

Loki and the Dwarf

By Thomas Keightley

From The Fairy Mythology [1870]

LOKI the son of Lafeiar, had out of mischief cut off all the hair of Sif. When Thor found this out he seized Loki, and would have broken every bone in his body, only that he swore to get the Suartalfar to make for Sif hair of gold, which would grow like any other hair.

Loki then went to the Dwarfs that are called the sons of Ivallda. They first made the hair, which as soon as it was put on the head grew like natural hair; then the ship Skidbladni, [a] which always had the wind with it, wherever it would sail; and, thirdly, the spear Gugner, which always hit in battle.

Then Loki laid his head against the dwarf Brock, that his brother Eitri could not forge three such valuable things as these were. They went to the forge; Eitri set the swine. skin (bellows) to the fire, and bid his brother Brock to blow, and not to quit the fire till he should have taken out the things he had put into it.

And when he was gone out of the forge, and that Brock was blowing, there came a fly and settled upon his hand, and bit him; but he blew without stopping till the smith took the work out of the fire; and it was a boar, and its bristles were of gold.

He then put gold into the fire, and bid him not to stop blowing till he came back. He went away, and then the fly came and settled on his neck, and bit him more severely than before; but he blew on till the smith came back and took out of the fire the gold-ring which is called Drupner. [b]

Then he put iron into the fire, and bid him blow, and said that if he stopped blowing all the work would be lost. The fly now settled between his eyes, and bit so hard that the blood ran into his eyes, so that he could not see; so when the bellows were down he caught at the fly in all haste, and tore off its wings; but then came the smith, and said that all that was in the fire had nearly been spoiled. He then took out of the fire the hammer Miölnir, [c] gave all the things to his brother Brock, and bade him go with them to Asgard and settle the wager.

Loki also produced his jewels, and they took Odin, Thor, and Frey, for judges. Then Loki gave to Odin the spear Gugner, and to Thor the hair that Sif was to have, and to Frey Skidbladni, and told their virtues as they have been already related. Brock took out his jewels, and gave to Odin the ring, and said that every ninth night there would drop from it eight other rings as valuable as itself. To Frey he gave the boar, and said that he would run through air and water, by night and by day, better than any horse, and that never was there night so dark that the way by which he went would not be light from his hide. He gave the hammer to Thor, and said that it would never fail to hit a Troll, and that at whatever he threw it it would never miss it; and that he could never fling it so far that it would not of itself return to his hand; and when he chose, it would become so small that he might put it into his pocket. But the fault of the hammer was that its handle was too short.

Their judgment was, that the hammer was the best, and that the Dwarf had won the wager. Then Loki prayed hard not to lose his head, but the Dwarf said that could not be. "Catch me then," said Loki; and when he went to catch him he was far away, for Loki had shoes with which he could run through air and water. Then the Dwarf prayed Thor to catch him, and Thor did so. The Dwarf now went to cut off his head, but Loki said he was to have the head only, and not the neck. Then the Dwarf took a knife and a thong, and went to sew up his mouth; but the knife was bad, so the Dwarf wished that his brother's awl were there; and as soon as he wished it, it was there, and he sewed his lips together. [d]

* Northern mythologists thus explain this very ancient fable. Sif is the earth, and the wife of Thor, the heaven or atmosphere; her hair is the trees, bushes, and plants, that adorn the surface of the earth. Loki is the Fire-God, that delights in mischief, bene servit, male imperat. When by immoderate heat he has burned off the hair of Sif, her husband compels him so by temperate heat to warm the moisture of the earth, that its former products may spring up more beautiful than ever. The boar is given to Freyr, to whom and his sister Freya, as the gods of animal and vegetable fecundity, the northern people offered that animal, as the Italian people did, to the earth. Loki's bringing the gifts from the under-ground people seems to indicate a belief that metals were prepared by subterranean fire, and perhaps the forging of Thor's hammer, the mythic emblem of thunder, by a terrestrial demon, on a subterranean anvil, may suggest that the natural cause of thunder is to be sought in the earth.

[a] Skidbladni, like Pari Banou's tent, could expand and contract as required. It would carry all the Aeser and their arms, and when not in use it could be taken asunder and put in a purse. "A good ship," says Ganglar, "is Skidbladni, but great art must have been employed in making it." Mythologists say it is the clouds.

[b] i. e. The Dripper.

[c] i. E. The Bruiser or Crusher, from Myla, to bruise or crush. Little the Fancy know of the high connexions of their phrase Mill.

[d] Edda Resenii, Daemisaga 59.