald Fairhair's father represents the end of history. Harald's contemporary, the powerful earl of Moeri, can hardly be said to have more than a grandfather; the same applies to Earl Hakon of Hladi, while his most dangerous opponent, Earl Atli of Gaular, is registered in history as his father's son. The noblest born of all the original settlers in Iceland, Geirmund, whose forefathers were kings by full right, had to pass down into history as merely the son of Hjor. All that lies behind these two or three prehistoric generations is myth. And while the Icelandic peasants, with their pride of race, made themselves leaders of Europe in scientific accuracy of reckoning, we find in Norway no great change in men's genealogical sense; as late as the eleventh and twelfth centuries, we find prominent families entering into history in a strangely abrupt fashion.

"A man was called Finnvid the Found; he was discovered in an eagle's nest, swathed in silken garments. From him descends the family called the Arnunga race. His son was Thorarin Bulliback, his son Arnvid, who was the father of Earl Arnmod. He is the ancestor of the Arnmodlings." This is the simple genealogy of Norwegian grandees of the 11th century. Generally the pedigrees lead through a couple of links to a barrow, as for instance Bardi, the princeling who was

buried in Bardistad, or Ketil, who lies in Vinreid. Exactly the same peculiarity is met with in the Anglo-Saxon traditions about the ancestors of the kingly races in Great Britain.

New organs did not grow forth suddenly in the brains of Englishmen or Icelanders. They had learned at home to keep faith with the past, and steadfastly to keep it alive; they only re-shaped the old tradition on a new basis. Earlier, too, men had cherished their family history, handing it down from generation to generation, but in a form that fitted with a view of time as a plane, and the soul as a thing ever present.

Luckily we are not left to speculate vaguely how the North-men reckoned their kin before becoming acquainted with the genealogies of the South. Among the literary remains of Scandinavia are found a couple of poems which introduce us to the circle in the hall of the chief, listening when his mighty hamingja is praised and his ancestors enumerated. The Eddic poem of Hyndluljóð is certainly not as it stands a pure family piece; it has been retouched by a poet versed in the poetic fashions of the viking age, and by him embellished with some additions from the mythological stock-in-trade. But the additions only affect the framework of the poem; the core is a Norwegian family pedigree as it used to be cited in the ancestral hall. The centre of the poem is a young atheling called Ottar, evidently belonging to a noble race of Western Norway, and the words, slightly abbreviated, run thus:

“Ottar was born of Innstein, and Innstein of Alf the Old, Alf of Ulf, Ulf of Sæfari, Sæfari of Svan the Red.

Your mother's name was Hiedis; a woman in noble rings and necklaces she was whom your father took for his honoured wife. Her father was Frodi, and her mother Friauf; all that race were reckoned among the great.

Formerly lived Ali richest of men, and earlier still Halfdan highest among Scyldings. All can tell of the great battles that the bold hero held.

He joined with Eymund, high in worth among men, and slew Sigtrygg with cool sword edge; he brought home Almveig, high in worth among women; eighteen sons were born to that pair.

Thence came the Scyldings, thence the Scilfings, thence Audlings and Ynglings; from them proud franklins, from them chieftains — all these are your race.

Hildigunn was her mother, daughter of Svava and Sækonung — all are your kin. Mark well, it means much that you know this; and now hear yet more.

Dag married Thora, mother of heroes, in that race were born champions before all others: Fradmar and Gyrd and the two Freki, Am, Josurmar and Alf the Old. Mark well, it means much that you know this.

Their friend was called Ketil, Klyp's heir; he was mother's father to your mother; there was Frodi and before him Kari and earlier yet was born Alf.

Then Nanna, Nokkvi's daughter — her son was kin by marriage to your father; it is an old kinship; and yet more I can count, both Broddi and Horfi — these are all your kin.

Isolf and Asof, Olmod's sons, with their mother Skurhild, daughter of Skekkil. To many men you may count yourself akin. All are your race, Ottar.

In Bolm in the East were born the sons of Arngrim and Eyfura, the berserks who rushed destroying over land and sea as fire leaps.

I know both Broddi and Horfi; they served among the king's men of Hrolf the Old.

All born from Earmanric, kinsman by marriage to Sigurd who slew the dragon.

This king was descended from Volsung, and Hjordis (Sigurd's mother) was of Hraudung's kin, but Eylimi (her father) was descended from the Audlings — all are your kin.

Gunnar and Hogni, heirs of Gjuki, and Gudrun their sister . . . . . all are your kin.

Harald Hilditonn born of Hroerek, son he was of Aud, Ivar's daughter, but Radbard was Randver's father. These men were consecrated to the gods — strong, holy kings — all are your kin.”

The poet then passes on to the enumeration of the gods of the clan.

The reckoning up of Ottar's ancestors is not based on conceiving and begetting. The poem enumerates a number of hamingjas which belonged to Ottar and his kinsmen. In the middle stand, as the main stem of the clan, Ottar, his father and mother with their nearest of kin, and about them are ranged a multitude of circles overlapping one another, some based on begetting, others on marriage, others again perhaps on fostering. Among these hamingjas are pure Norwegian clans such as that Horda-Kari clan indicated by Klyp and Olmod, a famous race which attained renown in Iceland with the lawgiver Ulfjot, and wrote itself into Norway's history as Erling Skjalgson of Soli. There are families from the East such as that who is introduced by Angantyr of Bolm in Sweden. There are Danish stocks such as the Scyldings; and the connections of Ottar even reach beyond the frontiers of Scandinavia and draw the luck of Volsungs and Burgundians into his soul.

Within these circles there may occur some indications of fathership and sonship placing the men in relation to one another, but parallel to these indications run phrases that merely affirm how this or that hero “was” or “lived” in former times, or state that “this is an old kinship”.

Another poem recording the pride of a Norwegian family is the Ynglingatal. This monumental poem is composed by one of the greatest scalds of the ninth century, Thjodolf, in honour of a petty king called Rognvald Heidumhærri. In this poem, the kinsmen of Rognvald are reckoned up in a direct line to the divine kings of Upsala, and though there are no indications in the verses that one king begot the next, the commentators are perhaps not so very far from the mark when they suppose it to have been Thjodolf's intention to connect the ancestors into a genealogical line. Probably the Ynglingatal is a compromise between the

old system and the more fashionable form of pedigrees that was coming in. This way of translating ancient facts into modern style can be illustrated by the Anglo-Saxon pedigrees in which the groups of ancestors are piled one on another into a ladder; the original arrangement sometimes shows through the fact that a founder of a race or a god is automatically put into the middle of the list and made the son of mortal men. Thus also Thjodolf's Ynglingatal shows traces of the process of adaptation: the old circle system peeps through the lines.

The verses of Thjodolf are compressed and often obscure — to us — because the poet, as already indicated, was not compiling an historical narrative but hinting at facts well known in the hall of his employer. Snorri has added a commentary which is partly drawn out of the verses by an ingenious reader, partly no doubt rests on additional data which he has evidently elicited by interrogating persons acquainted with the family.

After the poet has, in the first verses, proved divine descent from Frey through Sveigdir and Fjolinir, he begins with Vanlandi the series of the earthly kings; and baldly paraphrased the poem runs as follows:

*Vanlandi met his death through witchcraft. The troll-born woman crushed him with her feet, and the king's pyre flamed in the banks of the river Skuta.*

*The commentary adds: Vanlandi was crushed by a night-mare. He had married a Finnish princess and had left his bride never to return; his wife hired a sorceress to draw him to Finland by charms or else to kill him.*

*Visbur was swallowed by the fire, when the sons urged the mischievous destroyer of the forest against their father, so that he bit the great prince to death in the hall.*

*Comm.: Visbur deserted his first queen, and her sons avenged her.*

In former days it came about that sword-men reddened the earth with their own lord's blood, when the Swedes, in hope of good harvest, bore bloody weapons against *Domaldi*, hater of the Jutes.

*Comm.: Starvation reigned in the land, and when all other means to stop the misfortune failed the Swedes sacrificed their king.*

*Domar was placed on the pyre at Fyrir, when deathly illness had bitten that atheling of Fjolinir's race.*

Came the time when Hel should choose a kingly hero, and *Dyggvi*, ruler of the Yngvifolk, fell before her grip.

Thirsting for fame, *Dag* followed the bidding of death, when he set out for Vorvi to avenge his sparrow.

Surely the deed of Skjalf did not please the warrior host when she, the queen, hoisted *Agni*, their rightful king, up in his own necklace and let him ride the cool horse of the gallows.

*Comm.: Agni warred on Finland and led a princess captive; on the bridal night, when the king was in his cups, she tied a rope to his costly necklace and flung it over a bough overhead.*

Alrek fell what time he and *Eric*, the brothers, bore arms one against the other; those two kinsmen of Dag struck each other with bits. Frey's children have never before been known to use horse gear in battle.

*Yngvi* fell; he was left lying when *Alf*, the guardian of the altar, envious reddened his sword; it was *Bera* who made two brothers each the other's bane.

*Comm.: Bera, Alf's queen, preferred his brother Yngvi.*

*Jorund* was reft of his life long ago in the Limfiord; the rope's horse carried high the king who had formerly taken *Gudlaug's* life.

*Comm.: Jorund was killed by the Norwegian king Gylaug in revenge of his lather Gudlaug.*

*Aun* longed for life, till he drank horn for milk as a child; with his sons' lives he bought life for himself.

*Comm.: Aun sacrificed one of his sons every tenth year to prolong his own life.*

*Egil*, Tyr's atheling, great of fame, fled the land, and the end of that atheling of the Scilfings' race was the ox that drove its head-sword into his heart.

*Comm.: Egil, who had several times been driven from his land by a rebel, was at last killed when out hunting, by a savage bull.*

*Ottar* fell beneath the claws of the eagles at Vendil before Frodi's Danes; the Swedes could tell of the island-kingdom's earls, who slew him when he offered battle.

*Comm.: Ottar had dealings with Frodi, the king of Denmark.*

*Adils*, Frey's atheling, fell from his horse, and there died, Ali's foe, when his brains were mingled with the dust at Upsala.

*Adils is known by Snorri as the antagonist of King Ali of Norway and King Hrolf Of Sealand.*

The hall flamed to ruin about *Eystein* at Lofund, men of Jutiand burned him in the house.

The word went out that *Ynguar* had fallen before the folk-host of Esthonia; the Eastern Sea delights the Swedish king with its songs.

*Onund*, enemy of the Ests, fell before the hate of the leman's son; hard stones covered the slayer of *Hogni*.

*The commentary does not know why Onund had killed Hogni, or who was the leman's son who avenged him.*

Fire, the roaring house-thief, trod through *Ingjald* with hot feet at Ræning. His death was famous among the Swedes because the atheling of the gods living kindled his own pyre.

*Comm.: Ingjald had dealings with the kings of Scania, and when he was taken unawares by Ivar the Widegrasping he buried himself and all his warriors under the blazing beams of his own hall.*

The glowing fire loosened the war dress of the Swedish king *Olaf*, this scion of the Lofdung's disappeared from Upsala long ago.

*Halfdan* was sadly missed by the peace makers when he died on Thoten, and Skæreid in Skiringssal droops over the remains of the king.

*Eystein* went to Hel struck by the boom onboard the ship, the Gautland king rests under stones where Vadla's chilly stream meets the sea.

*Halfdan* who had his seat at Holtar, was buried by victorious men at Borro.

*Godrod* who lived long ago, was foully slain by Asa's thrall on the shore of Stiflusund.

Comm.: Godrod had killed Asa's father and married her against her will.

In ancient days *Olaf* ruled over Upsi and Vestmar and the kingdom of Grenland, a godlike prince; stricken by disease the brave leader of hosts lies in his barrow at Geirstad.

The best name of mark borne by king under the blue of heaven is *Rognvald's* who is called *Heidumhærr*.

The centre of the picture is occupied by Rognvald with the proud title of Heidumhærr whose meaning is unfortunately lost to us; he ruled at Geirstad in the south of Norway about 900. His father, Olaf Geirstadaalf, is well known from other fragments of the mythical lore of the clan; no doubt he is an historical king, but his humanity is half merged into divinity, as shown by his surname, Geirstadaalf, which means the god or patron of Geirstad. In other words, Olaf is the hero and father of the house; one line — the direct one upwards — of Rognvald comes to an end with him.

Above him there is a clearly marked circle in the line from Godrod to Olaf and Halfdan. This list of names that may or may not represent a direct succession of fathers and sons forms an important branch of Rognvald's hamingja, namely the branch by which the petty king of Geirstad was connected with the family which conquered Norway, through the person of Harald Fairhair. The unity of this circle is attested by the fact that the names Olaf, Halfdan and Godrod are perpetuated in Harald Fairhair's dynasty. The field of activity of this clan lies in the boundary lands between Norway, Sweden and Denmark, and taken together with the fragments of family legends which the author of the Ynglingasaga has happily unearthed, these verses give a picture of Westfold kings, who fought and befriended small princelings from the south, of Norway but also had dealings with the kings of adjacent East, to wit Gautland, which formed a region of its own in those days, half independent, between Norway and the ancient kingdom of Upsala. This connection is sealed by Ingjald, who by his name and through his queen Gauthild is intimately bound up with Gautland. Ingjald's place in the world is indicated by the tradition that he succumbs before Ivar the Widegrasping (Vidfadmi), a conqueror king of Scania in the south of modern Sweden.



Above this fundamental stock we can discern various groups, though it is not always possible to point out the exact spot where they join. Through Adils and his father Ottar we are introduced to a world viewed from another angle in the Beowulf. According to Snorri and the Northern sources which are dependent mainly on the family legends of Norwegian princes, Adils fought with Hrolf Kraki of Sealand without gaining much honour, and won glory by defeating Ali from the Uplands or, in other versions, from Norway. In the Anglo-Saxon poem — descended from another family legend — a vista is opened into a little world where four princely clans meet in battle and carouse. Foremost in fame are the Scyldings or Spear-Danes of Leire in Sealand, Heorogar and Hrothgar, and in the younger generation Hrothulf, and rivalling these mighty — spear-men the Heathobards come into prominence: Froda and his son Ingeld, who was unhappily married to a Scylding princess, the daughter of Hrothgar. On one side stand the Geats or Gautland-men — Hygelac foremost — and on the other side the “Swedes”, Ohthere and Eadgils and their kinsman Onela (Ali) who usurps the kingdom and is slain by his nephew Eadgils. It is a story of feuds and friendships between district kings in South Scandinavia before the time when the North had crystallised into three ethnographical and political groups, Sweden, Norway and Denmark. To the same circle as Adils belongs undoubtedly Aun the Old; though perhaps not identical with the Eanmund known to the Beowulf as Eadgils' brother, he bears witness in his name to kinship with the Swedes, for the family mark Ead is contained in Aun, though obscured by phonetical changes.

An entirely different circle is represented by Yngvar and Onund; they turn their faces to the East, to the Swedish viking lands of Esthonia, where Yngvar fell before the folk of the continent, and Onund, the foe of the Ests, avenged him.

Within the upper portion of the family register we can discern — at least two clan circles.

One has for its centre the unlucky brothers Eric and Alrek, who slew each other while out hunting, and the sons Alf and Yngvi who quarrelled over a woman. They are connected by a family fate, and their history is foreshadowed in Vanlandi, Visbur and Agni; this family is marked by all its men being vanquished by woman's counsel. We have here a race of kings whose aldr or hamingja had a peculiar taint, giving them into the hands of their women. Now these kings belong to another part of the world, as is proved by the fact that their expeditions are confined to Finland — there they harried, there they procured their wives, thence came the troll-born nightmare who trampled Vanlandi to death. In these men we are confronted with the renowned family of Ynglings whose seat was at Upsala.

Finally, in this group is interpolated another series: Domaldi, Domar, Dyggvi, Dag. Where they belong it is hard to say; Domar is called an Yngling, and is burned at Fyrir in Uppland; Dyggvi is also referred to the Yngvi clan, whereas Domaldi is hinted at as the enemy of the Jutes. But this much is certain, that with Dag we are suddenly back in Norway once more, or at least in regions comparatively near, for not only does he recur again and again in the family registers of the Norwegian kings, but his name crops up among the children of Harald Fairhair. Without doubt he is the mythical ancestor of a chiefly clan, the

Daglings, in the southern parts of Norway or Sweden, and it is possibly through this family that Rognvald is connected with the Ynglings. There are also some hints in other pedigrees that Dyggvi and his mother Drot were recognised by the descendants of Harald Fairhair as belonging to their ancestors, and in their genealogical tables they are brought in as descending from Dag. This does not at all prove that Dyggvi is really descended from Dag, but merely that the Daglings possessed the hamingja of Dyggvi and transmitted it through some alliance to the kingly race of Norway.

In the Ynglingatal we catch a glimpse of a family tradition working on the same lines with the Hyndluljóð. All this shows abundantly that to understand the clan feeling and clan system of ancient times we must revise our ideas of kinship altogether, and replace our genealogical tree by other images. Kinship was viewed from the standpoint of an individual family, the centre of a number of non-concentric rings, and thus the reckoning of relationship in one clan did not hold good for other families as to persons who were common kinsmen to both. The circles were foreshortened in different ways, as we may express the fact in our mathematical language. We cannot get history in our sense by comparing related genealogies and synchronising their data into our chronological system. Rognvald Heidumhæri and Harald Fairhair had a paternal grandfather in common, and would according to our reckoning be actual cousins, but the Ynglingatal was not Harald's pedigree, neither could it be made to tally with his clan feeling, as we very well know through the genealogical lists of the royal family. Harald shares Godrod and Halfdan with his cousin Rognvald, but these ancestors do not in Harald's case lead up to the Ynglings, but to Norwegian origin; he touches the hamingja of his cousin through Dag and through Ingjaid and Frodi, all of whom reappear in the ancestry of the king, but these kinships do not extend eastward and connect him with the Swedes. To be sure, when Harald in his past has the sequence: Eric, Alrek, we are fully justified in recognising something of the fateful family will that rings so loudly through the Ynglingatal; this hamingja entered into the luck of Harald, but it was far less extensive. And at all other points the two families run each its own course, and that course is determined by a different tendency in the family luck. The Harald family shows its ambition by incorporating in its hamingja the luck of the Danish viking chieftains and conquerors, as is proved by the presence of Ivar the Widegrasping and the Ragnar athelings in its registers. And through these rising clans of the unruly times in the dawn of Northern history this Norwegian family reaches farther outward to the Scyldings and the Volsungs of the Franks. Among Harald's ancestors were Sigurd the dragon slayer and the Niblungs famous in Northern song. Consequently, in Harald's family the divine places are not occupied by Frey and Yngvi, but by Odin and Scyld, the hero-ancestor of the Scyldings.

It is always necessary to keep firm hold of the end personage in the list, the man from whom the race is viewed; if he be lost, and the table thus lose its family mark, we can never reconstruct its value, and where links drop out they can never be set right again by comparison with another pedigree, not even by that of a cousin by blood.

The circles drawn into community of life, either by marriage or in any other way, are not washed out of their former connections before entering the pale of

friendship and kinship. Each family carried along with it the honour and luck and fate that constituted its soul, and by becoming kin by marriage Ottar or Rognvald acquired the ancestors of his new brothers-in-law.

To modern readers there is a difference not of degree but of quality between such matter-of-fact persons as Klyp or Olmod and a dragon slayer like Sigurd Fafnirbane, who belongs to poetry as we would say. But the difficulty is all on our side; in ancient times, Sigurd was a kinsman just as real as any historical person. A good many Norwegian and Icelandic families felt affinity with the famous slayer of the dragon and his Burgundian brothers-in-law.

All these clans had lawfully and rightfully acquired the Frankish and Burgundian hamingja by marrying or otherwise concluding vital alliance with circles possessing the deeds of the southern heroes. We are still able to point out the links which connected the families of the north with the mighty clans on the Rhine. How Herald Fairhair acquired the right to enter Burgundian, Frankish and Goth kings among his ancestors is clearly shown through his pedigree. His family is connected with Danish kings who claimed kinship with the Ragnar house, and these kings had ancestors who were allied to princes in Russia or on the southern shores of the Baltic. Some Icelandic families evidently concluded the alliance that brought Sigurd into their hamingja during their expeditions to the western Isles, where they settled temporarily and were brought into contact with descendants of Danish viking clans, first and foremost that of the Sons of Ragnar Lodbrok.

In the case of Ottar, we are not without some hints as to how he came into possession of such a far-off hamingja as that working in Sigurd and the Burgundian kings who ruled in Worms. It has already been pointed out that some persons in the Hyndluljóð indicate a relationship between the hero of the poem and the family whose most powerful member was Erling Skjalgson, the "king" of the Rugians. Erling married Astrid Tryggvi's daughter, a great-grandchild of Harald Fair-hair, and thus became brother-in-law of the Norwegian king Olaf Trygvason. It is not unlikely that Erling and the Hyndluljóð are nearly contemporary, and in Erling's marriage we have possibly an explanation as to how Danish and southern hamingja had filtered into leading families of western Norway.

These facts suggest another view of ancient poetry and saga than the purely literary theory current now, which rests on the rather naïve acceptance of modern literary conditions as applying to all times and cultures. Poems and novels are to us substantial wares brought to market by poets and handed in books over the counter to customers tendering a fixed price. But the sagas and poems of ancient times were property belonging to individual persons, the self-revelations of particular clans. The sagas do not rest on an author, but on an owner, one who acknowledges the past as it is here set forth, maintains it as his own, is proud of it and depends on it. The true saga, that which in its inmost essence is inspired by repetition by word of mouth, has in reality never worked its way loose from the personal mandate. Even the Icelandic sagas, which in artistic form are strongly influenced by European literature, still bear the birthmark of being told from the point of view of a clan, and expressing the clan's private past. The Volsungasaga is the prelude to Ragnar Lodbrok's, and it ends with Hofdithord, the chieftain of Skagafjord, according to the reckoning of

the Landnáma, fifth man from the famous viking chief. The Hervor's saga — the saga of the sword Tyrting — bears its stamp of proprietorship in the genealogies at the end, referring to a Norwegian and Icelandic family — the Angantyr clan — which prided itself on its connections with the kingly house of Sweden. The Beowulf has become regular literature in the hand of the late poet, but on a closer scrutiny of the West-Saxon pedigrees with their Beow and Scyld we may get an inkling of the circle in which the interest for the legends was fostered.

In accordance with our notions of the ways of poets who borrow their themes from neighbouring literatures and imitate their predecessors in the craft, we talk of the ancient legends as wandering from land to land, and we build up ingenious speculations as to how the Sigurd saga passed from the Franks on the Rhine to the scalds of the North. But in reality the songs or legends were not handed about loosely, they lived their way through the world from one circle of people to another. These are indeed not legends at all, not poetical treasures, but experiences which are kept living and creative in human souls. They have been passed on from place to place by tinging soul, in the sense that mind was drawn into mind and made to participate in the honour it held. They went with the maiden when, rich in noble ornaments, she entered into her husband's home and brought with her an honour strong in mind and compelling to action; they spread when a man mingled himself with his foster-brother and became a part of him, received his forefathers, received his deeds, received his thoughts, was bound by his hamingja. The predominance of the Volsung deeds and fate in Scandinavian poetry testifies to the fact that the honour of the Volsungs was a treasured heirloom in some of the leading, most influential families of the viking period.

Going back to the Hyndluljóð as the truest picture of an ancient clan, we see now that the circles enumerated belong to Ottar and his kinsmen as wholes. All that the allied families had and were flowed into the man's luck. And this spiritual amalgamation is of greater depth than we at first imagine, because Ottar's kindred were not principally a number of persons, but a mass of deeds — luck, honour and "fate". The names of the pedigree are clothed with epithets and short descriptive phrases indicating the life that had throbbled in the old heroes and pulsed from them into their descendants, the happenings and achievements in which their honour had manifested itself. We cannot understand the poem as it was understood by the old-world listeners, because to them every epithet and every line called up a host of memories. Our compositions tell a story to an audience wishing to know how it all happened, how it began and how it ended; the ancient poems were only reminders or hints by which deeds that lived in men's minds were called forth and made vivid before their eyes.

The family is primarily a hamingja, and as a soul it is incorporated into new kinsmen. The persons are only representatives of the hamingja, and their power consists in their having been able to regenerate the life rich in distinctive features that flowed through their ancestors. The hamingja is always something present, and the past is only real insofar as its fate has been renewed again and again in a sequence of transient generations. These old heroes have never been outside reality. A Sigurd, a Hrolf, a Ragnar have come to life again and

again, have been born forward from clan to clan, they have been ancestors whose deeds were revived in fresh human lives.

The hamingja is a present thing, and it is a living whole, not a complex being split up into a number of persons. We see from the example of a Harald or from that of an Ottar how a world met within the individual human being. In the king of Norway they crowd together: Norwegian village kings and chieftains who fought, married and added to their hamingja, Danish throne kings with a mass of deeds welling forth from the nothingness of earliest time, together with heroic clans who lived and battled on the Rhine or in the plains of Russia. It is a whole world, not only countries wide but centuries deep, all differences of time perish in the living renewal that is contained in a couple of generations.

The ancestors, then, are not figures seated in state on a lofty pile of years reached by laborious climbing through degrees and generations. The modern and the ancient ideas as to the founder of a race are far apart. When we lack the number of rings required to make a decent ladder we must hide our heads among the ephemeral crowd of those who may indeed confess to being, but cannot pretend to have been. The old progenitor simply resided within his children if he existed at all, and his heir grasped him directly by thrusting a hand into his own breast. Thus the brother-in-law or the friend immediately draws the old hero into his hamingja by touching his kinsmen, and after having mingled blood and mind with his new brothers he feels the ancestor's power in his own limbs.

This suggests a history of another structure than ours, not a chronological series of occurrences hanging on the pegs of dates, but living events coming to light again and again — in slightly different shapes, perhaps, but substantially the same — throughout subsequent generations. History to us is something past and done with, a crystallisation of completed incidents which can neither be obliterated nor in the least affected by later developments. Primitive history, on the other hand, is living and changing; not only do later phases rearrange the events into new patterns, but if history does not propagate itself it disappears, and the events sink into the same nothingness that covers events which never came to be. Primitive history lacks certain time proportions which to us are the foundation of all historical truth, and consequently it cannot wield the blocks of the centuries and build them up to towering pyramids. But primitive and ancient historians can do one thing which we cannot or have not yet been able to do, they can give the past as a whole explaining the present, whereas our history can be nothing but a row of torsos.

The secret of the incompatibility of the two systems lies in the fact that whereas our history forms a general self-existing organism outside the experience of all individual men, primitive and ancient history is the belongings of clans and peoples. The latter form is incomprehensible to modern men whose lives are arranged in years, and moreover, never merge into one another, but run on each in its own particular groove, and in consequence ancient traditions are naïvely set down by us as caprice or fanciful legend-mongering. In fact, the chasm is so great between the systems, historical though they be both of them, that facts cannot by any key be translated from one mode into the other. It is labour lost to analyse "myths" in legendary and historical elements in order to elicit a "kernel of truth".

Thus the problem of the structure of the Teutonic clan solves itself. It is waste of labour to seek a rigid system behind the laws, and it is still more useless to search for a universal Germanic system of which the later schemata are variations. The problem is primarily psychological rather than social, the form of the clan depends more on an inner structure than on an outer organisation. All who had the same thoughts and traditions, the same past and the same ambitions possessed one soul and were of one clan. This inner structure must necessarily develop itself into a strong external organism, but the force worked in living bodies of men which were eminently amenable to the plastic touch of circumstances and might take different patterns among different peoples. There is no earthly reason to suppose that the Norwegians and the Danes, the Lombards and the Anglo-Saxons ever had exactly the same social and legal customs.

The clan was a living whole, now wider, now narrower, varying in accordance with the strength of the hamingja, and adapting itself to the moment. It had as its core a body of friends which could never split up into fragments. This nucleus was never identical with the family or the father's house; not only did it comprise the brothers-in-law, but it extended literally in the breadth as is indicated by the juxtaposition of sons and brothers' sons in the same category. Under the stress of the moment, and under actual political conditions, it might swell out into the dimensions of a tribe or even a people. Normally the state was not a hamingja; the clans were held together by allegiance to a chief, and by membership in a legal order centred in the law-thing or moot place where people met several times in the year. This legal community did not prevent the clans from asserting their rights severally and from carrying on feuds among themselves, the law-thing meant only that differences among the members could be brought before the community and settled either by sentence or mediation according to compelling forms. But when the people acted unanimously - in war, in expeditions, in any common enterprise whatever - all the individual hamingjas melted into one, and one frith reigned supreme with one honour through the entire corporation. At such times killing was murder and villainy.

There is no make-believe in primitive and ancient society; the comrades are really one hamingja, and consequently one body, and when the fellowship loosened and everyday forms regained their sway the hamingja of the whole slept or was temporarily suspended as we would say, but it did not cease to exist.

Among the Teutons this larger hamingja was generally - though not necessarily — that of the king or chieftain. In war times his luck absorbed the lucks of his followers, and thus his gods and ancestors became the gods and ancestors of the whole people. In history it is not possible to distinguish between the king's clan and the people he led, simply because the two were identical in their relations with foreign bodies.

Without re-birth no eternity — to gauge the fulness of this sentence is a necessary condition for understanding what it means to have life and to die so that none knows one's name.

# **THE CULTURE OF THE TEUTONS**

**Volume II**

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**To the Memory of  
Vilhelm Thomsen**



## 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 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 *fridu-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 – *gift* – 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 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 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 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 Refr did not fail to mention the fact that King Gautrek gave rings for whetstones. Whereafter, a 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 chaffers, 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, 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* 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 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 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: "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 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 gifts 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 *gornidingr*) 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 *vargrand 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 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 Asbjarnames 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, 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 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 Svafhlami, and when they met in battle, Svarflami wielded his famous word Tyrfinn. 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 Tyrfin 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 Tyrfing, 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 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 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 keens 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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.

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 *heilir*, 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 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 newcomer 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, 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 Hygelae, and which the latter wore on the battlefield in that unlucky fight when the Franks took its life and his treasures. And what gold was among the chieftains, 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."

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 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 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-bookss 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.

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 ease 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. 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 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 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 *fridu-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 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 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 Scandinavian 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 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 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 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 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 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 whether 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 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, 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 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 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 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 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 ecstasy, 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.

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 byrnies 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 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.

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 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 Morsemen 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 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 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 crystallised 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, 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 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 or 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.

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.”

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 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 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 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 chance 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 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 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 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 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 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 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; 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.

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, Gunnthram 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."

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 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 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 *lidkøb* – 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 *frjálsgjæft* – 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 confirmation, 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.

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:

"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 Tyrfing 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.

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 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 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 Kyrrí'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 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.

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 hospitality; 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 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 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 doctrinarism 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 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 hugar 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 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 *mannhelig*, 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 *mannhelig* ---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 *mannhelig* 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 be 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

Thorhadd'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 valuing 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 unflinching sense of things to come, which is born of the welling up of luck itself from 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 staunched. 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 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 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 Naharvales 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 history. Paulus Diaconus relates that the Frankish prince Charles 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 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.

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.

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 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 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 land — 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*; Loft 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 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 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 contend 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 Nerthus 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, 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 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 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 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 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 homestead 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 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 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 *Laxdocla*, 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 assemblies, and the building at Hjardarholt 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 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 Hegranes, 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 (*gríð*) 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.

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 *mungátstíðir*, 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 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 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. 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 vessels. Elsewhere, the Johannestrunk 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 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.

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 Kyrrí'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; 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 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 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 taken 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 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 too 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 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 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 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 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 *tvimennig*, 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 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 Kyrrí, 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, 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 Geirroð, 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 Geirroð 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 Geirroð 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 Agði, 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 Agði with a fellow-feeling that excuses much, but also 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 forever excluded from the more informal fashion of drinking; they were never allowed to drink in pairs (*tvimennig*). 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 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; 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 words of the giant when he orders the hammer to be brought in: bring in the hammer to consecrate the bride, place Mjølfnir 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 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..." 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 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 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 whether the god and his strength go. 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 formæli, 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 Östgötalag 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 have the old, strong prayer, and as a prayer it might also be regarded after 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 face 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 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.

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* 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 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 unflinchingly; 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 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 Tubbemåla; 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 Smáland: 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 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; 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 Drontheim 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 latters’ 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 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 *fortomtebolycka*, 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 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 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 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 Icelander, 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 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 clear ring 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 crate 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, 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 ease 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 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 Ingolf 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 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 loth 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 with words and ale, a mannjafnd where the strokes are driven with a hornful. Across the floor two flyting 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 mannjafnd, 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 thought 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 mannjafnd 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 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 Sinfjoti, 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 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 *erfdrápa*, 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 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 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 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 Mostrarskegg, 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 - 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 Hyndlyljod 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 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.

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. Hrafnkel, 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 Hrafnkel 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, 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 blotted 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.

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 blot 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 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 chieftain'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 (godri), 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 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 *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 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 fair 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 holy drink had been drained off and the last remains perhaps disposed of on the fire of the blotstead, 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 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 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 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 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 Darradsljód:

"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. 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 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 formæii 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.

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 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 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 acceptation 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 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 inadversion 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 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, 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 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 Geirrodd, 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 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.

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 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 Hrungrnir, "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 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 wergild 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 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.

To understand what ancient eyes saw we must replace our geographically and spatially 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 líto 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 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 *aurris* 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 Middlegarth; the sun shone from the south on the flags of the hall, then the ground 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 here, 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.

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 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 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 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; 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 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 impersonate 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, 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.

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 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 naufr, 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 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 hugar 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 Hæring of the Hrafnista 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 truth, or what is the same thing, that he was Truth 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 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 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 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 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 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 downfall, 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 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.

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 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 presupposes 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 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, impersonated 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 the dimension of holiness. The predominant motif of the drama among Aryan

racis 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 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 appearance 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 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 mythology 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 narratory 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 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 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 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 paraphrased 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 Grinnismál (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 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 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 Geirroð.

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 Geirroð 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 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. 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, *vólr*; 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 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: Eilif's 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 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 fullness 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 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 *σπλῆγcna pḘsanto* – 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 *fjörsegi*, 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.

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 Geirrodd 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 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 *Thridi*, 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 formlæ; they are called *segjandi*, speakers – *segja* 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 wergild, 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 Thiazi had been slain, we are told, his daughter made her appearance in full panoply to ask for wergild; 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 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 Hrungrnir (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 Hrungrnir, 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 Hrungrnir 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.

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 dises 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 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 seq., 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 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 werewolf of the dwarfs on mighty wings from Surt's gloomy vales in the nether world, *ór Surt's 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.

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 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 Hrungrir 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 mythology 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 rivers; 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 statue 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 safely 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 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 Middle-garth, 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 exposition. 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 sacrificial 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 in plain words: "The gods went to their seats of council and gave names to night and moonless 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 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).

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 *isaurr* — “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. *suprap*. 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.

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, *heidvanr*; 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 heid*;

*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 distinguishable 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 stall 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 *auðr* and joy is the quintessence of human misery, the existence of the niding and the wolf (Helg. Hund. II 33). This *auðr* is personified and entered into the cosmic genealogy, as a near relative of earth and day and night, in recognition of the fact that *auðr* 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: *vafrlögi* (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 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. *Hauströng* 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 prophesies 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 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, Sigdr. 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 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; 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, 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 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 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, the norms 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 Middlegarth 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 Middlegarth, was raised on high and turned into a divine mansion. Time-honoured myths setting forth the doings of mutually 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. 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 capped 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 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 chronique 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 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 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 — *niðingsverk* -- 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 acceptance 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 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 Eiríksmál, a poem composed to the memory of Eric Bloody-axe. When he fought his last battle his 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 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.



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 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 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 — 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.

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 immediately to minds which were prepared to understand the significance of things.

No wonder that the *Voluspá* 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.



When we have considered the *Voluspá* 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 necessarily 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 discovery 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 *Middlegarth*.

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. *Nornadómr*, 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 dýri 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 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 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* (*Haustr.* 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.

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 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 sifjaðan*, 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 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 *mjötudr* 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.

But we get a little nearer by examining the word *mjötudr*, that is used by the author in support of his logic. *Mjotudr* 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 *mjotudr* — the power — among men, to help women in the throes of birth (Fjols. 22). *Vsp.* (2) offers a parallel form, *mjötviðr*; 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 *mjotudr* 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 *mjotudr*, in the same way as Heimdal's horn is called *hijod* 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, 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 *Rígmál*, Heimdal is identified with Ríg, 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 Ríg 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 figures. Such a poem makes up a *rök* or *dóm*; 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 expression: 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 Thiaz. 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: "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 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 obsequiosity — 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 sacral 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 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 *funir* 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: 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 norms, 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 *vaftrlogi* 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 *vaftrlogi*? — 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.

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 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 *Brisingamen* 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 *Brisingamen* is probably reminiscent of an individual form of the drama hailing from a clan of *Brisings* (cf. for another family traditions of a similar treasure, the *Brosings* in *Beow.* 1119). The *Brisings* 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 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 *Skirmismál*, and *Skirmismál* 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 rituals, 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 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 *seiðr* 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 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".

# **BERSERKER**

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## **BOOKS**

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