

Norse Tales

EPIC & LEGENDARY HEROES SERIES

SELECTED AUTHORS

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Norse Tales
Epic & Legendary Heroes Series

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ASGARD STORIES

Tales from Norse Mythology

By Mary H. Foster and Mabel H. Cummings

Preface

This little volume is the outcome of several years' experience in telling to classes of children the classic myths, both southern and northern. The insight and interest displayed by the children encourage the authors to hope that other teachers and pupils may enjoy the myths here reproduced.

The interest shown at present in the teaching of myths to children seems to call for some such simple volume, giving the Norse myths in suitable form for use with pupils as well as for the children's home reading. There are various collections of the Greek tales, but the books dealing with the Norse myths seem to be more or less cumbered with detail, and, therefore, not adapted to very young readers.

The experience of the authors satisfies them that the teaching of myths should begin with those of the North, and that the Greek tales should be given later, with comparisons and references to the Norse myths. The stories which were dear to our own northern forefathers stir our children more deeply and are more congenial to them than those which come down to us from the Greeks. This is perfectly reasonable. The graphic descriptions in the Norse tales of the hard struggle with rugged nature and the severe climate of the North naturally come home more closely to us than the less rigorous and sturdy conditions of the southern nations. Then, too, the moral tone of the Norse myths is higher, purer, and more steadfast than that of the Greek tales, and is more congenial to our Teutonic point of view.

Much depends, of course, upon the teacher's careful study of the myths and insight into their significance. They should be presented in such manner as to awaken the interest of the children and lead them to make use of their own imagination.

The value of the Norse myths has been urged by Carlyle,

Dasent, Anderson, and others. "To me there is in the Norse system something very genuine, very great, and manlike," wrote Carlyle. "A broad simplicity, so very different from the light gracefulness of the old Greek paganism, distinguishes this Norse system. It is thought, the genuine thought of deep, rude, earnest minds, fairly opened to the things about them—a face-to-face and heart-to-heart inspection of things—the first characteristic of all good thought in all times."

Anderson, the author of "Norse Mythology," wrote: "In the Norse mythology the centralizing idea is its peculiar feature; in it lies its strength and beauty. The one myth and the one divinity is inextricably in communion with the other; and thus also the idea of unity, centralization, is a prominent feature and one of the chief characteristics of the Teutonic nations.

"While the Greek mythology foreshadowed the petty states of Greece and southern Europe, the Norse mythology foreshadowed the political and social destinies of United Scandinavia, United Great Britain, and the United States of North America....

"The poetic period of the child's own race should be melted and moulded into poetry, touched by a spark of Christian refinement and love, and then poured, so to speak, into his soul. The child's mind should feed upon the mythological stories and the primitive folklore of his race."

While many works have been consulted in the preparation of this volume, the authors are especially indebted to the following: Thorpe's translation of Sæmund's "Edda"; "The Younger Edda," in translations; Anderson's "Norse Mythology"; Guerber's "Myths of Northern Lands"; William and Mary Howitt's "Literature and Romance of Northern Europe"; and Mallet's "Northern Antiquities."

Brookline, Mass.,
September, 1901.

CHAPTER I
The Story of the Beginning

The people who lived long ago, in the far-off lands of the north, watched the wonderful things that happened out of doors every day, just as we do; but they did not know about the one loving God, who is the Father of all, who made them and the world, and rules it by his wise laws; so they thought there must be a great many unseen powers, living in the clouds, in the wind, in the storms, and the sunshine, and doing all those wonders that no man could do.

And so those northern people, who were our own forefathers, came to believe in many gods—one for the sun, another for the thunder, another for the flowers, and so on.

In the long, dark winters, when the bright sun had gone away from them, these northmen had time to think many thoughts about the powers of frost, and wind, and storms, which they called giants, and they used to tell stories and sing songs about the short, bright summer, the thawing out of the streams and lakes, the coming of the birds and flowers.

With great joy the people saw the bright sun-god, Baldur, come back to them in the spring, after the long darkness, and knew that they owed their lives to his friendly warmth and light.

As we read the stories, or myths, told by those people long ago, we can see that they were meant to tell about the world around us. At first the stories were told and sung from father to son—that is, from one generation to another; but later, when people learned how to write, these myths were written down, and kept with great love and care.

This is the story they told of the Beginning. At first, before living creatures were in the world, it was all rough and

without order. Far to the north it was very cold, for ice and snow were everywhere. Toward the south there was fire, and from the meeting of the fire and the cold a thick vapor was formed, from which sprang a huge giant. On looking about for some food, he saw a cow, who was also searching for something to eat. The ice tasted salt, and when the cow began to lick it, a head appeared, and at last the whole figure of a god stood before her.

From these two, the giant and the god, came the two great races of giants and gods, who were always enemies to each other. The giants were constantly trying to break into Asgard, the home of the gods, in the sky; the gods, on the other hand, watched and planned to keep out the giants, and to drive them back to their own stronghold, Utgard. Our world, where men and women lived, was between Utgard and Asgard; it was called Midgard, and around this Midgard world, under the ocean, was coiled a monstrous serpent, who grew so long that his tail grew down his throat. He was called the Midgard serpent.

A wonderful tree, named "Yggdrasil," connected all the worlds. This great ash tree had its roots in Utgard, and the tops of its branches reached up so high as to overshadow Asgard. Its three main roots were watered by three fountains, and near one of them sat the wise giant Mimir, of whom we shall hear later. The Norns, three sisters, also lived at the roots of Yggdrasil, and were careful to see that it was watered every day.

A little gray squirrel was always running up and down the tree, jerking his tail and hurrying to tell the news to everyone along the way. He was so anxious to be the first one to carry the news, that many times he brought trouble to himself and to others, because he was not always careful to tell a story just as he had heard it, and often everyone would have been happier if the squirrel had kept the story quite to himself.

The gods and goddesses, all together, were called the

Æsir, and the chief and father of them all was Odin. His lofty throne rose high in the midst of Asgard, the sacred city, which the gods had built for their beautiful home.

From Asgard, arching over and down to the lower world, was a rainbow bridge, called Bifröst—"the trembling bridge"; upon this the dwellers in Asgard could travel every day, all except the mighty Thor. His thunder chariot was too heavy for "the trembling bridge," so he had to go around a longer way.

After the gods had made men and women, and had taught them to dwell on the earth, in the world of Midgard, Odin looked forth one morning from his heavenly seat, to see what further work was waiting for his helping hand.

He noticed, far away below him, a race of small beings, some of them busy, doing mischievous deeds, while others sat idle, doing nothing. Odin sent for all these little people to come to him, and when they had reached Asgard, and were admitted to his palace of Gladsheim, they entered the great judgment hall, where they found all the Æsir sitting, with Father Odin at their head.

The little people waited in a crowd near the door, wondering what was going to happen to them, while Hermod, the messenger of the gods, ran to his master to say that they had come.

Then the Allfather spoke to the little dwarfs about their evil deeds among men, and he told the naughtiest ones that they must go and live down underground, and look after the great furnace fire in the middle of the earth, to keep it always burning. Some must get coal to feed the fire, and others still were to have charge of the gold, and silver, and precious stones, under the rocks. Not one of these busy dwarfs must ever appear during the day; only by night might they venture to leave their tasks.

"And now," said Odin, turning to the idle ones, "what have you been doing?"

"We were doing nothing at all, so we could not have harmed anyone, and we pray you to spare us!" cried they.

"Do you not know that those who sit idle when they should be doing good deserve punishment, too?" said Odin. "I shall put you in charge of all the trees and flowers, and shall send one of the Æsir to teach you, so that you may be doing some good in the world."

Then the little elves went to work among the flowers, and Frey, the bright god of summer and sunshine, was a kind master to them. He taught them how to open the folded buds in the sunshine, to fill the honey cups, and lead the bees along the flower passages to find their food, to hatch the birds' eggs, and teach the little ones their songs, and then each night to fetch the water for dewdrops, to be hung on every leaf and blade of grass.

When their work was finished, and the moon had risen, these busy elves and fairies enjoyed many a happy evening, dancing and frisking on the green by moonlight. And so our world of Midgard was filled with busy work and play.

Even now, in our time, the people in the lands of the north, and in Germany, have many old sayings and stories that have come down to them from the days long ago. There is a beautiful white flower in the north, which is called Baldur's Brow, because it is so pure and bright, like the face of the dear sun-god, Baldur; and in some places, when the farmers gather in their harvest of grain, they leave a little bunch of it standing in the field, for Father Odin's horse.

We have some English names to remind us of those old tales of our forefathers, for we have Tuesday named for Tyr, or Tiu, the brave god who gave his right hand to save his friends; Wednesday, or Wodensday, named for Odin; Thursday, for Thor, the thunder-god; and Friday, for either the goddess Frigga, or Freyja, or for Frey, the god of summer, who ruled the fairies.

CHAPTER II
Odin's Reward

One night when all was quiet in Asgard and the Æsir had gone to rest, Odin, the Allfather, sat awake on his high throne, troubled with many thoughts. At his feet crouched his two faithful wolves, and upon his shoulders perched the two ravens of thought and memory, who flew far abroad every day, through the nine worlds, as Odin's messengers.

The Allfather had need of great wisdom in ruling the worlds; after thinking a long time on the matters which needed his care, he suddenly started up, and went forth with long strides from his palace of Gladsheim into the night. He soon returned, leading his beautiful, eight-footed steed, Sleipnir, and it was plain that Odin was going on a journey. He quickly mounted Sleipnir, and rode swiftly away toward Bifröst, the rainbow bridge, which reached from Asgard, the city of the gods, down through the air to the lower worlds.

When Sleipnir stepped upon the bridge it trembled, and seemed hardly strong enough to bear the horse and his rider; but they had no fear of its giving way, and Sleipnir galloped swiftly onward.

Soon Odin saw Heimdall, the watchman of the bridge, riding toward him on a fine horse, with a golden mane that reflected light upon the noble face of his rider.

"You must be bound on some important errand, Father Odin, to be riding forth from Asgard so late at night," said Heimdall.

"It is indeed a most important errand, and I must hasten on," replied Odin. "It is well for us that we have such a faithful guardian of the 'trembling bridge'; if it were not for you, Heimdall, our enemies might long ago have taken Asgard by

storm. You are so watchful, you can hear the grass grow in the fields, and the wool gather on the backs of the sheep, and you need less sleep than a bird. I myself stand in great need of wisdom, in order to take care of such faithful servants, and to drive back such wicked enemies!"

They hurried over the bridge until they came to Heimdall's far-shining castle, at the farther end of it. This was a lofty tower which was placed so as to guard the bridge, and it sent forth into the land of the giant enemies such a wonderful, clear light, that Heimdall could see, even in the darkest night, anyone who came toward the bridge. Here Odin stopped a few moments to drink the mead which the good Heimdall offered him.

Then said Odin, "As I am journeying into the land of our enemies, I shall leave my good horse with you; there are not many with whom I would trust him, but I know that you, my faithful Heimdall, will take good care of him. I can best hide myself from the giants by going on as a wanderer."

With these words the Allfather quitted Heimdall's castle, and started off toward the north, through the land of the fierce giants.

During all the first day there was nothing to be seen but ice and snow; several times Odin was nearly crushed as the frost giants hurled huge blocks of ice after him.

The second day he came to mountains and broad rivers. Often when he had just crossed over a stream, the mountain giants would come after him to the other bank, and when they found that Odin had escaped them, they would send forth such a fierce yell, that the echoes sounded from hill to hill.

At the end of the third day, Odin came to a land where trees were green and flowers blooming. Here was one of the three fountains which watered the world tree, Yggdrasil, and near by sat the wise giant, Mimir, guarding the waters of this wonderful fountain, for whoever drank of it would have the gift of great wisdom.

Mimir was a giant in size, but he was not one of the fierce giant enemies of the gods, for he was kind, and wiser than the wisest.

Mimir's well of wisdom was in the midst of a wonderful valley, filled with rare plants and bright flowers, and among the groves of beautiful trees were strange creatures, sleeping dragons, harmless serpents, and lizards, while birds with gay plumage flew and sang among the branches. Over all this quiet valley shone a lovely soft light, different from sunlight, and in the center grew one of the roots of the great world tree. Here the wise giant Mimir sat gazing down into his well.

Odin greeted the kind old giant, and said, "Oh, Mimir, I have come from far-away Asgard to ask a great boon!"

"Gladly will I help you if it is in my power," said Mimir.

"You know," replied Odin, "that as father of gods and men I need great wisdom, and I have come to beg for one drink of your precious water of knowledge. Trouble threatens us, even from one of the Æsir, for Loki, the fire-god, has lately been visiting the giants, and I fear he has been learning evil ways from them. The frost giants and the storm giants are always at work, trying to overthrow both gods and men; great is my need of wisdom, and even though no one ever before has dared ask so great a gift, I hope that since you know how deep is my trouble, you will grant my request."

Mimir sat silently, thinking for several moments, and then said, "You ask a great thing, indeed, Father Odin; are you ready to pay the price which I must demand?"

"Yes," said Odin, cheerfully, "I will give you all the gold and silver of Asgard, and all the jeweled shields and swords of the Æsir. More than all, I will give up my eight-footed horse Sleipnir, if that is needed to win the reward."

"And do you suppose that these things will buy wisdom?" said Mimir. "That can be gained only by bearing bravely, and giving up to others. Are you willing to give me a part of yourself? Will you give up one of your own eyes?"

At this Odin looked very sad; but after a few moments of deep thought, he looked up with a bright smile, and answered, "Yes, I will even give you one of my eyes, and I will suffer whatever else is asked, in order to gain the wisdom that I need!"

We cannot know all that Odin bravely suffered in that strange, bright valley, before he was rewarded with a drink from that wonderful fountain; but we may be quite sure that never once was the good Allfather sorry for anything he had given up, or any suffering he had borne, for the sake of others.

CHAPTER III
Tyr and the Wolf

I.

Odin, the Allfather, sat one day on his high air-throne, and looking around him, far and wide, saw three fierce monsters. They were the children of the mischievous fire-god Loki, and Odin began to feel anxious, for they had grown so fast and were getting so strong that he feared they might do harm to the sacred city of Asgard. The wise father knew Loki had given strength to these dreadful creatures, and he saw that all this danger had come upon the Æsir from Loki's wickedness.

One of these monsters was a huge serpent, that Odin sent down into the ocean, where he grew so fast that his body was coiled around the whole world, and his tail grew into his own mouth. He was called the Midgard serpent.

The second monster was sent to Niflheim, the home of darkness, and shut up there.

The third, a fierce wolf, named Fenrir, was brought to Asgard, where Odin hoped he might be tamed by living among the Æsir, and seeing their good deeds, and hearing their kind words; but he grew more and more fierce, until only one of all the gods dared to feed him. This was the brave god, Tyr. He was a war-god, like Thor, and is sometimes called the Sword-god. Tyr was loved by all because he was so true and faithful.

Each day the dreadful wolf grew larger and stronger, till all at once, before the Æsir thought about it, he had become a very dangerous beast.

Father Odin always looked troubled when he saw Fenrir, the wolf, come to get his evening meal of meat from Tyr's

hand, and at last one night, after the wolf had gone growling away to his lair, Odin called a meeting of the Æsir. He told them of his fears, saying they must find some plan for guarding themselves and their home against this monster. They could not slay him, for no one must ever be killed, and no blood must be shed, within the walls of the sacred city.

Thor was the first to speak: "Do not fear, Father Odin, for by tomorrow night we shall have Fenrir so safely bound that he cannot do us any harm. I will make a mighty chain, with the help of my hammer, Miölnir, and with it we will bind him fast!"

When the Æsir heard these words of Thor, they were glad, and all went home rejoicing—all save the Allfather, who was still troubled, for he well knew the danger, and feared that even the mighty Thor would find this task too much for him. But Thor seized his hammer, and strode off to his forge. There he worked the whole night long, and all through Asgard were heard the blows of Miölnir and the roaring of the bellows.

The next night, when the Æsir were gathered together, Thor brought forth his new-made chain, to test it. In came Fenrir, the wolf, and everyone was surprised to see how willingly he let himself be bound with the chain. When Thor had riveted the last links together, the gods smiled, and began to praise him for his wonderful work; but all at once the wolf gave one bound forward, broke the great chain, and walked off to his lair as if nothing had happened.

Thor was much disappointed, still he did not lose courage. He said to the Æsir that he would make another chain, yet stronger. Again he set to work, and for three nights and three days the great Thor worked at his forge without resting.

While he worked his friends did not forget him. They came and looked on while he was busy, and, as they watched the mighty hammer falling with quick blows upon the metal, they talked to Thor or sang noble songs to cheer him; sometimes they brought him food and drink. One visitor, who was

no friend, fierce Fenrir, the wolf, sometimes put his nose in at the door for a moment, and watched Thor at work; then, as he went away, Thor heard a strange sound like a wicked laugh.

At last the chain was finished, and Thor dragged it to the place of meeting. It was so heavy that even the mighty Thor could hardly lift it, or drag it as far as Odin's palace of Gladsheim. This time Fenrir was not so willing to be bound; but the gods coaxed him, and talked of his great strength, and told him they were sure he would easily break this chain also. After a while he agreed to let them put it around his neck.

This time Thor was sure the chain would hold firm, for never before had such a strong one been made. But soon, with a great shake and a fierce bound, the wolf broke away, and went off to his lair, snarling and showing his wicked teeth, while the broken chain lay on the ground.

Sadly the Æsir came together that night in Odin's palace, and this time Thor was not the first to speak; he sat apart and was silent.

First spoke Frey, the god of summer and king of the fairies. "Hearken to me, O lords of Asgard!" he said. "I have not won a brave name in battle, like the noble Tyr, neither have I done such mighty deeds as the great Thor and others of our heroes. Instead of fighting giants and monsters, I have spent most of my life in the woods, among the flowers, listening for hours to the birds. Many things have I watched, some perhaps that my brothers thought too small to be worthy of notice. I have learned many lessons, and the greatest of them all is to know how much power there is in little things, and to see how often the work, done quietly, and hidden from the eyes of men, is the finest and the most wonderful. Since we cannot make a chain strong enough to bind Fenrir, let us go to the little dwarfs, who work in silence and in darkness, and ask them to make us a chain!"

The Allfather's troubled face grew brighter as he heard

Frey speak, and he bade him send a messenger quickly to the dwarfs, to order a chain made as soon as possible.

II.

So Frey went out, leaving the Æsir in their trouble, and came to his own lovely home, Alfheim. There everything was bright and peaceful, and the little elves were busy and happy. Frey found a trusty messenger, and sent him with all speed to the dwarfs underground, to order the new chain, and to return as soon as he could bring it. The faithful servant found the funny little dwarf workmen all busy in their dark rock chambers, far down inside the earth, while at one side, in a lighter place, sat their king. The messenger bowed before him, and told him his errand.

The dwarfs were a wicked race, but they were afraid of Odin, for they had not forgotten the talk he once had with them, when he sent them down to work in darkness underground, and since that time they never had dared disobey him. The dwarf king said it would take two days and two nights to make the chain, but it would be so strong that no one could break it.

While the busy dwarfs were at work, the messenger looked about at the many wonderful things: the great central fire which burns always in the middle of the earth, watched and fed with coal by the dwarfs; above this, the beds of coal, and bright precious diamonds, which the dwarfs took from the ashes of the fire. In another place he watched them putting gold and silver, tin and copper, into the cracks in the rocks, and he drank of the pure, underground water, which gives the Midgard people fresh springs.

After two days this messenger returned to the dwarf king. The king, holding out in his hand a fine, small chain, said to the messenger: "This may seem to you to be small and weak; but it is a most wonderful piece of work, for we have used in it all the strongest stuff we could find. It is made of six kinds

of things: the noise made by the footfall of cats, the roots of stones, the beards of women, the voice of fishes, the spittle of birds, the sinews of bears. This chain can never be broken; and if you can once put it on Fenrir, he will never be able to throw it off."

Odin's messenger was glad to hear this, so he thanked the dwarf king, and promising him a large reward, he went on his way back to Asgard, where the Æsir were longing for his return, and were all rejoiced to see him with the magic chain.

Now Father Odin feared that Fenrir would not let them bind him a third time, so he proposed they should all take a holiday, and go out to a beautiful lake to the north of Asgard, where they would have games and trials of strength. The other gods were pleased with this plan, and all set out in Frey's wonderful ship, which was large enough to hold all the Æsir with their horses, and yet could be folded up small enough to go in one's pocket.

They landed on a lovely island in the lake, and after the races and games were over, Frey brought out the little chain, and asked them all to try to break it. Thor and Tyr tried in vain; then Thor said, "I do not believe anyone but Fenrir can break it."

Now the wolf did not want to be bound again; but he was very proud of his strength, and, for fear of being called a coward, said at last he would let them do it, if he might hold the right hand of one of the Æsir in his mouth while they bound him, as a sign that the gods did not mean to play any tricks.

When the gods heard this, they looked at each other, and all but one of them drew back. Only the brave, good Tyr stepping forward, quietly put his hand into Fenrir's mouth. The other gods then put the chain around the beast, and fastened it to a great rock. The fierce creature gave a leap to free himself, but the more he struggled the tighter grew the chain. The Æsir gathered about him in joy to see this, but

their hearts were filled with sorrow when they saw that their noble Tyr had lost his right hand; the dreadful wolf had shut his teeth together in his rage, when he found he could not get free.

Thus the brave Tyr dared to risk danger for the sake of saving others, and gave up even his right hand to gain peace and happiness for Asgard.

CHAPTER IV
Freyja's Necklace

"Yes, I really must have some flowers to wear to the feast tonight," said Freyja to her husband, Odur.

Freyja was the goddess of love and beauty; she was the most beautiful of all the Æsir, and everyone loved to look at her charming face, and to hear her sweet voice.

"I think you look quite beautiful enough as you are, without flowers," Odur replied, but Freyja was not satisfied; she thought she would go and find her brother Frey, the god of summer, for he would give her a garland of flowers. So she wandered forth from Asgard on her way to Frey's bright home in Alfheim, where he lived among his happy, busy little elves. As Freyja walked along she was thinking of the feast to be given that night in Asgard, and knowing that all the gods and goddesses would be there, she wished to look her very best.

On and on she wandered, not thinking how far she was getting away from home. Finally the light began to grow fainter and fainter, and Freyja found herself in a strange place. The sunlight had faded away, but there was still a little light that came from lanterns carried by funny little dwarfs, who were busily working. Some were digging gold and gems, others were cleaning off the dirt from the precious stones, and polishing them to make them bright, while four little fellows were seated in one corner, putting the sparkling stones together into a wonderful necklace.

"What can that beautiful thing be?" thought Freyja. "If only I had that, it would surely make me look more beautiful than anyone else at the feast tonight!" And the more she thought about it, the more she longed to get it. "Oh, I really must have it!" she said to herself, and with these words she

stepped nearer to the four little men. "For what price will you sell me your necklace?" she asked.

The dwarfs looked up from their work, and when they saw Freyja's lovely face and heard her sweet voice, said, "Oh, if you will only look kindly upon us, and be our friend, you may have the necklace!"

Then a mocking laugh echoed again and again through the dark cavern, seeming to say, "How foolish you are to wish for these bright diamonds; they will not make you happy!" But Freyja snatched the necklace and ran out of the cavern. It did not please her to hear the teasing laugh of the dwarfs, and she wanted to get away from them as soon as possible.

At last she was once more out in the open air; she tried to be free and happy again, but a strange feeling of dread came over her, as if something were going to happen. Soon she came to a still pool of water, and, putting on the necklace, she bent over to look at her picture in the clear water. How beautiful the diamonds were! and how they sparkled in the sunshine! She must hasten home to show them to Odur.

The fair goddess soon reached Asgard, and hurried to the palace to find her husband. But Odur was not there. Over and over again she searched through all the rooms in vain; he had gone, and although Freyja had her beautiful necklace, she cared little for it without her dear husband.

Soon it was time to go to the feast, but Freyja would not go without Odur. She sat down and wept bitter tears; she felt no joy now for having the necklace, and no sorrow because she could not feast with the Æsir.

If only Odur would come back, all would be well again. "I will go to the end of the world to find him!" said Freyja, and she began to make ready for her journey. Her chariot, drawn by two cats, was soon ready; but before she could start, she must first ask Father Odin to allow her to go.

"Allfather, I beg you give me leave to go to look for my Odur in every corner of the world!"

The wise father replied, "Go, fair Freyja, and may you find whom you seek."

Then she started forth. First to the Midgard world the goddess of beauty went, but no one in all the world had seen or heard of Odur. Down under the earth, to Niflheim, and even to Utgard, the land of giants, she wandered, but still no one had seen or even heard of her husband. Poor Freyja wept many tears, and wherever the teardrops fell, and sank into the ground, they turned into glistening gold.

At last the sad goddess returned to her own palace alone. She still wore the wonderful necklace, which was called Brisingamen.

One night, when the hour was late, all the Æsir were asleep, except the ever watchful Heimdall, who heard soft footsteps, like those of a cat, near Freyja's palace. He listened, and thought, "That is surely someone bent on mischief; I must follow him."

When Heimdall reached the palace, he found it was Loki, changed into another form, creeping softly about. Heimdall quietly watched him, and saw him glide in to Freyja's bedside, where the fair goddess lay asleep, wearing her beautiful necklace. Loki had come to steal the necklace, but when he saw that she was lying on the clasp of the chain, so that he could not undo it without waking her, he changed himself into a gnat, and, crawling along on the pillow, stung her just enough to make her turn over, but not enough to wake her. Then he unclasped the chain and ran off with it as fast as he could.

But Heimdall was not going to let the thief get away. As soon as Loki found that he was followed, he took his other form, a little flame of fire; Heimdall then took his other shape, and became a shower of rain, to put out the fire; but Loki, quick and watchful, changed himself into a bear, to catch the rain. Then Heimdall too became a bear, and a fierce fight began. At last the rain-god conquered, and forced wicked Loki to give back the necklace to Freyja.

The whole land seemed to feel sorry for poor, lonely Freyja; the leaves fell from the trees, the bright flowers faded, and the singing birds flew away.

Once more the fair goddess went forth from Asgard to seek Odur. Away, away to the far-off sunny south she wandered, and there, where the myrtle trees and the oranges grow, at last she found her long-lost husband.

Then hand in hand the two turned northward again, to their home, and so happy were they together, that they spread joy and happiness around them as they passed along. Everywhere the ice and snow thawed before them, green grass and sweet flowers sprang up behind their footsteps, the birds sang their sweetest songs, the warm summer came back to the north lands, and everyone was glad and joyful, for lovely, smiling Freyja was at home again.

"White were the moorlands
And frozen, before her;
Green were the moorlands
And blooming, behind her.
Out of her gold locks
Shaking the spring flowers,
Out of her garments
Shaking the south wind,
Around in the birches
Awaking the throstles,
Beautiful Freyja came."—Kingsley.

CHAPTER V
The Hammer of Thor

Sif was the wife of mighty Thor, the thunder-god, and she was very proud of her beautiful golden hair, which she combed and braided with great care. One morning when she awoke she was filled with grief and dismay to find that her lovely hair had been cut off in the night, while she slept. Her husband happened to be away that day, but when he came home late at night, Sif was careful to keep out of his sight, she felt so ashamed of her shorn head.

Thor, however, soon called for Sif, and when he saw what had been done to her, he was very angry. Now Thor had a quick temper; everyone feared his fierce anger. "Who could have done this wicked deed?" thought he. "There is only one among all the Æsir who would think of doing such a thing!"

Thor lost no time in finding Loki, and that mischief-god had to admit that he was the guilty one, but he begged Thor to give him just a few days, and he promised to get something for Sif that would make her look more beautiful than ever. So Thor decided to give him a chance to try, and commanded him to give back to Sif her golden hair.

Now Loki knew a place where some wonderful workmen lived, so he went off, as fast as he could go, to Niflheim, the home of the dwarfs, under the earth, and asked one of them to make quickly some golden hair for Sif. Besides this, he asked for two gifts to carry to the gods Odin and Frey, so that they might be on his side if Thor should bring his complaint before the Æsir.

Loki did not have to wait long before the dwarf brought him a quantity of beautiful hair, spun from the finest golden thread. It had the wonderful power of growing just like real

hair, as soon as it touched anyone's head. Besides this, there was a spear for Odin, which never missed its aim, no matter how far it was thrown, and for Frey, a ship that could sail through the air as well as the sea. Although it was large enough to hold all the gods and their horses, yet it could be folded so that it was small enough to put in one's pocket.

Loki was greatly pleased with these wonderful presents, and declared that this dwarf must be the most skillful workman of them all. Now it happened that another dwarf, named Brock, heard him say this, and he told Loki that he was sure he and his brother could make more wonderful things than these.

Loki did not believe that could be done, but he told Brock to try his skill; the Æsir should judge between them and the one who should fail in the trial must lose his head.

Then Brock called his brother, Sindri, and they set to work at once. They first built a great fire, and Sindri threw into it a lump of gold; then he told Brock to blow the bellows while he went out, and be sure not to stop blowing until he should come back.

Brock thought this an easy task, but his brother had not long been gone when a huge fly came in and buzzed about his face, and bothered him so that he could hardly keep on blowing; still he was able to finish his work, so that when Sindri came back, they took out of the fire an enormous wild boar, which gave out light, and could travel through the air with wonderful speed.

On the second day Sindri threw another lump of gold into the fire, and left his brother to blow the bellows. Again the buzzing, stinging fly came, and was even more troublesome than before; but Brock tried very hard to be patient, and was able to bear it without stopping his work until Sindri returned. Then they took from the fire a magic ring of gold, from which eight new rings fell off every week.

The third day a lump of iron was put into the fire, and

Brock was again left alone. In came the cruel fly—have you guessed that it was really that mischief-maker Loki? He bit the poor little dwarf so hard on the forehead that the blood ran down into his eyes, and blinded him so that he could no longer see to do his work.

Poor Brock had to stop just before Sindri came home, but not before the hammer which they were making in the fire was nearly finished, only the handle came out rather too short. This magic hammer was named Miölnir. It had the power of never missing its mark, and would always return to the hand which threw it.

When Loki appeared at last before the Æsir, with the two dwarf brothers and their gifts, it was declared that they had made the finest things, for the hammer, which was given to Thor, would surely be most useful in keeping the giants out of Asgard.

When Loki found that the judgment was against him, he started to run away; but Thor soon made him turn back by threatening to throw his hammer after him.

Then Loki had to collect his wits, and think of some way to escape losing his head, instead of making the dwarfs pay the forfeit, as he had expected. At last he told Brock and Sindri that they could have his head, according to the agreement, but as nothing had been said about his neck, they could not, of course, touch that.

Thus the wily Loki, by his wit, saved his life.

CHAPTER VI
Thor's Wonderful Journey

I.

One morning Thor asked Loki, the fire-god, if he would like to go forth with him to Utgard, the stronghold of the giants, where he was going to try, with his mighty hammer, to conquer those fierce enemies of Asgard. Loki was glad to go with him, and the two gods started forth in Thor's chariot, drawn by two goats.

Thor often went on a journey, so the dwellers in Asgard did not wonder to see him getting ready for a long drive. As Thor and Loki drove along, the heavy chariot rattled, and made the thunder echo among the hills. People in our world, down below in Midgard, heard the rumbling, and said: "What a heavy thunderstorm! How the thunder crashes and rumbles!"

Toward evening the travelers stopped at a peasant's hut, and Thor, alighting from his chariot, went to the door of the house, to ask shelter for the night.

"I will gladly give you a room, but I have no food in the house," said the man who opened the door.

"Oh, never mind that," said Thor; "I will provide the food." So Thor and Loki stopped for the night at the peasant's hut. They found the family within, the man, his wife, and two children, a boy and a girl. All looked on in great surprise to see Thor kill his two goats and cook them for the evening meal. "Eat all you wish of the meat," said Thor, "but be careful not to break any of the bones; throw them all into the two skins which I have spread upon the floor."

Now the boy, whose name was Thialfe, wondered why Thor should say this, and as he happened to have a piece of

the leg-bone, he thought there could be no harm in breaking it open, to get out the soft marrow to eat. Thor was just then talking to Loki, and did not notice what had been done; but next morning the boy learned a lesson that he never forgot.

When Thor was ready to start off again, next day, he held his magic hammer over the skins in which lay the bones. All at once the goats became whole again, and stood there just the same as before, except that one of them limped with his hind leg.

Then the young Thialfe knew why Thor had told them not to break the bones. At first, when he saw Thor's angry face, and how he grasped his hammer, the boy was frightened, and wanted to run away; but soon he remembered it would be cowardly to do that, so he went to Thor, and asked his forgiveness. Now the mighty thunder-god, though often angry, was always just and kind. After scolding the boy as he deserved, he freely forgave him, and said that he and his sister might go along with Loki and himself on their journey.

II.

The four started off, after saying good-by to the peasant and his wife, leaving in their charge the chariot and goats, for it seemed best to finish the journey on foot.

At nightfall they entered a thick forest, through which they wandered on for miles, when all at once they came upon a house, and a strange-looking house it was. The wide front door opened into a big room; at the left was a small room, and just opposite the front door were four long, narrow rooms.

The travelers wondered to find a house in the depths of a forest, but they were glad to have shelter for the night, and all lay down for a good rest. Soon after midnight they were awakened by groans and strange sounds, and the earth began to tremble. Thor sent his companions into the farthest room, grasped his hammer, and stood on guard by the door. At day-break he started forth to find out what had caused the noise.

He had not gone far when he came upon a huge giant, lying on the ground asleep, and Thor found that he was making the earth tremble with his snoring, which must have been the sound they had heard in the night.

While Thor was looking at the giant, he awoke, and spoke to the god. "Ho, ho! I think you little fellow must be Thor, of whom I have often heard, but really, I did not think you were quite so small! Now the sun is up, and I must be off; but where is my other glove? Oh, here it is, on the ground!" And the giant stooped and picked up his glove, which was the very house in which our four travelers had spent the night, with the big front door where the hand went in, the thumb for the one side-room, and the four narrow finger-rooms opposite the door.

"If you are going my way, you may come along with me," said the giant. So they journeyed together for one day, but even mighty Thor could hardly keep up with the giant's long strides.

When night came, the giant stopped under a large oak tree, and said, "I am going to sleep; you may eat your supper, if you wish; here is a bag full of things." Saying this, he fell asleep, and was soon snoring. But when Thor tried to open the bag of food, he could not untie the cord. This made him angry, for the giant had tied up their food with his own. He looked at the huge figure lying before him asleep, and when he thought what a mean trick the giant had played upon them, Thor seized the magic hammer, and threw it at him.

"Did a leaf fall on me?" said the giant, sleepily. "Haven't you eaten your supper yet? Well, I am going to sleep again." And soon he was snoring louder than before. Thor grasped his hammer tighter than ever, and threw it with such strength that it seemed as though it must surely have killed the giant; but again he rubbed his eyes, and said, "I thought an acorn fell on my head!" He had hardly spoken when he was asleep again.

Then a third time Thor hurled his hammer with all his strength, and it seemed to hit his enemy in the forehead, and was buried out of sight, but the giant only said: "I think there must be birds overhead in this tree; I thought a feather dropped down on me. Are you awake, Thor? I think we'd better be going on with our journey, and if you are bound to go to Utgard, I will show you the way, but I advise you to go home instead; you will find bigger fellows than I in Utgard!"

But Thor had made up his mind to go on, and nothing could make him change. At noontime the four friends left their giant guide, whose path led another way. They had not traveled far when Thor spied a large city looming up before them, and soon they came to Utgard, the home of the fierce giants.

Although it was surrounded by high walls, Thor and his friends were able to creep through the bars of the great gate. When they came to the palace and found its door open, they went in, and there sat all the giants with their king, Utgard-Loki, at their head. A quite different Loki was this giant king from the mischievous fire-god, the Loki from Asgard, who now stood before him.

III.

Upon seeing the four strangers, the king of the giants said: "Why, this must be the god Thor. I really did not suppose that you were such a little fellow, Thor! but probably you are stronger than you look. Now, before you sit down at our table, you must each show some proof of your strength!"

Then Loki, who was very hungry, said he was sure he could eat more than anyone else; so the king called one of the giants to come forth, saying to Loki, "If you can indeed eat more than one of my men, you will perform a great feat."

A huge trough, full of meat, was brought in, and Loki began eating at one end, while the giant began at the other. They reached the center together; but Loki had eaten only

the meat, while the giant had devoured meat, bones, trough, and all.

Thialfe, the peasant boy, took his turn next, and boasted that he was the fastest runner of them all. "Oh," said the king, "it will be a most wonderful feat if you can win a race against one of my men!" The first time Thialfe ran the course he kept ahead until near the end, and was beaten by only a few yards. The second time he came off worse, and the third time he was only halfway around when the giant had reached the goal.

Thor, however, was not at all cast down by the failure of the others, and he proposed to try a drinking match. So the king brought forth a long drinking horn, saying, "My men usually empty this in one draught, if they are very thirsty, though sometimes they have to take it in two swallows, or even three."

Then Thor put his lips to the drinking horn, and took one long, deep pull, thinking he had surely emptied it, but to his surprise, the water had lowered only a few inches. Again he lifted the horn, feeling sure he should empty it this time, yet he did no better than before. The king said, "You have left a great deal for your last drink!"

This made Thor try his very best; but it was of no use, he could not empty the horn.

"So you are not as strong as you seemed, after all! Do you care to try anything else?" said the king of the giants, in a mocking tone.

"Oh, certainly, anything you like!" replied Thor.

"Well," said the king, "I will give you something easy this time, since I see you are not as strong as I expected. You may try to lift this cat from the floor; it would be mere child's play for one of my men."

Thor put out his hand to lift the cat, but he could raise only one paw, though he used all his strength.

"Well, it is no more than I expected!" said the king; "you boast of your strength, but you do not show it to us."

By this time Thor was getting very angry, and he spoke fiercely, "I will challenge any one of you to fight with me!"

The king looked about the hall to find someone small enough to wrestle with Thor. Then he said, "All my men are too large, I shall have to send for one of the women!" Soon a bent old woman came hobbling in, and Thor thought it would be nothing to overcome her; but the longer they wrestled, the stronger the old woman became, and at last, when it was plain that she was going to win, and Thor had been thrown down upon the floor, the king called to them to stop.

Thor and his friends were then invited to sit down at the feast, and the next morning, after a good breakfast, they started on their journey homeward. Utgard-Loki, the giant king, went with them to the city gate, and when he was about to leave them, said, "Do you find it as easy as you expected to overthrow the giants?"

"No," said Thor, who was too honest to hide his shame, "I am vexed that I have done so little, and I know that after this failure, you will all laugh at my weakness."

"No, indeed," replied the king; "since you are now well outside our stronghold I will tell you the truth about what you saw there, and I will take good care not to let you get in again. You have greatly surprised us all, for we did not dream that you were so strong, and I have had to use magic to hold out against you.

"When you met the first giant in the forest you would have killed him with your hammer, if he had not put a mountain between himself and you. Loki was a wonderful eater, but we matched him against fire, and who can devour more than fire? The boy was a swift runner, and I had to make him race against thought, in order to beat him; what can be swifter than thought? The horn, from which you drank, was the ocean, and you took such a mighty draught, that the people in Midgard saw the tide ebb. It was really not a cat you tried to lift, but the Midgard Serpent, and you pulled him so far

that we feared he would let go his hold. Then you wrestled with Old Age, and who is there that can overcome Old Age?"

With these words the giant king vanished, and Thor, upon looking around, saw the city of Utgard was also gone.

Then silently, but with many thoughts of these strange things, Thor and Loki, with the boy and the girl, made their way back to Asgard.

CHAPTER VII
How Thor Lost His Hammer

"Come, Loki, are you ready? My goats are eager to be off!" cried Thor, as he sprang into his chariot, and away they went, thundering over the hills. All day long they journeyed, and at night they lay down to rest by the side of a brook.

When Baldur, the bright sun-god, awoke them in the morning, the first thing Thor did was to reach out for Miölnir, his magic hammer, which he had carefully laid by his side the night before.

"Why, Loki!" cried he. "Alas, my hammer is gone! Those evil frost giants must have stolen it from me while I slept. How shall we hold Asgard against them without my hammer? They will surely take our stronghold!"

"We must go quickly and find it!" replied Loki. "Let us ask Freyja to lend us her falcon garment."

Now the goddess, Freyja, had a wonderful garment made of falcon feathers, and whoever wore it looked just like a bird. As you may suppose, this was sometimes a very useful thing. So Thor and Loki went quickly back to Asgard, and drove with all speed to Freyja's palace, where they found her sitting among her maidens. "Asgard is in great danger!" said Thor, "and we have come to you, fair goddess, to ask if you will lend us your falcon garment, for my hammer has been carried off, and we must go in search of it."

"Surely," answered Freyja, "I would lend you my falcon cloak, even if it were made of gold and silver!"

Then Loki quickly dressed himself in Freyja's garment and flew away to the land of the frost giants, where he found their king making collars of gold for his dogs, and combing his horses. As Loki came near, he looked up and said, "Ah, Loki,

how fare the mighty gods in Asgard?"

"The Æsir are in great trouble," replied Loki, "and I am sent to fetch the hammer of Thor."

"And do you think I am going to be foolish enough to give it back to you, after I have had all the trouble of getting it into my power?" said the king. "I have buried it deep, deep, down in the earth, and there is only one way by which you can get it again. You must bring me the goddess Freyja to be my wife!"

Loki did not know what to say to this, for he felt sure that Freyja would never be willing to go away from Asgard to live among the fierce giants; but as he saw no chance of getting the hammer, he flew back to Asgard, to see what could be done.

Thor was anxiously looking out for him. "What news do you bring, Loki?" cried he. "Have you brought me my hammer again?"

"Alas, no!" said Loki. "I bring only a message from the giant king. He will not give up your hammer until you persuade Freyja to marry him!"

Then Thor and Loki went together to Freyja's palace, and the fair goddess greeted them kindly, but when she heard their errand, and found they wished her to marry the cruel giant, she was very angry, and said to Thor, "You should not have been so careless as to lose your hammer; it is all your own fault that it is gone, and I will never marry the giant to help you get it again."

Thor then went to tell Father Odin, who called a meeting of all the Æsir, for it was a very serious matter they were to consider. If the king of the giants only knew the power of the mighty hammer, he might storm Asgard, and carry off the fair Freyja to be his bride.

So the Æsir met together in their great judgment hall, in the palace of Gladsheim; long and anxiously they talked over their peril, trying to find some plan for saving Asgard from these enemies. At last Heimdall, the faithful watchman of the

rainbow bridge, proposed a plan.

"Let us dress Thor," said he, "in Freyja's robes, braid his hair, and let him wear Freyja's wonderful necklace, and a bridal veil!"

"No, indeed!" cried Thor, angrily, "you would all laugh at me in a woman's dress; I will do no such thing! We must find some other way." But when no other way could be found, at last Thor was persuaded to try Heimdall's plan, and the Æsir went to work to dress the mighty thunder-god like a bride. He was the tallest of them all, and, of course, he looked very queer to them in his woman's clothes, but he would be small enough beside a giant. Then they dressed Loki to look like the bride's waiting-maid, and the two set off for Utgard, the stronghold of the giants.

When the giant king saw them coming he bade his servants make ready the wedding feast, and invited all his giant subjects to come and celebrate his marriage with the lovely goddess Freyja.

So the wedding party sat down to the feast, and Thor, who was always a good eater, ate one ox and eight salmon, and drank three casks of mead. The king watched him, greatly surprised to see a woman eat so much, and said:—

"Where hast thou seen
Such a hungry bride!"

But the watchful Loki, who stood near by, as the bride's waiting-maid, whispered in the king's ear, "Eight nights has Freyja fasted and would take no food, so anxious was she to be your bride!"

This pleased the giant, and he went toward Thor, saying he must kiss his fair bride. But when he lifted the bridal veil, such a gleam of light shot from Thor's eyes that the king started back, and asked why Freyja's eyes were so sharp.

Again Loki replied, "For eight nights the fair Freyja has not slept, so greatly did she long to reach here!" This again pleased the king, and he said, "Now let the hammer be

brought and given to the bride, for the hour has come for our marriage!"

All this time Thor was so eager to get his treasure back that he could hardly keep still, and if it had not been for what the wily Loki said, he might have been found out too soon. But at last the precious hammer was brought and handed to the bride, as was always the custom at weddings; as soon as Thor grasped it in his hand, he threw off his woman's robes and stood out before the astonished giants.

Then did the mighty Thunderer sweep down his foes, and many of the cruel frost giants were slain. Once more the sacred city of Asgard was saved from danger, for Thor was its defender, and he was careful never again to let his magic hammer be taken from him.

Besides the hammer, Thor had two other precious things, his belt of strength, which doubled his power when he tightened it, and his iron glove, which he put on when he was going to throw the hammer.

"I am the God Thor,
I am the War God,
I am the Thunderer!
Here in my Northland,
My fastness and fortress,
Reign I forever!
"Here amid icebergs
Rule I the nations;
This is my hammer,
Miölnir the mighty;
Giants and sorcerers
Cannot withstand it!
"These are the gauntlets
Wherewith I wield it,
And hurl it afar off;
This is my girdle,

Whenever I brace it
Strength is redoubled!"—Longfellow

CHAPTER VIII
A Gift from Frigga

Long years ago there lived a peasant and his wife, who led a quiet, busy life on their little farm at the foot of a mountain. While the wife was busy indoors with her housework, her husband watched his flocks in the fields, or sometimes wandered up the mountain-side to hunt for game, which he would carry home for dinner.

One day he had strayed farther than usual, and found himself on the top of the mountain, where the ground was covered with ice and snow. All at once he came upon a high arched doorway opening into a great glacier, and he passed through to see whither it might lead.

The passageway widened out into a wonderful cavern, like a broad hall, sparkling with precious stones, and long, shining stalactites, that looked like icicles of marble. In the midst stood a beautiful goddess, surrounded by fair maidens, all dressed in silvery robes, and crowned with flowers.

The shepherd was so overcome by the wonder of this sight that he sank upon his knees. Then the goddess stretched forth her hands and gave him her blessing, telling him to choose whatever he wished, to carry home from the cavern. The man was no longer afraid when he heard her kind voice speaking to him, so he looked about, and at last humbly asked to have the pretty blue flowers which the fair one held in her hand.

The lovely goddess Frigga, or Holda, as the German people called her, smiled kindly, and told the poor shepherd he had made a wise choice. She gave him her bunch of blue flowers, with a measure of seed, saying to him, "You will live and be prosperous so long as the flowers do not fade."

The peasant bowed thankfully before the goddess, and

when he rose she had vanished, and he was alone on the mountain-side, just as usual, with no cavern, no sparkling stones, and no fair maidens to be seen. If it had not been for the pretty blue flowers and the measure of seed in his hand, he would have thought it all a dream.

He hurried homeward to tell his wife, who was angry when she heard the story, for she thought he had made such a foolish choice. "How much better it would have been," said she, "if you had brought home some of those precious stones you tell about, which are worth money, instead of these good-for-nothing flowers!"

The poor man bore her angry words quietly, and made the best of what he had. He went to work at once to sow his seeds, which he found, to his surprise, were enough to plant several fields.

Every morning before he led his flock to pasture, and on his way home at night, he watched the little green shoots growing in his fields. Even his wife was pleased when she saw the lovely blue blossoms of the flax opening; then, after they had withered and fallen, the seeds formed. Sometimes it seemed to the good man, as he stood in the twilight looking over his field, that he saw a misty form, like the beautiful goddess, stretching out her hands over the field of flax, to give it her blessing.

When at length the seeds had ripened, Frigga came again to show the peasant how to gather his harvest of flax, and to teach his wife to spin and weave it into fine linen, which she bleached in the sun. The people came from far and near to buy the linen, and the peasant and his wife found themselves busy and happy, with money enough and to spare.

When they had lived many years, and were growing old among their children and grandchildren, the peasant noticed one day that the bunch of blue flowers, given to him so many years before, and which had always kept bright, were beginning to fade; then he knew he had not much longer to stay.

He climbed slowly up the mountain-side, and found the door of the cavern open. A second time he went in, and the kind goddess Frigga took the peasant by the hand, and led him away to stay with her, where she always took care of him.

Frigga was the queen of the gods, and she helped her husband, Odin, govern the world. It was her part to look after the children, and help the mothers take care of their families.

CHAPTER IX
The Stealing of Iduna

I.

Odin, the wise father of the gods, started off one day on a journey through Midgard, the world of men, to see how his people were getting on, and to give them help. He took with him his brother Hönir, the light-giver, and Loki, the fire-god. Loki, you know, was always ready to go wherever he could have any fun or do any mischief.

All the morning they went about among the homes of Midgard, and whenever Odin found busy, faithful workers, he was sure to leave behind some little thing which would hardly be noticed, a straw in the farmer's barn, or a kernel of grain in the furrow by the plow, or a bit of iron at the blacksmith's forge; but always happiness and plenty followed his little gift.

At noontime Loki was so hungry that he begged Odin to stop for dinner; so when they came to a shady spot by the bank of a river, the three gods chose it for their resting-place.

Odin threw himself down under a tree and began to read his little book of runes, or wise sayings, but Loki began to make a fire and get ready for the feast. Then he started off to a farmhouse near by, leaving Hönir to cook the meat which they had brought.

As Loki came near the farmhouse, he thought to himself, "I will change myself into a cat, and then I can have a better chance to spy about." So he changed himself into a black cat, and jumping upon the kitchen window-sill, he saw the farmer's wife taking some cakes out of the oven. They smelled so good and looked so tempting that Loki said to himself, "What a prize those cakes would be for our dinner!"

Just then the woman turned back to the oven to get more

cakes, and Loki snatched those which she had laid on the table. The good housewife soon missed her cakes; she looked all about, and could not think what had become of them, but just as she was taking the last lot from the oven, she turned quickly around, and saw the tail of a cat whisking out of the window.

"There!" cried she, "that wicked black cat has stolen my nice cakes. I will go after him with my broom!" But by the time she reached the door all she could see was a cow walking in her garden, and when she came there to drive her away, nothing was to be seen except a big raven and six little ones flying overhead.

Then the mischievous Loki went back to the river bank, where he had left his two friends, and showed them the six cakes, boasting of the good joke he had played upon the poor woman. But Odin did not think it was a joke. He scolded Loki for stealing, and said, "It is a shame for one of the Æsir to be a thief! Go back to the farmhouse, and put these three black stones on the kitchen table."

Loki knew that the stones meant something good for the poor woman, and he did not wish to go back to the house; but he had to do as the Allfather told him. As he went along he heard his friends the foxes, who put their heads out of their holes and laughed at his tricks, for the foxes thought Loki was the biggest thief of them all.

Changing himself into an owl, Loki flew in at the kitchen window, and dropped from his beak the three stones, which, when they fell upon the white table, seemed to be three black stains.

The next time the good woman came into her kitchen, she was surprised to find that the dinner was all cooked. And so the wonderful stones that Odin had sent brought good luck; the housewife always found her food ready cooked, and all her jars and boxes filled with good things to eat, and never again was in need.

The other women all said she was the best housekeeper in the village, but one thing always troubled her, and that was the table with the three black stains. She scrubbed, and scrubbed, but could never make it white again.

And now we must go back to Loki. He was very hungry by this time, and hoped that Hönir would have the meat nicely cooked when he came back to the river bank, but when they took it out of the kettle, they found it was not cooked at all. So Odin went on reading his book of runes, not thinking about food, while Hönir and Loki watched the fire, and at the end of an hour they looked again at the meat.

"Now, it will surely be done this time!" said Loki, but again they were disappointed, for the meat in the kettle was still raw. Then they began to look about to see what magic might be at work, and at last spied a big eagle sitting on a tree near the fire. All at once the bird spoke, and said, "If you will promise to give me all the meat I can eat, it shall be cooked in a few minutes."

The three friends agreed to this, and in a short time, as the bird had promised, the meat was well done, Loki was so hungry he could hardly wait to get it out of the kettle, but suddenly the eagle pounced down upon it, and seized more than half, which made Loki so angry that he took up a stick to beat the bird, and what do you think happened? Why, the stick, as soon as it touched the bird's back, stuck fast there, and Loki found he could not let go his end of it. Then away flew the eagle, carrying Loki with him, over the fields and over the tree-tops, until it seemed as though his arms would be torn from his body. He begged for mercy, but the bird flew on and on. At last Loki said, "I will give you anything you ask, if you will only let me go!"

Now the eagle was really the cruel storm giant Thiassi, and he said, "I will never let you go until you promise to get for me, from Asgard, the lovely goddess Iduna, and her precious apples!"

When Odin and Hönir saw Loki whisked off through the air, they knew that the eagle must be one of their giant enemies, so they hurried home to Asgard to defend their sacred city. Just as they came to Bifröst, the rainbow bridge, Loki joined them; but he took care not to tell them how the eagle came to let him go.

Odin felt sure that Loki had been doing something wrong, but knowing very well that Loki would not tell him the truth, he made up his mind not to ask any questions.

II.

The goddess Iduna, whom Loki was to tempt away out of Asgard, was the dearest of them all. She was the fair goddess of spring and of youth, and all the Æsir loved her. Her garden was the loveliest spot, with all sorts of bright, sweet flowers, birds singing by day and night, little chattering brooks under the great trees, and everything happy and fresh. The gods loved to go and sit with Iduna, and rest in her beautiful garden, within the walls of Asgard.

There was another delightful thing in the garden, and that was Iduna's casket. This was a magic box filled with big, golden-red apples, which she always gave her friends to taste. These wonderful apples were not only delicious to eat, but whoever tasted them, no matter how tired or feeble he might be, would feel young and strong again. So the dwellers in Asgard ate often of this wonderful fruit, which kept them fresh and young, fit to help the people in the world of Midgard. The casket in which Iduna kept her apples was always filled, for whenever she took out one, another came in its place; but no one knew where it came from, and only the goddess of youth, herself, could take the apples from the box, for if anyone else tried, the fruit grew smaller and smaller, as the hand came nearer, until at last it vanished away.

A few days after Loki's bargain with the giant Thiassi, Iduna was in her bright garden one morning, watering the

flowers, when her husband, Bragi, came to say good-by to her, because he must go on a journey.

Loki watched him start off, and thought, "Now, here is my chance to tempt Iduna away from Asgard." After a while he went to the garden, and found the lovely goddess sitting among her flowers and birds. She looked up at Loki with such a sweet smile, as he came near, that he felt almost ashamed of his cruel plan; but he sat down on a grassy bank, and asked Iduna for one of her magic apples.

After tasting it, he smacked his lips, saying, "Do you know, fair Iduna, as I was coming home toward Asgard one day, I saw a tree full of apples which were really larger and more beautiful than yours; I do wish you would go with me and see them."

"Why, how can that be?" said Iduna, "for Father Odin has often told me that my apples were the largest and finest he ever saw. I should so like to see those others, and I think I will go with you now, to compare them with mine."

"Come on, then!" said Loki; "and you'd better take along your own apples, so that we can try them with the others."

Now Bragi had often told Iduna that she must never wander away from home, but, thinking it would do no harm to go such a little way, just this once, she took the casket of apples in her hand and went with Loki. They had hardly passed through the garden gate, when she began to wish herself back again, but Loki, taking her by the hand, hurried along to the rainbow bridge.

They had no sooner crossed over Bifröst than Iduna saw a big eagle flying toward them. Nearer and nearer he came, until at last he swooped down and seized poor Iduna with his sharp talons, and flew away with her to his cold, barren home. There she stayed shut up for many long dreary months, always longing to get back to Asgard, to see Bragi and her lovely garden.

The giant Thiassi had long been planning that if he could

only once get the fair goddess of youth in his power, he would eat her magic apples, and so get strength enough to conquer the Æsir; but now, after all, she would not give him even one of them, and when he put his hand into the casket, the apples grew smaller and smaller, until at last they vanished, so that he could not get even a taste.

This cruel storm giant kept poor Iduna closely shut up in a little rock chamber, hoping that some day he could force her to give him what he wanted. All day long she heard the sea beating on the rocks below her gloomy cell, but she could not look out, for the only window was a narrow opening in the rock, high up above her head. She saw no one but the giant, and his serving-women, who waited upon her.

When these women first came to her, Iduna was surprised to see that they were not ugly or stern-looking, and, when she looked at their fair, smiling faces, she hoped they would be friendly and pitiful to her in her trouble. She begged them to help her, and, with many tears, told them her sad story; but still they kept on smiling, and when they turned their backs, Iduna saw that they were hollow. These were the Ellewomen, who had no hearts, and so could never be sorry for anyone. When one is in trouble, it is very hard to be with Ellewomen.

Every day the giant came to ask Iduna, in his terrible voice, if she had made up her mind to give him the apples. Iduna was frightened, but she always had courage enough to say "No," for she knew it would be false and cowardly to give to a wicked giant these precious gifts which were meant for the high gods. Although it was hard to be a prisoner, and to see no one but the cold, fair Ellewomen who kept on smiling at her tears, she knew it was far better to belong to the bright Æsir, even in prison, than to be a giant, or an Ellewoman, no matter how free or smiling they might be.

III.

All this while the dwellers in Asgard were sad and lonely

without their dear Iduna. At first they went to her garden, as before, but they missed the bright goddess, and soon the garden itself grew dreary. The fresh green leaves turned brown and fell, the flowers faded, no new buds opened. No bird-songs were heard, and the saddest thing of all was that now the gods had no more of the wonderful apples to keep them fresh and strong, while two strangers, named Age and Pain, walked about the city of Asgard, and the Æsir felt themselves growing tired and feeble.

Every day they watched for Iduna's return; at last, when day after day had passed, and still she did not come, a meeting of all the gods and goddesses was called to talk over what they should do, and where they should search for their lost sister.

Loki, you may be sure, took care not to show himself at the meeting; but when it was found out that Iduna had last been seen walking with him, Bragi went after him, and brought him in before all the Æsir.

Then Father Odin, who sat on his high throne, looking very tired and sad, said: "Oh, Loki, what is this that you have done? You have broken your promise of brotherhood, and brought sorrow upon Asgard! Fail not to bring home again our sister, or else come not yourself within our gates!"

Loki knew well that this command must be obeyed, and besides, even he was beginning to wish for Iduna again; so, borrowing the cloak of falcon feathers which belonged to the goddess Freyja, he put it on and set out for Utgard and the castle of the giant Thiassi, which was a gloomy cave in a high rock by the sea, and there he found poor Iduna shut up in prison.

By good luck, the giant was away fishing when Loki arrived, so he was able to fly in, without being seen, through the narrow opening in Iduna's rock cell. You would have taken him to be just a falcon bird, but Iduna knew it was really Loki, and was filled with joy to see him. Without stopping to talk, Loki quickly changed her into a nut, which he held fast in his

falcon claws, and flew swiftly northward, over the sea, toward Asgard. He had not gone far when he heard a rushing noise behind them, and he knew it must be the eagle. Faster and faster flew the falcon with his precious nut; but the fierce eagle flew still faster after them.

Meanwhile, for five days, the dwellers in Asgard gathered together on the city walls, gazing southward, to watch for the coming of the birds, while Loki and Iduna, chased by Thiassi, the eagle, flew over the wide sea separating Utgard, the land of the giants, from Asgard. Each night the eagle was nearer his prey, and the watchers in the city were filled with fear lest he should overtake their friends.

At last they thought of a plan to help Iduna: gathering a great pile of wood by the city walls, they set fire to it. When Loki reached the place he flew safely through the thick smoke and flame, for you know he was the god of fire, and dropped down into the city with his little nut held fast in his falcon claws. But when the heavy eagle came rushing on after them, he could not rise above the heat of the fire, and, smothered by the smoke, fell down and was burned to death.

There was great joy in Asgard at having the dear Iduna back again; her friends gathered around her, and she invited them all into her garden, where the withered trees and flowers began to sprout and blossom; the gay birds came back, singing and building their nests, and the happy little brooks went dancing under the trees.

Iduna sat with Bragi among her friends, and they all feasted upon her golden apples; she was so thankful to be free, and at home in her garden again. Once more the Æsir became young and strong, and the two dark strangers went away, for happiness and peace had come back to Asgard.

CHAPTER X
Skadi

While Iduna's friends were still crowding about her, all joyful and glad at getting her home again, they spied some one afar off, coming toward Asgard.

As the figure drew nearer, they saw it was Skadi, the tall daughter of the frost giant Thiassi, who had chased Iduna; she was dressed all in white fur, and carried a shining hunting-spear and arrows. Slung over her shoulder were snowshoes and skates, for Skadi had come from her mountain home in the icy north. Very angry about the loss of her father, she had come to ask the Æsir why they had been so cruel to him.

Father Odin spoke kindly to her, saying, "We will do honor to your father by putting his eyes in the sky, where they will always shine as two bright stars, and the people in Midgard will remember Thiassi whenever they look up at night and see the two twinkling lights. Besides this, we will also give you gold and silver." But Skadi, thinking money could never repay her for the loss of her father, was still angry.

Loki looked at her stern face, and he said to himself, "If we can only make Skadi laugh, she will be more ready to agree to the plan," and he began to think of some way to amuse her. Taking a long cord he tied it to a goat; it was an invisible cord, which no one could see, and Loki himself held the other end of it. Then he began to dance and caper about, and the goat had to do just what Loki did. It really was such a funny sight, that all the gods shouted with laughter, and even poor, sorrowful Skadi had to smile.

When the Æsir saw this, they proposed another plan: Skadi might choose one of the gods for her husband, but she must choose, from seeing only his bare feet. The giantess

looked at them all, as they stood before her, and when she saw the bright face of Baldur, more beautiful than all the rest, she agreed to their plan, saying to herself, "It might be that I should choose him, and then I should surely be happy."

The gods then stood in a row behind a curtain, so that Skadi could see nothing but their bare feet. She looked carefully at them all, and at last chose the pair of feet which seemed to her the whitest, and of the finest shape, thinking those must be Baldur's; but when the curtain was taken away, she was surprised and sorry to find she had chosen Niörd, the god of the seashore.

The wedding took place at Asgard, and when the feasting was over, Skadi and Niörd went to dwell in his home by the sea. At first they were very happy, for Niörd was kind to his giant bride; but how could you expect one of the Æsir to live happily very long with a frost giantess for his wife?

Skadi did not like the roar of the waves, and hated the cries of the sea-gulls and the murmur of gentle summer winds. She longed for her frozen home, far away in the north, amid ice and snow.

And so they finally agreed that, for nine months of the year, Niörd should live with Skadi among her snowy mountains, where she found happiness in hunting over the white hills and valleys on her snowshoes, with her hunting dogs at her side, or skating on the ice-bound rivers and lakes. Then for the three short months of summer Skadi must live with Niörd in his palace by the sea, while he calmed the stormy ocean waves, and helped the busy fishermen to have good sailing for their boats.

Niörd loved to wander along the shore, his jacket trimmed with a fringe of lovely seaweeds and his belt made of the prettiest shells on the beach, with the friendly little sandpipers running before him, and beautiful gulls and other sea birds sailing in the air above his head. Sometimes he loved to sit on the rocks by the shore, watching the seals play in the

sunshine, or feeding the beautiful swans, his favorite birds.

There is a kind of sponge, which the people in the north still call Niörd's glove, in memory of this old Norse god.

CHAPTER XI
Baldur

I.

Baldur was the best beloved of all the gods. Odin was their father and king; to him they turned for help and wise advice, but it was to Baldur they went for loving words and bright smiles. The sight of his kind face was a joy to the Æsir, and to all the people of Midgard. They sometimes called him the god of light, a good name for him, because he truly gave to the world light and strength.

Baldur was the son of Odin and Frigga; he was the most gentle and lovely of all the gods. His beautiful palace in Asgard was bright and spotless; no evil creature could enter there; no one who had wrong thoughts could stay in that palace of love and truth.

At last, after the bright summer was over, for many days Baldur had looked sad and troubled. Some of the Æsir saw it, but most of all, his loving, watchful mother, Frigga. Baldur could not bear to worry his mother, so he kept his sorrow to himself, saying nothing about it; but at last Frigga drew his secret from him, and then his friends knew that Baldur had had dreams which told of coming trouble, dreams of his leaving all his friends and going away from Asgard, to dwell in another land.

Odin and Frigga, fearing the dreams might come true and they must lose their beloved son, began to think what they could do to prevent it.

Then the loving mother said, "I will make all things in the world promise not to hurt our son." And so Queen Frigga sent out for everything in the whole world, and everything came trooping to Asgard, to her palace. All living creatures came

from the land, from the water, and from the air. All plants and trees came; all rocks, stones, and even the metals under the earth, where the busy dwarfs worked. Fire came, and water, as well as all poisons, and sickness. Everything promised not to harm the good Baldur, except one little plant called mistletoe, which was so small that Frigga did not send for it, feeling sure it could not do any harm.

"Now I am happy once more," said the queen, "for our Baldur is safe!" And she sat at peace in her beautiful palace, rejoicing that her dear son was free from all danger.

But Odin, the wise Allfather, still felt uneasy, even after all these promises, fearing what might happen. So he took his eight-footed steed, Sleipnir, and rode forth from Asgard to the underworld to find Hela, the wise woman who ruled over that far-off land. She could tell everything that was going to happen, and she knew the names of all those who were coming to dwell with her. Odin was the only one wise enough to speak with Hela, for no one else knew the words that would call her forth from her dwelling; but when Odin called, she came to answer.

"Tell me," said he, "for whom are you making ready this costly room?"

"We make ready for Baldur, the god of light," replied Hela.

"Who, then, will slay Baldur, and bring such darkness and sorrow to Asgard?"

Again said the wise woman, "It is Hodur, Baldur's twin brother, who will slay the sun-god." And with these words she vanished.

Sadly Father Odin returned to Asgard, and told his wife the words of Hela; but Frigga was not troubled in her heart, for she felt sure that nothing would hurt her dear son.

II.

One beautiful sunny day at the end of summer the gods

had all gone out to an open field beyond Asgard to have some sports. As they all knew that nothing could hurt Baldur, they placed him at the end of the field for a target, and then took turns throwing their darts at him, just for the fun of seeing them fall off without hurting him. They thought this was showing great honor to Baldur, and he was pleased to join in the sport.

Loki happened to be away when they began to play, and when he came was angry in his heart that nothing could hurt Baldur.

"Why should he be so favored? I hate him!" said Loki to himself, and began at once to plan some evil.

All this while Queen Frigga sat in her palace, thinking of all her dear sons, and of how much good they did to men. As she sat thus, thinking, and spinning with her hands, there came a knock at the door. The queen called, "Come in!" and an old woman stood before her.

Frigga spoke kindly to her, and soon the old woman said she had passed by the field where the gods were playing, and throwing sharp weapons at Baldur.

"Oh, yes," said Frigga; "neither metal nor wood can hurt him, for all things in the world have given me their promise."

"What!" said the old woman; "do you mean that all things have really vowed to spare Baldur?"

"All," replied the queen, "except one little plant that grows on the eastern side of Asgard; it is called mistletoe, and I thought it too small and soft to do any harm."

Before long the old woman went away, and when she was quite out of sight of Frigga's palace, threw off her woman's clothes, and who do you suppose it was? Why, no woman at all, but that wicked Loki, of course, who hurried away out of Asgard, to find the poor little plant that did not know about Baldur's danger. When he came to the place where the plant grew, Loki cutting off a branch, quickly made a sharp arrow, which he carried back to the playground, where the Æsir were

still at their game, all but one, Hodur, the god of darkness, Baldur's blind twin brother.

Then Loki went up to Hodur, and said to him in a low voice, "Why do you not join with the others in doing honor to Baldur?"

"I cannot see to take aim, you know, and besides, I have no weapon," said Hodur.

"Come, then, here is a fine new dart for you, and I will guide your hand," whispered wicked Loki; then he slipped the arrow of mistletoe wood into Hodur's hand and aimed it himself at Baldur, who stood there so bright and smiling.

Then poor blind Hodur heard a dreadful cry from all the gods: Baldur the Beautiful had fallen, struck by the arrow; he would now be taken away from them, to live with Hela in the underworld.

Every heart was filled with sorrow for this dreadful loss; but no one tried to punish him who had done the wicked deed, for they stood upon sacred ground, and the field was named the Peace-stead, or Place of Peace, where no one might hurt another. Besides, the gods did not know it was the false Loki who hated Baldur, that had struck him down.

When Frigga heard the sad news, she asked who would win her love by going to the underworld and begging Hela to let Baldur come back to them.

Hermod, the swift messenger-god, ready to do his mother's bidding, set forth at once on the long journey. Nine days and nights he traveled without resting, until he came to Hela's underworld. There he found Baldur, who was glad to see him, and sent messages to his friends in Asgard. Hela said Baldur might return to them on one condition: that every living creature, and everything in the world must weep for him.

So Hermod hastened back to Asgard, and when the Æsir heard Hela's answer, they sent out messengers over the world to bid all things weep for Baldur, their bright sun-god. Then did the beasts, the birds, the fishes, the flowers and trees, even

stones and metals weep; as indeed we can see the teardrops come to all things when they are changed from heat to cold.

As the messengers were coming back to Asgard they met an old woman, whom they bade weep, but she replied, "Let Hela keep Baldur down below; why should I care?" When the Æsir heard of this, they thought it must have been the same old woman who went before to Frigga's palace, and we know who that was.

And so Baldur the beautiful, Baldur the bright, did not come back, and all the dwellers in Asgard were sad and sorrowful without him.

CHAPTER XII
Ægir's Feast

I.

Ægir was the ruler of the ocean, and his home was deep down below the tossing waves, where the water is calm and still. There was his beautiful palace, in the wonderful coral caves; its walls all hung with bright-colored seaweeds, and the floor of white, sparkling coral sand. Such wonderful sea-plants grew all about, and still more wonderful creatures, some, which you could not tell from flowers, waving their pretty fringes in the water; some sitting fastened to the rocks and catching their food without moving, like the sponges; others darting about and chasing each other.

> "Deep in the wave is a coral grove,
> Where the purple mullet and goldfish rove;
> Where the sea-flower spreads its leaves of blue,
> That never are wet with falling dew,
> But in bright and changeful beauty shine
> Far down in the green and glassy brine.
> The floor is of sand, like the mountain drift,
> And the pearl-shells spangle the flinty snow;
> From coral rocks the sea-plants lift
> Their boughs where the tides and billows flow.
> The water is calm and still below,
> For the winds and waves are absent there,
> And the sands are bright as the stars that glow
> In the motionless fields of upper air."—Percival.

In that ocean home lived the lovely mermaids, who sometimes came up above the waves to sit on the rocks and comb

their long golden hair in the sunshine. They had heads and bodies like beautiful maidens, with fish-tails instead of feet.

One day the gods in Asgard gave a feast, and Ægir was invited. He could not often leave home to visit Asgard, for he was always very busy with the ocean winds and tides and storms; but calling his daughters, the waves, he bade them keep the ocean quiet while he was away, and look after the ships at sea.

Then Ægir went over Bifröst, the rainbow bridge, to Asgard, where they had such a gay party and such feasting that he was sorry when the time came to go home; but at last he said good-by to Father Odin and the rest of the Æsir. He thanked them all for the pleasure they had given him, saying, "If only I had a kettle that held enough mead for us all to drink, I would invite you to visit me."

Thor, who was always glad to hear about eating and drinking, said, "I know of a kettle a mile wide and a mile deep; I will fetch it for you!"

Then Ægir was pleased, and set a day for them all to come to his great feast.

So Thor took with him his brother, the brave Tyr, who knew best how to find the kettle; and together they started off in Thor's thunder chariot, drawn by goats, on their way to Utgard, the home of the giants.

When they reached that land of ice and snow, they soon found the house of Hymir, the giant who owned "Mile-deep," as the big kettle was called. The gods were glad to find that the giant was not at home, and his wife, who was more gentle than most of her people, asked them to come in and rest, advising them to be ready to run when they should hear the giant coming, and to hide behind a row of kettles which hung from a beam at the back end of the hall. "For," said she, "my husband may be very angry when he finds strangers here, and often the glance of his eye is so fierce that it kills!"

At first the mighty Thor and brave Tyr were not willing

to hide like cowards; but at last they agreed to the plan, upon the good wife promising to call them out as soon as she had told her husband about them.

It was not long before they heard the heavy steps of Hymir, as he came striding into his icy home; and very lucky it was for Thor and Tyr that the giantess had told them to hide, for when the giant heard that two of the Æsir from Asgard were in his home, so fierce a flash shot from his eyes that it broke the beam from which the kettles hung, and they all fell broken on the floor except Mile-deep.

After a while the giant grew quiet, and at last even began to be polite to his guests. He had been unlucky at his fishing that day, so he had to kill three of his oxen for supper. Thor being hungry, as usual, made Hymir quite angry by eating two whole oxen, so that, when they rose from the table the giant said, "If you keep on eating as much at every meal, as you have tonight, Thor, you will have to find your own food."

"Very well," said Thor; "I will go fishing with you in the morning!"

II.

Next morning Thor set forth with the giant, and as they walked over the fields toward the sea, Thor cut off the head of one of the finest oxen, for bait. Of course you may know that Hymir was not pleased at this, but Thor said he should need the very best kind of bait, for he was hoping to catch the Midgard serpent, that dangerous monster who lived at the bottom of the ocean, coiled around the world, with his tail in his mouth.

When they came to the shore where the boat was ready, each one took an oar, and they rowed out to deep water. Hymir was tired first, and called to Thor to stop. "We are far enough out!" he cried "This is my usual fishing-place, where I find the best whales. If we go farther the sea will be rougher, and we may run into the Midgard serpent."

As this was just what Thor wanted, he rowed all the harder, and did not stop until they were far out on the ocean; then he baited his hook with the ox's head, and threw it overboard. Soon there came a fierce jerk on the line; it grew heavier and heavier, but Thor pulled with all his might. He tugged so hard that he broke through the bottom of the boat, and had to stand on the slippery rocks beneath.

All this time the giant was looking on, wondering what was the matter, but when he saw the horrid head of the Midgard serpent rising above the waves, he was so frightened that he cut the line; and Thor, after trying so hard to rid the world of that dangerous monster, saw him fall back again under the water; even Miölnir, the magic hammer, which Thor hurled at the creature, was too late to hit him. And so the two fishermen had to turn back, and wade to the shore, carrying the broken boat and oars with them.

The giant was proud to think he had been too quick for Thor, and after they reached the house he said to the thunder-god, "Since you think you are so strong, let us see you break this goblet; if you succeed, I will give you the big kettle."

This was just what Thor wanted; so he tightened his belt of strength, and threw the goblet with all his might against the wall; but instead of breaking the goblet he broke the wall.

A second time he tried, but did no better. Then the giant's wife whispered to Thor, "Throw it at his head!" And she sang in a low voice, as she turned her spinning-wheel—

"Hard the pillar, hard the stone,
Harder yet the giant's bone!
Stones shall break and pillars fall,
Hymir's forehead breaks them all!"

Yet again Thor threw the goblet, this time against the giant's head, and it fell, broken in pieces.

Then Tyr tried to lift the Mile-deep kettle, for he was in a hurry to leave this land of ice and snow; but he could not

stir it from its place, and Thor had to help him, before they could get it out of the giant's house.

When Hymir saw the gods, whom he hated, carrying off his kettle, he called all his giant friends, and they started out in chase of the Æsir; but when Thor heard them coming he turned and saw their fierce, grinning faces glaring down at him from every rocky peak and iceberg.

Then the mighty Thunderer raised Miölnir, the hammer, above his head, and hurled it among the giants, who became stiff and cold, all turned into giant rocks, that still stand by the shore.

III.

Ægir was very glad to get Mile-deep; so he set to work to make the mead in it, to get ready for the great feast, at the time of the flax harvest, when all the Æsir were coming from Asgard to visit him.

Before the day came, all light and joy had gone from the sacred city, because the bright Baldur had been slain, and the homes of the gods were dark and lonely without him. So they were all glad to visit Ægir, to find cheer for their sadness.

There was Father Odin, with his golden helmet, and Queen Frigga, wearing her crown of stars, golden-haired Sif, Freyja, with Brisingamen, the wonderful necklace, and all the noble company of the Æsir, all except mighty Thor, who had gone far away to the giant-land.

As they all sat in Ægir's beautiful ocean hall, drinking the sweet mead, and talking together, Loki came in and stood before them; but, finding he was not welcome, and no seat saved for him, he began saying ugly things to make them all angry, and at last he grew angry himself, and slew Ægir's servant because they praised him. The Æsir drove him out from the hall, but once more he came in, and said such dreadful things that at last Frigga said, "Oh, if my son Baldur were only here, he would silence thy wicked tongue!"

Then Loki turned to Frigga, and told her that he himself was the very one who had slain Baldur. He had no sooner spoken than a heavy peal of thunder shook the hall, and angry Thor strode in, waving his magic hammer. Seeing this, the coward Loki turned and fled, and Asgard was rid of him forever.

CHAPTER XIII
The Punishment of Loki

When Loki was driven out by the mighty Thor from Ægir's palace-hall he knew that he could never again be allowed to come among the gods in Asgard. Many times had this mischievous fire-god brought trouble and sorrow to the Æsir, but now he had done the most cruel deed of all, he had slain Baldur the Good, and had driven all light and joy from Asgard.

Far away he fled, among the mountains, hoping that no one would find him there; and near a lovely mountain stream he built for himself a hut with four doors looking north, east, south, and west, so that if the wise Allfather, on his high air throne in Asgard, should see him, and send messengers to punish him, the watchful Loki could see them coming and escape by the opposite door.

He spent most of the days and nights thinking how he could get away from the Æsir. "If I ran to the stream and turned myself into a fish," he thought, "I wonder if they could catch me. I could keep out of the way of a hook; but then there are nets; Ægir's wife has a wonderful thing like a net, for catching fish, and that would be far worse than a hook!"

When Loki thought of the net, he began to wonder how it was made, and the more he thought, the more he wished he could make one so as to see how a fish could keep from getting caught in it. He sat down by the fire in his little hut, took a piece of cord and began to make a fish-net. He had nearly finished it when, looking up through the open door, he saw three of the Æsir in the distance, coming toward his hut. Loki well knew that they were coming to catch him, and, quickly throwing his net into the fire, he ran to the stream,

changed himself into a beautiful spotted salmon, and leaped into the water.

A moment later the three gods entered the hut, and one of them spied the fish-net burning in the fire. "See!" cried he, "Loki must have been making this net to catch fish; he always was a good fisherman, and now this is just what we want for catching him!"

So they snatched the last bit of the net from the fire, and by looking at it found out how to make another, which they took with them to the bank of the stream.

The first time the net was put into the water, Loki hid between two rocks, and the net was so light that it floated past him; but the next time it had a heavy stone weight, which made it sink down, till Loki saw he could not get away unless he could leap over the net. He did this, but Thor, seeing him, waded out into the stream, where he threw the net again, so that Loki must jump a second time, or else go on out into the deep sea.

As he leaped, Thor stooped and caught him in his hand, but the fish was so slippery that Thor could hardly hold it. In the struggle the salmon's tail was pinched so tightly by the thunder-god's strong fingers that it was drawn out to a point, and the old stories say that is why salmon tails are so pointed ever since.

Thus was Loki caught in his own trap, and dreadful was his punishment. The Æsir chained him to a high rock, and placed a great, poisonous serpent, hanging over the cliff above his head.

If it had not been for Loki's good, faithful wife, he would have died of the poison that dropped from the snake's mouth. She watched by her husband, holding a cup above him to catch the poison. Only when she had to turn aside to empty the cup did the drops fall upon Loki; then they gave him such terrible pain that he shook the earth with his struggles, and the people in Midgard fled from the dreadful earthquake, in

Iceland the great geysers, springs of hot water, burst through the earth, and in the south-lands burning ashes and lava poured down the mountain-sides.

There, chained to the cliff, the cruel, mischievous Loki was to lie until the Twilight of the gods, the dark day of Ragnarök, when all the mighty evil monsters and beasts would get free, and the terrible battle be fought between them and the gods of Asgard.

CHAPTER XIV
The Twilight of the Gods

Loki and Fenrir, the wolf, were safely bound, each to his separate cliff, but still happiness and peace did not return to Asgard, for Baldur was no longer there, and light and joy had gone from the home of the gods. The Æsir felt that the Twilight of the gods, which Odin knew was to come, must be near.

Soon began a long cold winter; surely it must be the beginning of the Fimbulwinter, which was to come before the last great battle. From the north came cold blasts of freezing wind; snow and ice covered the earth; men could not see the face of the sun or the moon. Everywhere there was darkness; the people grew fierce and unhappy and wicked, for they seemed no longer to love each other. So the evil deeds of men kept on, and the fierce frost giants grew stronger and stronger. They killed the trees and flowers, and bound the lakes and rivers with icy bands.

Even when summer time came, the cold still held on, and no one could see the green grass or the beautiful golden sunlight. The frost giants were pleased to see the trouble they had brought upon men, and hoped they soon could destroy Asgard and the gods.

Three long winters passed, with no light to warm and brighten the world; after that still three other dreary winters, and then the eagle who sat on the top of the great world tree, Yggdrasil, gave a loud, shrill cry; at that the earth shook, the rocks crumbled and fell, so that Loki and the wolf were freed from their chains.

The waters of the deep ocean rose and rolled high over the land, and up above the waves writhing out of the deep,

came the monster Midgard serpent to join in the last battle. Now the enemies of the gods were gathering from all sides—the frost giants, the mountain giants, with Loki, Fenrir, and the Midgard serpent.

Heimdall, the faithful watchman, looked from his watch-tower by the rainbow bridge, and when he saw the host of monsters appearing and raging toward Asgard, he blew his magic horn, Giallar, which was the signal of warning to the gods.

When Father Odin heard the blast of Heimdall's horn, he hastened to arm himself for the battle; once again it is said the Allfather sought wisdom at Mimir's fountain, asking to know how best to lead the Æsir against their enemies. But what Mimir said to him no one ever knew, for a second call sounded from the Giallar horn, and the gods, with Odin at their head, rode forth from Asgard to meet their foes.

Thor took his place beside Odin, but they were soon parted in the struggle. The thunder-god fell upon his old enemy, the serpent, whom twice before he had tried to slay, and after a fierce fight, he at last conquered and slew the monster; but the poisonous breath from the serpent's mouth overcame the mighty Thor, and he also fell.

Heimdall and Loki came face to face, and each slew the other. Thus every one of the gods battled each with his foe, till at last the darkness grew deeper, and all, both gods and giants lay dead. Then fire burst forth, raging from Utgard to Asgard—and all the worlds were destroyed in that dreadful day of Ragnarök.

But this was not the end of all: after many months, and years, and even centuries had passed, a new world began to appear, with the fair ocean, and the beautiful land, with a bright, shining sun by day, and the moon and stars by night. Then once more the light and heat from the sun made the grass and trees grow, and the flowers bloom.

Baldur and Hodur came to this beautiful new world, and

walked and talked together. Thor's sons were there, too, and with them, the hammer, Miölnir, no longer for use against giants, but for helping men build homes.

Two people, a man and a woman, who were kept safe through the raging fire, now came to dwell on the earth, and all their children and grandchildren lived at peace with each other in this beautiful new world.

Baldur and Hodur talked often of the old days when the Æsir dwelt in Asgard, before Loki, the wicked one, brought darkness and trouble to them. With loving words they spoke of Odin and Frigga; and the brave Tyr, who gave his right hand to save the Æsir; of mighty Thor; and faithful Heimdall; of lovely Freyja, with her beautiful necklace; and of fair Iduna's garden, where they used to sit and eat her magic apples. "But still," they said, "we know now that this new world is fairer than the old, and here, also, the loving Allfather watches over his children."

IN THE DAYS OF GIANTS

A Book of Norse Tales

By Abbie Farwell Brown


E. D. SMITH

Index of Names

Ægir (ā´jir). God of the deep sea.
Æsir (ā´sir). The twelve gods of Asgard.
Alfheim (ălf´hīm). Home of the elves and of Frey.
Asgard (as´gärd). The home of the Æsir.
Baldur (bạl´der). The sun-god.
Bifröst (bē´frẽst). The rainbow bridge.
Bragi (brä´gē). The god of poetry. Husband of Iduna.
Brisingamen (brĭ sing´ä men). Freyja's necklace.
Brock. One of the dwarfs.
Fenrir. The monster wolf.
Fimbulwinter (fim´bul). The last stormy winter.
Frey (frī). The god of summer and of the elves.
Freyja (frī´yă). The goddess of love and beauty.
Frigga (frĭg´ä). The queen of the gods. Wife of Odin.
Giallar-Horn (Gyäl´lar). Heimdall's trumpet.
Gladsheim (glădz´hīm). Odin's palace.
Heimdall (hīm´däl). Guardian of the rainbow bridge.
Hela (hē´lä). Queen of the underworld.
Hermod (hẽr´mod). The messenger-god.
Hodur (ho´der). God of darkness. Baldur's brother.
Hönir (hẽ´nir). God of mind or thought.
Hymir (hē´mir). The frost giant who owned the great kettle called Mile-deep.
Iduna (ē doon´ä). Goddess of spring.
Jötunheim (yẽ´toon hīm). Home of the giants.
Loki (lō´kē). God of fire.
Midgard. The earth.
Mimir (mē´mir). Guardian of the well of wisdom.
Miölnir (myẽl´nir). Thor's magic hammer.

Niflheim (nĭfl´hīm). The underground world.
Niörd (nye͡rd). God of the seashore.
Norns. The three Fates.
Odin (ō´din). The father, or chief, of the gods.
Odur (ō´dûr). Freyja's husband.
Ragnarök (råg´nå rûk). The Twilight of the gods.
Sif. Wife of Thor.
Sindri. One of the dwarfs.
Skadi (skä´dē). Thiassi's daughter.
Sleipnir (slīp´nir). Odin's eight-footed steed.
Thiassi (tē äs´sē). A frost giant. Skadi's father.
Thor (thor or tor). God of thunder.
Tyr (tēr) or Tiu (tū). God of war.
Utgard (oo͡t´gärd). City of the giants, in Jötunheim.
Yggdrasil (ig´drå sil). The world tree.

Key to Pronunciation

ā as in ale.
ă as in am.
ä as in arm.
ō as in old.
oo͡ as in foot.
a̤ as in all.
å as in ask.
ē as in eve.
û as in urn.
ū as in use.
e͡ as in fern.
ī as in ice.
ĭ as in ill.

CHAPTER I
The Beginning of Things

The oldest stories of every race of people tell about the Beginning of Things. But the various folk who first told them were so very different, the tales are so very old, and have changed so greatly in the telling from one generation to another, that there are almost as many accounts of the way in which the world began as there are nations upon the earth. So it is not strange that the people of the North have a legend of the Beginning quite different from that of the Southern, Eastern, and Western folk.

This book is made of the stories told by the Northern folk—the people who live in the land of the midnight sun, where summer is green and pleasant, but winter is a terrible time of cold and gloom; where rocky mountains tower like huge giants, over whose heads the thunder rolls and crashes, and under whose feet are mines of precious metals. Therefore you will find the tales full of giants and dwarfs—spirits of the cold mountains and dark caverns.

You will find the hero to be Thor, with his thunderbolt hammer, who dwells in the happy heaven of Asgard, where All-Father Odin is king, and where Balder the beautiful makes springtime with his smile. In the north countries, winter, cold, and frost are very real and terrible enemies; while spring, sunshine, and warmth are near and dear friends. So the story of the Beginning of Things is a story of cold and heat, of the wicked giants who loved the cold, and of the good Æsir, who basked in pleasant warmth.

In the very beginning of things, the stories say, there were two worlds, one of burning heat and one of icy cold. The cold world was in the north, and from it flowed Elivâgar, a river of

poisonous water which hardened into ice and piled up into great mountains, filling the space which had no bottom. The other world in the south was on fire with bright flame, a place of heat most terrible. And in those days through all space there was nothing beside these two worlds of heat and cold.

But then began a fierce combat. Heat and cold met and strove to destroy each other, as they have tried to do ever since. Flaming sparks from the hot world fell upon the ice river which flowed from the place of cold. And though the bright sparks were quenched, in dying they wrought mischief, as they do today; for they melted the ice, which dripped and dripped, like tears from the suffering world of cold. And then, wonderful to say, these chilly drops became alive; became a huge, breathing mass, a Frost-Giant with a wicked heart of ice. And he was the ancestor of all the giants who came afterwards, a bad and cruel race.

At that time there was no earth nor sea nor heaven, nothing but the icy abyss without bottom, whence Ymir the giant had sprung. And there he lived, nourished by the milk of a cow which the heat had formed. Now the cow had nothing for her food but the snow and ice of Elivâgar, and that was cold victuals indeed! One day she was licking the icy rocks, which tasted salty to her, when Ymir noticed that the mass was taking a strange shape. The more the cow licked it, the plainer became the outline of the shape. And when evening came Ymir saw thrusting itself through the icy rock a head of hair. The next day the cow went on with her meal, and at night-time a man's head appeared above the rock. On the third day the cow licked away the ice until forth stepped a man, tall and powerful and handsome. This was no evil giant, for he was good; and, strangely, though he came from the ice his heart was warm. He was the ancestor of the kind Æsir; for All-Father Odin and his brothers Vili and Ve, the first of the gods, were his grandsons, and as soon as they were born they became the enemies of the race of giants.

Now after a few giant years—ages and ages of time as we reckon it—there was a great battle, for Odin and his brothers wished to destroy all the evil in the world and to leave only good. They attacked the wicked giant Ymir, first of all his race, and after hard fighting slew him. Ymir was so huge that when he died a mighty river of blood flowed from the wounds which Odin had given him; a stream so large that it flooded all space, and the frost-giants, his children and grandchildren, were drowned, except one who escaped with his wife in a chest. And but for the saving of these two, that would have been the end of the race of giants.

All-Father and his brothers now had work to do. Painfully they dragged the great bulk of Ymir into the bottomless space of ice, and from it they built the earth, the sea, and the heavens. Not an atom of his body went to waste. His blood made the great ocean, the rivers, lakes, and springs. His mighty bones became mountains. His teeth and broken bones made sand and pebbles. From his skull they fashioned the arching heaven, which they set up over the earth and sea. His brain became the heavy clouds. His hair sprouted into trees, grass, plants, and flowers. And last of all, the Æsir set his bristling eyebrows as a high fence around the earth, to keep the giants away from the race of men whom they had planned to create for this pleasant globe.

So the earth was made. And next the gods brought light for the heavens. They caught the sparks and cinders blown from the world of heat, and set them here and there, above and below, as sun and moon and stars. To each they gave its name and told what its duties were to be, and how it must perform them, day after day, and year after year, and century after century, till the ending of all things; so that the children of men might reckon time without mistake.

Sôl and Mâni, who drove the bright chariots of the sun and moon across the sky, were a fair sister and brother whose father named them Sun and Moon because they were so

beautiful. So Odin gave them each a pair of swift, bright horses to drive, and set them in the sky forever. Once upon a time—but that was many, many years later—Mâni, the Man in the Moon, stole two children from the earth. Hiuki and Bil were going to a well to draw a pail of water. The little boy and girl carried a pole and a bucket across their shoulders, and looked so pretty that Mâni thrust down a long arm and snatched them up to his moon. And there they are to this day, as you can see on any moonlight night—two little black shadows on the moon's bright face, the boy and the girl, with the bucket between them.

The gods also made Day and Night. Day was fair, bright, and beautiful, for he was of the warm-hearted Æsir race. But Night was dark and gloomy, because she was one of the cold giant-folk. Day and Night had each a chariot drawn by a swift horse, and each in turn drove about the world in a twenty-four hours' journey. Night rode first behind her dark horse, Hrîmfaxi, who scattered dew from his bit upon the sleeping earth. After her came Day with his beautiful horse, Glad, whose shining mane shot rays of light through the sky.

All these wonders the kind gods wrought that they might make a pleasant world for men to call their home. And now the gods, or Æsir as they were called, must choose a place for their own dwelling, for there were many of them, a glorious family. Outside of everything, beyond the great ocean which surrounded the world, was Jotunheim, the cold country where the giants lived. The green earth was made for men. The gods therefore decided to build their city above men in the heavens, where they could watch the doings of their favorites and protect them from the wicked giants. Asgard was to be their city, and from Asgard to Midgard, the home of men, stretched a wonderful bridge, a bridge of many colors. For it was the rainbow that we know and love. Up and down the rainbow bridge the Æsir could travel to the earth, and thus keep close to the doings of men.

Next, from the remnants of Ymir's body the gods made the race of little dwarfs, a wise folk and skillful, but in nature more like the giants than like the good Æsir; for they were spiteful and often wicked, and they loved the dark and the cold better than light and warmth. They lived deep down below the ground in caves and rocky dens, and it was their business to dig the precious metals and glittering gems that were hidden in the rocks, and to make wonderful things from the treasures of the under-world. Pouf! pouf! went their little bellows. Tink-tank! went their little hammers on their little anvils all day and all night. Sometimes they were friendly to the giants, and sometimes they did kindly deeds for the Æsir. But always after men came upon the earth they hated these new folk who eagerly sought for the gold and the jewels which the dwarfs kept hidden in the ground. The dwarfs lost no chance of doing evil to the race of men.

Now the gods were ready for the making of men. They longed to have a race of creatures whom they could love and protect and bless with all kinds of pleasures. So Odin, with his brothers Hœnir and Loki, crossed the rainbow bridge and came down to the earth. They were walking along the sea-shore when they found two trees, an ash and an elm. These would do as well as anything for their purpose. Odin took the two trees and warmly breathed upon them; and lo! they were alive, a man and a woman. Hœnir then gently touched their foreheads, and they became wise. Lastly Loki softly stroked their faces; their skin grew pink with ruddy color, and they received the gifts of speech, hearing, and sight. Ask and Embla were their names, and the ash and the elm became the father and mother of the whole human race whose dwelling was Midgard, under the eyes of the Æsir who had made them.

This is the story of the Beginning of Things.

CHAPTER II
How Odin Lost His Eye

In the beginning of things, before there was any world or sun, moon, and stars, there were the giants; for these were the oldest creatures that ever breathed. They lived in Jotunheim, the land of frost and darkness, and their hearts were evil. Next came the gods, the good Æsir, who made earth and sky and sea, and who dwelt in Asgard, above the heavens. Then were created the queer little dwarfs, who lived underground in the caverns of the mountains, working at their mines of metal and precious stones. Last of all, the gods made men to dwell in Midgard, the good world that we know, between which and the glorious home of the Æsir stretched Bifröst, the bridge of rainbows.

In those days, folk say, there was a mighty ash-tree named Yggdrasil, so vast that its branches shaded the whole earth and stretched up into heaven where the Æsir dwelt, while its roots sank far down below the lowest depth. In the branches of the big ash-tree lived a queer family of creatures. First, there was a great eagle, who was wiser than any bird that ever lived—except the two ravens, Thought and Memory, who sat upon Father Odin's shoulders and told him the secrets which they learned in their flight over the wide world. Near the great eagle perched a hawk, and four antlered deer browsed among the buds of Yggdrasil. At the foot of the tree coiled a huge serpent, who was always gnawing hungrily at its roots, with a whole colony of little snakes to keep him company—so many that they could never be counted. The eagle at the top of the tree and the serpent at its foot were enemies, always saying hard things of each other. Between the two skipped up and down a little squirrel, a tale-bearer and a gossip, who repeated

each unkind remark and, like the malicious neighbor that he was, kept their quarrel ever fresh and green.

In one place at the roots of Yggdrasil was a fair fountain called the Urdar-well, where the three Norn-maidens, who knew the past, present, and future, dwelt with their pets, the two white swans. This was magic water in the fountain, which the Norns sprinkled every day upon the giant tree to keep it green—water so sacred that everything which entered it became white as the film of an eggshell. Close beside this sacred well the Æsir had their council hall, to which they galloped every morning over the rainbow bridge.

But Father Odin, the king of all the Æsir, knew of another fountain more wonderful still; the two ravens whom he sent forth to bring him news had told him. This also was below the roots of Yggdrasil, in the spot where the sky and ocean met. Here for centuries and centuries the giant Mimer had sat keeping guard over his hidden well, in the bottom of which lay such a treasure of wisdom as was to be found nowhere else in the world. Every morning Mimer dipped his glittering horn Giöll into the fountain and drew out a draught of the wondrous water, which he drank to make him wise. Every day he grew wiser and wiser; and as this had been going on ever since the beginning of things, you can scarcely imagine how wise Mimer was.

Now it did not seem right to Father Odin that a giant should have all this wisdom to himself; for the giants were the enemies of the Æsir, and the wisdom which they had been hoarding for ages before the gods were made was generally used for evil purposes. Moreover, Odin longed and longed to become the wisest being in the world. So he resolved to win a draught from Mimer's well, if in any way that could be done.

One night, when the sun had set behind the mountains of Midgard, Odin put on his broad-brimmed hat and his striped cloak, and taking his famous staff in his hand, trudged down the long bridge to where it ended by Mimer's secret

grotto.

"Good-day, Mimer," said Odin, entering; "I have come for a drink from your well."

The giant was sitting with his knees drawn up to his chin, his long white beard falling over his folded arms, and his head nodding; for Mimer was very old, and he often fell asleep while watching over his precious spring. He woke with a frown at Odin's words. "You want a drink from my well, do you?" he growled. "Hey! I let no one drink from my well."

"Nevertheless, you must let me have a draught from your glittering horn," insisted Odin, "and I will pay you for it."

"Oho, you will pay me for it, will you?" echoed Mimer, eyeing his visitor keenly. For now that he was wide awake, his wisdom taught him that this was no ordinary stranger. "What will you pay for a drink from my well, and why do you wish it so much?"

"I can see with my eyes all that goes on in heaven and upon earth," said Odin, "but I cannot see into the depths of ocean. I lack the hidden wisdom of the deep—the wit that lies at the bottom of your fountain. My ravens tell me many secrets; but I would know all. And as for payment, ask what you will, and I will pledge anything in return for the draught of wisdom."

Then Mimer's keen glance grew keener. "You are Odin, of the race of gods," he cried. "We giants are centuries older than you, and our wisdom which we have treasured during these ages, when we were the only creatures in all space, is a precious thing. If I grant you a draught from my well, you will become as one of us, a wise and dangerous enemy. It is a goodly price, Odin, which I shall demand for a boon so great."

Now Odin was growing impatient for the sparkling water. "Ask your price," he frowned. "I have promised that I will pay."

"What say you, then, to leaving one of those far-seeing eyes of yours at the bottom of my well?" asked Mimer, hoping

that he would refuse the bargain. "This is the only payment I will take."

Odin hesitated. It was indeed a heavy price, and one that he could ill afford, for he was proud of his noble beauty. But he glanced at the magic fountain bubbling mysteriously in the shadow, and he knew that he must have the draught.

"Give me the glittering horn," he answered. "I pledge you my eye for a draught to the brim."

Very unwillingly Mimer filled the horn from the fountain of wisdom and handed it to Odin. "Drink, then," he said; "drink and grow wise. This hour is the beginning of trouble between your race and mine." And wise Mimer foretold the truth.

Odin thought merely of the wisdom which was to be his. He seized the horn eagerly, and emptied it without delay. From that moment he became wiser than anyone else in the world except Mimer himself.

Now he had the price to pay, which was not so pleasant. When he went away from the grotto, he left at the bottom of the dark pool one of his fiery eyes, which twinkled and winked up through the magic depths like the reflection of a star. This is how Odin lost his eye, and why from that day he was careful to pull his gray hat low over his face when he wanted to pass unnoticed. For by this oddity folk could easily recognize the wise lord of Asgard.

In the bright morning, when the sun rose over the mountains of Midgard, old Mimer drank from his bubbly well a draught of the wise water that flowed over Odin's pledge. Doing so, from his underground grotto he saw all that befell in heaven and on earth. So that he also was wiser by the bargain. Mimer seemed to have secured rather the best of it; for he lost nothing that he could not spare, while Odin lost what no man can well part with—one of the good windows wherethrough his heart looks out upon the world. But there was a sequel to these doings which made the balance swing down

in Odin's favor.

Not long after this, the Æsir quarreled with the Vanir, wild enemies of theirs, and there was a terrible battle. But in the end the two sides made peace; and to prove that they meant never to quarrel again, they exchanged hostages. The Vanir gave to the Æsir old Niörd the rich, the lord of the sea and the ocean wind, with his two children, Frey and Freia. This was indeed a gracious gift; for Freia was the most beautiful maid in the world, and her twin brother was almost as fair. To the Vanir in return Father Odin gave his own brother Hœnir. And with Hœnir he sent Mimer the wise, whom he took from his lonely well.

Now the Vanir made Hœnir their chief, thinking that he must be very wise because he was the brother of great Odin, who had lately become famous for his wisdom. They did not know the secret of Mimer's well, how the hoary old giant was far more wise than anyone who had not quaffed of the magic water. It is true that in the assemblies of the Vanir Hœnir gave excellent counsel. But this was because Mimer whispered in Hœnir's ear all the wisdom that he uttered. Witless Hœnir was quite helpless without his aid, and did not know what to do or say. Whenever Mimer was absent he would look nervous and frightened, and if folk questioned him he always answered:—

"Yes, ah yes! Now go and consult someone else."

Of course the Vanir soon grew very angry at such silly answers from their chief, and presently they began to suspect the truth. "Odin has deceived us," they said. "He has sent us his foolish brother with a witch to tell him what to say. Ha! We will show him that we understand the trick." So they cut off poor old Mimer's head and sent it to Odin as a present.

The tales do not say what Odin thought of the gift. Perhaps he was glad that now there was no one in the whole world who could be called so wise as himself. Perhaps he was sorry for the danger into which he had thrust a poor old giant

who had never done him any wrong, except to be a giant of the race which the Æsir hated. Perhaps he was a little ashamed of the trick which he had played the Vanir. Odin's new wisdom showed him how to prepare Mimer's head with herbs and charms, so that it stood up by itself quite naturally and seemed not dead. Thenceforth Odin kept it near him, and learned from it many useful secrets which it had not forgotten.

So in the end Odin fared better than the unhappy Mimer, whose worst fault was that he knew more than most folk. That is a dangerous fault, as others have found; though it is not one for which many of us need fear being punished.

CHAPTER III
Kvasir's Blood

Once upon a time there lived a man named Kvasir, who was so wise that no one could ask him a question to which he did not know the answer, and who was so eloquent that his words dripped from his lips like notes of music from a lute. For Kvasir was the first poet who ever lived, the first of those wise makers of songs whom the Norse folk named skalds. This Kvasir received his precious gifts wonderfully; for he was made by the gods and the Vanir, those two mighty races, to celebrate the peace which was evermore to be between them.

Up and down the world Kvasir traveled, lending his wisdom to the use of men, his brothers; and wherever he went he brought smiles and joy and comfort, for with his wisdom he found the cause of all men's troubles, and with his songs he healed them. This is what the poets have been doing in all the ages ever since. Folk declare that every skald has a drop of Kvasir's blood in him. This is the tale which is told to show how it happened that Kvasir's blessed skill has never been lost to the world.

There were two wicked dwarfs named Fialar and Galar who envied Kvasir his power over the hearts of men, and who plotted to destroy him. So one day they invited him to dine, and while he was there, they begged him to come aside with them, for they had a very secret question to ask, which only he could answer. Kvasir never refused to turn his wisdom to another's help; so, nothing suspecting, he went with them to hear their trouble.

Thereupon this sly pair of wicked dwarfs led him into a lonely corner. Treacherously they slew Kvasir; and because their cunning taught them that his blood must be precious,

they saved it in three huge kettles, and mixing it with honey, made thereof a magic drink. Truly, a magic drink it was; for whoever tasted of Kvasir's blood was straightway filled with Kvasir's spirit, so that his heart taught wisdom and his lips uttered the sweetest poesy. Thus the wicked dwarfs became possessed of a wonderful treasure.

When the gods missed the silver voice of Kvasir echoing up from the world below, they were alarmed, for Kvasir was very dear to them. They inquired what had become of him, and finally the wily dwarfs answered that the good poet had been drowned in his own wisdom. But Father Odin, who had tasted another wise draught from Mimer's well, knew that this was not the truth, and kept his watchful eye upon the dark doings of Fialar and Galar.

Not long after this the dwarfs committed another wicked deed. They invited the giant Gilling to row out to sea with them, and when they were a long distance from shore, the wicked fellows upset the boat and drowned the giant, who could not swim. They rowed back to land, and told the giant's wife how the "accident" had happened. Then there were giant shrieks and howls enough to deafen all the world, for the poor giantess was heartbroken, and her grief was a giant grief. Her sobs annoyed the cruel-hearted dwarfs. So Fialar, pretending to sympathize, offered to take her where she could look upon the spot where her dear husband had last been seen. As she passed through the gateway, the other dwarf, to whom his brother had made a sign, let a huge millstone fall upon her head. That was the ending of her, poor thing, and of her sorrow, which had so disturbed the little people, crooked in heart as in body.

But punishment was in store for them. Suttung, the huge son of Gilling, learned the story of his parents' death, and presently, in a dreadful rage, he came roaring to the home of the dwarfs. He seized one of them in each big fist, and wading far out to sea, set the wretched little fellows on a rock which

at high tide would be covered with water.

"Stay there," he cried, "and drown as my father drowned!" The dwarfs screamed thereat for mercy so loudly that he had to listen before he went away.

"Only let us off, Suttung," they begged, "and you shall have the precious mead made from Kvasir's blood."

Now Suttung was very anxious to own this same mead, so at last he agreed to the bargain. He carried them back to land, and they gave him the kettles in which they had mixed the magic fluid. Suttung took them away to his cave in the mountains, and gave them in charge of his fair daughter Gunnlöd. All day and all night she watched by the precious kettles, to see that no one came to steal or taste of the mead; for Suttung thought of it as his greatest treasure, and no wonder.

Father Odin had seen all these deeds from his seat above the heavens, and his eye had followed longingly the passage of the wondrous mead, for Odin longed to have a draught of it. Odin had wisdom, he had drained that draught from the bottom of Mimer's mystic fountain; but he lacked the skill of speech which comes of drinking Kvasir's blood. He wanted the mead for himself and for his children in Asgard, and it seemed a shame that this precious treasure should be wasted upon the wicked giants who were their enemies. So he resolved to try if it might not be won in some sly way.

One day he put on his favorite disguise as a wandering old man, and set out for Giant Land, where Suttung dwelt. By and by he came to a field where nine workmen were cutting hay. Now these were the servants of Baugi, the brother of Suttung, and this Odin knew. He walked up to the men and watched them working for a little while.

"Ho!" he exclaimed at last, "your scythes are dull. Shall I whet them for you?" The men were glad enough to accept his offer, so Odin took a whetstone from his pocket and sharpened all the scythes most wonderfully. Then the men wanted to buy the stone; each man would have it for his own, and

they fell to quarreling over it. To make matters more exciting, Odin tossed the whetstone into their midst, saying:—

"Let him have it who catches it!" Then indeed there was trouble! The men fought with one another for the stone, slashing right and left with their sharp scythes until everyone was killed. Odin hastened away, and went up to the house where Baugi lived. Presently home came Baugi, complaining loudly and bitterly because his quarrelsome servants had killed one another, so that there was not one left to do his work.

"What am I going to do?" he cried. "Here it is mowing time, and I have not a single man to help me in the field!"

Then Odin spoke up. "I will help you," he said. "I am a stout fellow, and I can do the work of nine men if I am paid the price I ask."

"What is the price which you ask?" queried Baugi eagerly, for he saw that this stranger was a mighty man, and he thought that perhaps he could do as he boasted.

"I ask that you get for me a drink of Suttung's mead," Odin answered.

Then Baugi eyed him sharply. "You are one of the gods," he said, "or you would not know about the precious mead. Therefore I know that you can do my work, the work of nine men. I cannot give you the mead. It is my brother's, and he is very jealous of it, for he wishes it all himself. But if you will work for me all the summer, when winter comes I will go with you to Suttung's home and try what I can do to get a draught for you."

So they made the bargain, and all summer Father Odin worked in the fields of Baugi, doing the work of nine men. When the winter came, he demanded his pay. So then they set out for Suttung's home, which was a cave deep down in the mountains, where it seems not hard to hide one's treasures. First Baugi went to his brother and told him of the agreement between him and the stranger, begging for a gift of

the magic mead wherewith to pay the stout laborer who had done the work of nine. But Suttung refused to spare even a taste of the precious liquor.

"This laborer of yours is one of the gods, our enemies," he said. "Indeed, I will not give him of the precious mead. What are you thinking of, brother!" Then he talked to Baugi till the giant was ready to forget his promise to Odin, and to desire only the death of the stranger who had come forward to help him.

Baugi returned to Odin with the news that the mead was not to be had with Suttung's consent. "Then we must get it without his consent," declared Odin. "We must use our wits to steal it from under his nose. You must help me, Baugi, for you have promised."

Baugi agreed to this; but in his heart he meant to entrap Odin to his death. Odin now took from his pocket an auger such as one uses to bore holes. "Look, now," he said. "You shall bore a hole into the roof of Suttung's cave, and when the hole is large enough, I will crawl through and get the mead."

"Very well," nodded Baugi, and he began to bore into the mountain with all his might and main. At last he cried, "There, it is done; the mountain is pierced through!" But when Odin blew into the hole to see whether it did indeed go through into the cave, the dust made by the auger flew into his face. Thus he knew that Baugi was deceiving him, and thenceforth he was on his guard, which was fortunate.

"Try again," said Odin sternly. "Bore a little deeper, friend Baugi." So Baugi went at the work once more, and this time when he said the hole was finished, Odin found that his word was true, for the dust blew through the hole and disappeared in the cave. Now Odin was ready to try the plan which he had been forming.

Odin's wisdom taught him many tricks, and among them he knew the secret of changing his form into that of any

creature he chose. He turned himself into a worm—a long, slender, wiggly worm, just small enough to be able to enter the hole that Baugi had pierced. In a moment he had thrust his head into the opening, and was wriggling out of sight before Baugi had even guessed what he meant to do. Baugi jumped forward and made a stab at him with the pointed auger, but it was too late. The worm's striped tail quivered in out of sight, and Baugi's wicked attempt was spoiled.

When Odin had crept through the hole, he found himself in a dark, damp cavern, where at first he could see nothing. He changed himself back into his own noble form, and then he began to hunt about for the kettles of magic mead. Presently he came to a little chamber, carefully hidden in a secret corner of this secret grotto—a chamber locked and barred and bolted on the inside, so that no one could enter by the door. Suttung had never thought of such a thing as that a stranger might enter by a hole in the roof!

At the back of this tiny room stood three kettles upon the floor; and beside them, with her head resting on her elbow, sat a beautiful maiden, sound asleep. It was Gunnlöd, Suttung's daughter, the guardian of the mead. Odin stepped up to her very softly, and bending over, kissed her gently upon the forehead. Gunnlöd awoke with a start, and at first she was horrified to find a stranger in the cave where it seemed impossible that a stranger could enter. But when she saw the beauty of Odin's face and the kind look of his eye, she was no longer afraid, but glad that he had come. For poor Gunnlöd often grew lonesome in this gloomy cellar-home, where Suttung kept her prisoner day and night to watch over the three kettles.

"Dear maiden," said Odin, "I have come a long, long distance to see you. Will you not bid me stay a little while?"

Gunnlöd looked at him kindly. "Who are you, and whence do you come so far to see me?" she asked.

"I am Odin, from Asgard. The way is long and I am thirsty.

Shall I not taste the liquor which you have there?"

Gunnlöd hesitated. "My father bade me never let soul taste of the mead," she said "I am sorry for you, however, poor fellow. You look very tired and thirsty. You may have one little sip." Then Odin kissed her and thanked her, and tarried there with such pleasant words for the maiden that before he was ready to go she granted him what he asked—three draughts, only three draughts of the mead.

Now Odin took up the first kettle to drink, and with one draught he drained the whole. He did the same by the next, and the next, till before she knew it, Gunnlöd found herself guarding three empty kettles. Odin had gained what he came for, and it was time for him to be gone before Suttung should come to seek him in the cave. He kissed fair Gunnlöd once again, with a sigh to think that he must treat her so unfairly. Then he changed himself into an eagle, and away he flew to carry the precious mead home to Asgard.

Meanwhile Baugi had told the giant Suttung how Odin the worm had pierced through into his treasure-cave; and when Suttung, who was watching, saw the great eagle fly forth, he guessed who this eagle must be. Suttung also put on an eagle's plumage, and a wonderful chase began. Whirr, whirr! The two enormous birds winged their way toward Asgard, Suttung close upon the other's flight. Over the mountains they flew, and the world was darkened as if by the passage of heavy storm-clouds, while the trees, blown by the breeze from their wings, swayed, and bent almost to the ground.

It was a close race; but Odin was the swifter of the two, and at last he had the mead safe in Asgard, where the gods were waiting with huge dishes to receive it from his mouth. Suttung was so close upon him, however, that he jostled Odin even as he was filling the last dish, and some of the mead was spilled about in every direction over the world. Men rushed from far and near to taste of these wasted drops of Kvasir's

blood, and many had just enough to make them dizzy, but not enough to make them wise. These folk are the poor poets, the makers of bad verses, whom one finds to this day satisfied with their meagre, stolen portion, scattered drops of the sacred draught.

The mead that Odin had captured he gave to the gods, a wondrous gift; and they in turn cherished it as their most precious treasure. It was given into the special charge of old Bragi of the white beard, because his taste of the magic mead had made him wise and eloquent above all others. He was the sweetest singer of all the Æsir, and his speech was poetry. Sometimes Bragi gave a draught of Kvasir's blood to some favored mortal, and then he also became a great poet. He did not do this often—only once or twice in the memory of an old man; for the precious mead must be made to last a long, long time, until the world be ready to drop to pieces, because this world without its poets would be too dreadful a place to imagine.

CHAPTER IV
The Giant Builder

Ages and ages ago, when the world was first made, the gods decided to build a beautiful city high above the heavens, the most glorious and wonderful city that ever was known. Asgard was to be its name, and it was to stand on Ida Plain under the shade of Yggdrasil, the great tree whose roots were underneath the earth.

First of all they built a house with a silver roof, where there were seats for all the twelve chiefs. In the midst, and high above the rest, was the wonder-throne of Odin the All-Father, whence he could see everything that happened in the sky or on the earth or in the sea. Next they made a fair house for Queen Frigg and her lovely daughters. Then they built a smithy, with its great hammers, tongs, anvils, and bellows, where the gods could work at their favorite trade, the making of beautiful things out of gold; which they did so well that folk name that time the Golden Age. Afterwards, as they had more leisure, they built separate houses for all the Æsir, each more beautiful than the preceding, for of course they were continually growing more skillful. They saved Father Odin's palace until the last, for they meant this to be the largest and the most splendid of all.

Gladsheim, the home of joy, was the name of Odin's house, and it was built all of gold, set in the midst of a wood whereof the trees had leaves of ruddy gold—like an autumn-gilded forest. For the safety of All-Father it was surrounded by a roaring river and by a high picket fence; and there was a great courtyard within.

The glory of Gladsheim was its wondrous hall, radiant with gold, the most lovely room that time has ever seen.

Valhalla, the Hall of Heroes, was the name of it, and it was roofed with the mighty shields of warriors. The ceiling was made of interlacing spears, and there was a portal at the west end before which hung a great gray wolf, while over him a fierce eagle hovered. The hall was so huge that it had 540 gates, through each of which 800 men could march abreast. Indeed, there needed to be room, for this was the hall where every morning Odin received all the brave warriors who had died in battle on the earth below; and there were many heroes in those days.

This was the reward which the gods gave to courage. When a hero had gloriously lost his life, the Valkyries, the nine warrior daughters of Odin, brought his body up to Valhalla on their white horses that gallop the clouds. There they lived forever after in happiness, enjoying the things that they had most loved upon earth. Every morning they armed themselves and went out to fight with one another in the great courtyard. It was a wondrous game, wondrously played. No matter how often a hero was killed, he became alive again in time to return perfectly well to Valhalla, where he ate a delicious breakfast with the Æsir; while the beautiful Valkyries who had first brought him thither waited at table and poured the blessed mead, which only the immortal taste. A happy life it was for the heroes, and a happy life for all who dwelt in Asgard; for this was before trouble had come among the gods, following the mischief of Loki.

This is how the trouble began. From the beginning of time, the giants had been unfriendly to the Æsir, because the giants were older and huger and more wicked; besides, they were jealous because the good Æsir were fast gaining more wisdom and power than the giants had ever known. It was the Æsir who set the fair brother and sister, Sun and Moon, in the sky to give light to men; and it was they also who made the jeweled stars out of sparks from the place of fire. The giants hated the Æsir, and tried all in their power to injure

them and the men of the earth below, whom the Æsir loved and cared for. The gods had already built a wall around Midgard, the world of men, to keep the giants out; built it of the bushy eyebrows of Ymir, the oldest and hugest of giants. Between Asgard and the giants flowed Ifing, the great river on which ice never formed, and which the gods crossed on the rainbow bridge. But this was not protection enough. Their beautiful new city needed a fortress.

So the word went forth in Asgard—"We must build us a fortress against the giants; the hugest, strongest, finest fortress that ever was built."

Now one day, soon after they had announced this decision, there came a mighty man stalking up the rainbow bridge that led to Asgard city.

"Who goes there!" cried Heimdal the watchman, whose eyes were so keen that he could see for a hundred miles around, and whose ears were so sharp that he could hear the grass growing in the meadow and the wool on the backs of the sheep. "Who goes there! No one can enter Asgard if I say no."

"I am a builder," said the stranger, who was a huge fellow with sleeves rolled up to show the iron muscles of his arms. "I am a builder of strong towers, and I have heard that the folk of Asgard need one to help them raise a fair fortress in their city."

Heimdal looked at the stranger narrowly, for there was that about him which his sharp eyes did not like. But he made no answer, only blew on his golden horn, which was so loud that it sounded through all the world. At this signal all the Æsir came running to the rainbow bridge, from wherever they happened to be, to find out who was coming to Asgard. For it was Heimdal's duty ever to warn them of the approach of the unknown.

"This fellow says he is a builder," quoth Heimdal. "And he would fain build us a fortress in the city."

"Ay, that I would," nodded the stranger. "Look at my iron

arm; look at my broad back; look at my shoulders. Am I not the workman you need?"

"Truly, he is a mighty figure," vowed Odin, looking at him approvingly. "How long will it take you alone to build our fortress? We can allow but one stranger at a time within our city, for safety's sake."

"In three half-years," replied the stranger, "I will undertake to build for you a castle so strong that not even the giants, should they swarm hither over Midgard—not even they could enter without your leave."

"Aha!" cried Father Odin, well pleased at this offer. "And what reward do you ask, friend, for help so timely?"

The stranger hummed and hawed and pulled his long beard while he thought. Then he spoke suddenly, as if the idea had just come into his mind. "I will name my price, friends," he said; "a small price for so great a deed. I ask you to give me Freia for my wife, and those two sparkling jewels, the Sun and Moon."

At this demand the gods looked grave; for Freia was their dearest treasure. She was the most beautiful maid who ever lived, the light and life of heaven, and if she should leave Asgard, joy would go with her; while the Sun and Moon were the light and life of the Æsir's children, men, who lived in the little world below. But Loki the sly whispered that they would be safe enough if they made another condition on their part, so hard that the builder could not fulfill it. After thinking cautiously, he spoke for them all.

"Mighty man," quoth he, "we are willing to agree to your price—upon one condition. It is too long a time that you ask; we cannot wait three half-years for our castle; that is equal to three centuries when one is in a hurry. See that you finish the fort without help in one winter, one short winter, and you shall have fair Freia with the Sun and Moon. But if, on the first day of summer, one stone is wanting to the walls, or if anyone has given you aid in the building, then your reward is

lost, and you shall depart without payment." So spoke Loki, in the name of all the gods; but the plan was his own.

At first the stranger shook his head and frowned, saying that in so short a time no one unaided could complete the undertaking. At last he made another offer. "Let me have but my good horse to help me, and I will try," he urged. "Let me bring the useful Svadilföri with me to the task, and I will finish the work in one winter of short days, or lose my reward. Surely, you will not deny me this little help, from one four-footed friend."

Then again the Æsir consulted, and the wiser of them were doubtful whether it were best to accept the stranger's offer so strangely made. But again Loki urged them to accept. "Surely, there is no harm," he said. "Even with his old horse to help him, he cannot build the castle in the promised time. We shall gain a fortress without trouble and with never a price to pay."

Loki was so eager that, although the other Æsir did not like this crafty way of making bargains, they finally consented. Then in the presence of the heroes, with the Valkyries and Mimer's head for witnesses, the stranger and the Æsir gave solemn promise that the bargain should be kept.

On the first day of winter the strange builder began his work, and wondrous was the way he set about it. His strength seemed as the strength of a hundred men. As for his horse Svadilföri, he did more work by half than even the mighty builder. In the night he dragged the enormous rocks that were to be used in building the castle, rocks as big as mountains of the earth; while in the daytime the stranger piled them into place with his iron arms. The Æsir watched him with amazement; never was seen such strength in Asgard. Neither Týr the stout nor Thor the strong could match the power of the stranger. The gods began to look at one another uneasily. Who was this mighty one who had come among them, and what if after all he should win his reward? Freia trembled in

her palace, and the Sun and Moon grew dim with fear.

Still the work went on, and the fort was piling higher and higher, by day and by night. There were but three days left before the end of winter, and already the building was so tall and so strong that it was safe from the attacks of any giant. The Æsir were delighted with their fine new castle; but their pride was dimmed by the fear that it must be paid for at all too costly a price. For only the gateway remained to be completed, and unless the stranger should fail to finish that in the next three days, they must give him Freia with the Sun and Moon.

The Æsir held a meeting upon Ida Plain, a meeting full of fear and anger. At last they realized what they had done; they had made a bargain with one of the giants, their enemies; and if he won the prize, it would mean sorrow and darkness in heaven and upon earth. "How did we happen to agree to so mad a bargain?" they asked one another. "Who suggested the wicked plan which bids fair to cost us all that we most cherish?" Then they remembered that it was Loki who had made the plan; it was he who had insisted that it be carried out and they blamed him for all the trouble.

"It is your counsels, Loki, that have brought this danger upon us," quoth Father Odin, frowning. "You chose the way of guile, which is not our way. It now remains for you to help us by guile, if you can. But if you cannot save for us Freia and the Sun and Moon, you shall die. This is my word." All the other Æsir agreed that this was just. Thor alone was away hunting evil demons at the other end of the world, so he did not know what was going on, and what dangers were threatening Asgard.

Loki was much frightened at the word of All-Father. "It was my fault," he cried, "but how was I to know that he was a giant? He had disguised himself so that he seemed but a strong man. And as for his horse—it looks much like that of other folk. If it were not for the horse, he could not finish the work.

Ha! I have a thought! The builder shall not finish the gate; the giant shall not receive his payment. I will cheat the fellow."

Now it was the last night of winter, and there remained but a few stones to put in place on the top of the wondrous gateway. The giant was sure of his prize, and chuckled to himself as he went out with his horse to drag the remaining stones; for he did not know that the Æsir had guessed at last who he was, and that Loki was plotting to outwit him. Hardly had he gone to work when out of the wood came running a pretty little mare, who neighed to Svadilföri as if inviting the tired horse to leave his work and come to the green fields for a holiday.

Svadilföri, you must remember, had been working hard all winter, with never a sight of four-footed creature of his kind, and he was very lonesome and tired of dragging stones. Giving a snort of disobedience, off he ran after this new friend towards the grassy meadows. Off went the giant after him, howling with rage, and running for dear life, as he saw not only his horse but his chance of success slipping out of reach. It was a mad chase, and all Asgard thundered with the noise of galloping hoofs and the giant's mighty tread. The mare who raced ahead was Loki in disguise, and he led Svadilföri far out of reach, to a hidden meadow that he knew; so that the giant howled and panted up and down all night long, without catching even a sight of his horse.

Now when the morning came the gateway was still unfinished, and night and winter had ended at the same hour. The giant's time was over, and he had forfeited his reward. The Æsir came flocking to the gateway, and how they laughed and triumphed when they found three stones wanting to complete the gate!

"You have failed, fellow," judged Father Odin sternly, "and no price shall we pay for work that is still undone. You have failed. Leave Asgard quickly; we have seen all we want

of you and of your race."

Then the giant knew that he was discovered, and he was mad with rage. "It was a trick!" he bellowed, assuming his own proper form, which was huge as a mountain, and towered high beside the fortress that he had built. "It was a wicked trick. You shall pay for this in one way or another. I cannot tear down the castle which, ungrateful ones, I have built you, stronger than the strength of any giant. But I will demolish the rest of your shining city!" Indeed, he would have done so in his mighty rage; but at this moment Thor, whom Heimdal had called from the end of the earth by one blast of the golden horn, came rushing to the rescue, drawn in his chariot of goats. Thor jumped to the ground close beside the giant, and before that huge fellow knew what had happened, his head was rolling upon the ground at Father Odin's feet; for with one blow Thor had put an end to the giant's wickedness and had saved Asgard.

"This is the reward you deserve!" Thor cried. "Not Freia nor the Sun and Moon, but the death that I have in store for all the enemies of the Æsir."

In this extraordinary way the noble city of Asgard was made safe and complete by the addition of a fortress which no one, not even the giant who built it, could injure, it was so wonder-strong. But always at the top of the gate were lacking three great stones that no one was mighty enough to lift. This was a reminder to the Æsir that now they had the race of giants for their everlasting enemies. And though Loki's trick had saved them Freia, and for the world the Sun and Moon, it was the beginning of trouble in Asgard which lasted as long as Loki lived to make mischief with his guile.

CHAPTER V
The Magic Apples

It is not very amusing to be a king. Father Odin often grew tired of sitting all day long upon his golden throne in Valhalla above the heavens. He wearied of welcoming the new heroes whom the Valkyries brought him from wars upon the earth, and of watching the old heroes fight their daily deathless battles. He wearied of his wise ravens, and the constant gossip which they brought him from the four corners of the world; and he longed to escape from everyone who knew him to some place where he could pass for a mere stranger, instead of the great king of the Æsir, the mightiest being in the whole universe, of whom everyone was afraid.

Sometimes he longed so much that he could not bear it. Then—he would run away. He disguised himself as a tall old man, with white hair and a long gray beard. Around his shoulders he threw a huge blue cloak, that covered him from top to toe, and over his face he pulled a big slouch hat, to hide his eyes. For his eyes Odin could not change—no magician has ever learned how to do that. One was empty; he had given the eye to the giant Mimer in exchange for wisdom.

Usually Odin loved to go upon these wanderings alone; for an adventure is a double adventure when one meets it single-handed. It was a fine game for Odin to see how near he could come to danger without feeling the grip of its teeth. But sometimes, when he wanted company, he would whisper to his two brothers, Hœnir and red Loki. They three would creep out of the palace by the back way; and, with a finger on the lip to Heimdal, the watchman, would silently steal over the rainbow bridge which led from Asgard into the places of men and dwarfs and giants.

Wonderful adventures they had, these three, with Loki to help make things happen. Loki was a sly, mischievous fellow, full of his pranks and his capers, not always kindly ones. But he was clever, as well as malicious; and when he had pushed folk into trouble, he could often help them out again, as safe as ever. He could be the jolliest of companions when he chose, and Odin liked his merriment and his witty talk.

One day Loki did something which was no mere jest nor easily forgiven, for it brought all Asgard into danger. And after that Father Odin and his children thought twice before inviting Loki to join them in any journey or undertaking. This which I am about to tell was the first really wicked deed of which Loki was found guilty, though I am sure his red beard had dabbled in secret wrongs before.

One night the three high gods, Odin, Hœnir, and Loki, stole away from Asgard in search of adventure. Over mountains and deserts, great rivers and stony places, they wandered until they grew very hungry. But there was no food to be found—not even a berry or a nut.

Oh, how footsore and tired they were! And oh, how faint! The worst of it ever is that—as you must often have noticed—the heavier one's feet grow, the lighter and more hollow becomes one's stomach; which seems a strange thing, when you think of it. If only one's feet became as light as the rest of one feels, folk could fairly fly with hunger. Alas! this is not so.

The three Æsir drooped and drooped, and seemed on the point of starving, when they came to the edge of a valley. Here, looking down, they saw a herd of oxen feeding on the grass.

"Hola!" shouted Loki. "Behold our supper!" Going down into the valley, they caught and killed one of the oxen, and, building a great bonfire, hung up the meat to roast. Then the three sat around the fire and smacked their lips, waiting for the meat to cook. They waited for a long time.

"Surely, it is done now," said Loki, at last; and he took the meat from the fire. Strange to say, however, it was raw as ere the fire was lighted. What could it mean? Never before had meat required so long a time to roast. They made the fire brighter and re-hung the beef for a thorough basting, cooking it even longer than they had done at first. When again they came to carve the meat, they found it still uneatable. Then, indeed, they looked at one another in surprise.

"What can this mean?" cried Loki, with round eyes.

"There is some trick!" whispered Hœnir, looking around as if he expected to see a fairy or a witch meddling with the food.

"We must find out what this mystery betokens," said Odin thoughtfully. Just then there was a strange sound in the oak-tree under which they had built their fire.

"What is that?" Loki shouted, springing to his feet. They looked up into the tree, and far above in the branches, near the top, they spied an enormous eagle, who was staring down at them, and making a queer sound, as if he were laughing.

"Ho-ho!" croaked the eagle. "I know why your meat will not cook. It is all my doing, masters."

The three Æsir stared in surprise. Then Odin said sternly: "Who are you, Master Eagle? And what do you mean by those rude words?"

"Give me my share of the ox, and you shall see," rasped the eagle, in his harsh voice. "Give me my share, and you will find that your meat will cook as fast as you please."

Now the three on the ground were nearly famished. So, although it seemed very strange to be arguing with an eagle, they cried, as if in one voice: "Come down, then, and take your share." They thought that, being a mere bird, he would want but a small piece.

The eagle flapped down from the top of the tree. Dear me! What a mighty bird he was! Eight feet across the wings was the smallest measure, and his claws were as long and strong

as ice-hooks. He fanned the air like a whirlwind as he flew down to perch beside the bonfire. Then in his beak and claws he seized a leg and both shoulders of the ox, and started to fly away.

"Hold, thief!" roared Loki angrily, when he saw how much the eagle was taking. "That is not your share; you are no lion, but you are taking the lion's share of our feast. Begone, Scarecrow, and leave the meat as you found it!" Thereat, seizing a pole, he struck at the eagle with all his might.

Then a strange thing happened. As the great bird flapped upward with his prey, giving a scream of malicious laughter, the pole which Loki still held stuck fast to the eagle's back, and Loki was unable to let go of the other end.

"Help, help!" he shouted to Odin and to Hœnir, as he felt himself lifted off his feet. But they could not help him. "Help, help!" he screamed, as the eagle flew with him, now high, now low, through brush and bog and briar, over treetops and the peaks of mountains. On and on they went, until Loki thought his arm would be pulled out, like a weed torn up by the roots. The eagle would not listen to his cries nor pause in his flight, until Loki was almost dead with pain and fatigue.

"Hark you, Loki," screamed the eagle, going a little more slowly; "no one can help you except me. You are bewitched, and you cannot pull away from this pole, nor loose the pole from me, until I choose. But if you will promise what I ask, you shall go free."

Then Loki groaned: "O eagle, only let me go, and tell me who you really are, and I will promise whatever you wish."

The eagle answered: "I am the giant Thiasse, the enemy of the Æsir. But you ought to love me, Loki, for you yourself married a giantess."

Loki moaned: "Oh, yes! I dearly love all my wife's family, great Thiasse. Tell me what you want of me?"

"I want this," quoth Thiasse gruffly. "I am growing old, and I want the apples which Idun keeps in her golden casket,

to make me young again. You must get them for me."

Now these apples were the fruit of a magic tree, and were more beautiful to look at and more delicious to taste than any fruit that ever grew. The best thing about them was that whoever tasted one, be he ever so old, grew young and strong again. The apples belonged to a beautiful lady named Idun, who kept them in a golden casket. Every morning the Æsir came to her to be refreshed and made over by a bite of her precious fruit. That is why in Asgard no one ever waxed old or ugly. Even Father Odin, Hœnir, and Loki, the three travelers who had seen the very beginning of everything, when the world was made, were still sturdy and young. And so long as Idun kept her apples safe, the faces of the family who sat about the table of Valhalla would be rosy and fair like the faces of children.

"O friend giant!" cried Loki. "You know not what you ask! The apples are the most precious treasure of Asgard, and Idun keeps watch over them as if they were dearer to her than life itself. I never could steal them from her, Thiasse; for at her call all Asgard would rush to the rescue, and trouble would buzz about my ears like a hive of bees let loose."

"Then you must steal Idun herself, apples and all. For the apples I must have, and you have promised, Loki, to do my bidding."

Loki sniffed and thought, thought and sniffed again. Already his mischievous heart was planning how he might steal Idun away. He could hardly help laughing to think how angry the Æsir would be when they found their beauty-medicine gone forever. But he hoped that, when he had done this trick for Thiasse, now and then the giant would let him have a nibble of the magic apples; so that Loki himself would remain young long after the other Æsir were grown old and feeble. This thought suited Loki's malicious nature well.

"I think I can manage it for you, Thiasse," he said craftily. "In a week I promise to bring Idun and her apples to you. But

you must not forget the great risk which I am running, nor that I am your relative by marriage. I may have a favor to ask in return, Thiasse."

Then the eagle gently dropped Loki from his claws. Falling on a soft bed of moss, Loki jumped up and ran back to his traveling companions, who were glad and surprised to see him again. They had feared that the eagle was carrying him away to feed his young eaglets in some far-off nest. Ah, you may be sure that Loki did not tell them who the eagle really was, nor confess the wicked promise which he had made about Idun and her apples.

After that the three went back to Asgard, for they had had adventure enough for one day.

The days flew by, and the time came when Loki must fulfill his promise to Thiasse. So one morning he strolled out into the meadow where Idun loved to roam among the flowers. There he found her, sitting by a tiny spring, and holding her precious casket of apples on her lap. She was combing her long golden hair, which fell from under a wreath of spring flowers, and she was very beautiful. Her green robe was embroidered with buds and blossoms of silk in many colors, and she wore a golden girdle about her waist. She smiled as Loki came, and tossed him a posy, saying: "Good-morrow, red Loki. Have you come for a bite of my apples? I see a wrinkle over each of your eyes which I can smooth away."

"Nay, fair lady," answered Loki politely, "I have just nibbled of another apple, which I found this morning. Verily, I think it is sweeter and more magical than yours."

Idun was hurt and surprised.

"That cannot be, Loki," she cried. "There are no apples anywhere like mine. Where found you this fine fruit?" and she wrinkled up her little nose scornfully.

"Oho! I will not tell anyone the place," chuckled Loki, "except that it is not far, in a little wood. There is a gnarled old apple-tree, and on its branches grow the most beautiful

red-cheeked apples you ever saw. But you could never find it."

"I should like to see these apples, Loki, if only to prove how far less good they are than mine. Will you bring me some?"

"That I will not," said Loki teasingly. "Oh, no! I have my own magic apples now, and folk will be coming to me for help instead of to you."

Idun began to coax him, as he had guessed that she would: "Please, please, Loki, show me the place!"

At first he would not, for he was a sly fellow, and knew how to lead her on. At last, he pretended to yield.

"Well, then, because I love you, Idun, better than all the rest, I will show you the place, if you will come with me. But it must be a secret—no one must ever know."

All girls like secrets.

"Yes—yes!" cried Idun eagerly. "Let us steal away now, while no one is looking."

This was just what Loki hoped for.

"Bring your own apples," he said, "that we may compare them with mine. But I know mine are better."

"I know mine are the best in all the world," returned Idun, pouting. "I will bring them, to show you the difference."

Off they started together, she with the golden casket under her arm; and Loki chuckled wickedly as they went. He led her for some distance, further than she had ever strayed before, and at last she grew frightened.

"Where are you taking me, Loki?" she cried. "You said it was not far. I see no little wood, no old apple-tree."

"It is just beyond, just a little step beyond," he answered. So on they went. But that little step took them beyond the boundary of Asgard—just a little step beyond, into the space where the giants lurked and waited for mischief.

Then there was a rustling of wings, and *whirr-rr-rr!* Down came Thiasse in his eagle dress. Before Idun suspected what


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was happening, he fastened his claws into her girdle and flapped away with her, magic apples and all, to his palace in Jotunheim, the Land of Giants.

Loki stole back to Asgard, thinking that he was quite safe, and that no one would discover his villainy. At first Idun was not missed. But after a little the gods began to feel signs of age, and went for their usual bite of her apples. Then they found that she had disappeared, and a great terror fell upon them. Where had she gone? Suppose she should not come back!

The hours and days went by, and still she did not return. Their fright became almost a panic. Their hair began to turn gray, and their limbs grew stiff and gouty so that they hobbled down Asgard streets. Even Freia, the loveliest, was afraid to look in her mirror, and Balder the beautiful grew pale and haggard. The happy land of Asgard was like a garden over which a burning wind had blown—all the flower-faces were faded and withered, and springtime was turned into yellow fall.

If Idun and her apples were not quickly found, the gods seemed likely to shrivel and blow away like autumn leaves. They held a council to inquire into the matter, endeavoring to learn who had seen Idun last, and whither she had gone. It turned out that one morning Heimdal had seen her strolling out of Asgard with Loki, and no one had seen her since. Then the gods understood; Loki was the last person who had been with her—this must be one of Loki's tricks. They were filled with anger. They seized and bound Loki and brought him before the council. They threatened him with torture and with death unless he should tell the truth. And Loki was so frightened that finally he confessed what he had done.

Then indeed there was horror in Asgard. Idun stolen away by a wicked giant! Idun and her apples lost, and Asgard growing older every minute! What was to be done? Big Thor seized Loki and threw him up in the air again and again, so that his

heels touched first the moon and then the sea; you can still see the marks upon the moon's white face. "If you do not bring Idun back from the land of your wicked wife, you shall have worse than this!" he roared. "Go and bring her now."

"How can I do that?" asked Loki, trembling.

"That is for you to find," growled Thor. "Bring her you must. Go!"

Loki thought for a moment. Then he said:—

"I will bring her back if Freia will loan me her falcon dress. The giant dresses as an eagle. I, too, must guise me as a bird, or we cannot outwit him."

Then Freia hemmed and hawed. She did not wish to loan her feather dress, for it was very precious. But all the Æsir begged; and finally she consented.

It was a beautiful great dress of brown feathers and gray, and in it Freia loved to skim like a falcon among the clouds and stars. Loki put it on, and when he had done so he looked exactly like a great brown hawk. Only his bright black eyes remained the same, glancing here and there, so that they lost sight of nothing.

With a whirr of his wings Loki flew off to the north, across mountains and valleys and the great river Ifing, which lay between Asgard and Giant Land. And at last he came to the palace of Thiasse the giant.

It happened, fortunately, that Thiasse had gone fishing in the sea, and Idun was left alone, weeping and broken-hearted. Presently she heard a little tap on her window, and, looking up, she saw a great brown bird perching on the ledge. He was so big that Idun was frightened and gave a scream. But the bird nodded pleasantly and croaked: "Don't be afraid, Idun. I am a friend. I am Loki, come to set you free."

"Loki! Loki is no friend of mine. He brought me here," she sobbed. "I don't believe you came to save me."

"That is indeed why I am here," he replied, "and a dangerous business it is, if Thiasse should come back before we start

for home."

"How will you get me out?" asked Idun doubtfully. "The door is locked, and the window is barred."

"I will change you into a nut," said he, "and carry you in my claws."

"What of the casket of apples?" queried Idun. "Can you carry that also?"

Then Loki laughed long and loudly.

"What welcome to Asgard do you think I should receive without the apples?" he cried. "Yes, we must take them, indeed."

Idun came to the window, and Loki, who was a skillful magician, turned her into a nut and took her in one claw, while in the other he seized the casket of apples. Then off he whirred out of the palace grounds and away toward Asgard's safety.

In a little while Thiasse returned home, and when he found Idun and her apples gone, there was a hubbub, you may be sure! However, he lost little time by smashing mountains and breaking trees in his giant rage; that fit was soon over. He put on his eagle plumage and started in pursuit of the falcon.

Now an eagle is bigger and stronger than any other bird, and usually in a long race he can beat even the swift hawk who has an hour's start. Presently Loki heard behind him the shrill scream of a giant eagle, and his heart turned sick. But he had crossed the great river, and already was in sight of Asgard. The aged Æsir were gathered on the rainbow bridge watching eagerly for Loki's return; and when they spied the falcon with the nut and the casket in his talons, they knew who it was. A great cheer went up, but it was hushed in a moment, for they saw the eagle close after the falcon; and they guessed that this must be the giant Thiasse, the stealer of Idun.

Then there was a great shouting of commands, and a rushing to and fro. All the gods, even Father Odin and his

two wise ravens, were busy gathering chips into great heaps on the walls of Asgard. As soon as Loki, with his precious burden, had fluttered weakly over the wall, dropping to the ground beyond, the gods lighted the heaps of chips which they had piled, and soon there was a wall of fire, over which the eagle must fly. He was going too fast to stop. The flames roared and crackled, but Thiasse flew straight into them, with a scream of fear and rage. His feathers caught fire and burned, so that he could no longer fly, but fell headlong to the ground inside the walls. Then Thor, the thunder-lord, and Tŷr, the mighty war-king, fell upon him and slew him, so that he could never trouble the Æsir any more.

There was great rejoicing in Asgard that night, for Loki changed Idun again to a fair lady; whereupon she gave each of the eager gods a bite of her life-giving fruit, so that they grew young and happy once more, as if all these horrors had never happened.

Not one of them, however, forgot the evil part which Loki had played in these doings. They hid the memory, like a buried seed, deep in their hearts. Thenceforward the word of Loki and the honor of his name were poor coin in Asgard; which is no wonder.

CHAPTER VI
Skadi's Choice

The giant Thiasse, whom Thor slew for the theft of Idun and the magic apples, had a daughter, Skadi, who was a very good sort of girl, as giantesses go. Most of them were evil-tempered, spiteful, and cruel creatures, who desired only to do harm to the gods and to all who were good. But Skadi was different. Stronger than the hatred of her race for the Æsir, stronger even than her wish to be revenged for her father's death, was her love for Balder the beautiful, the pride of all the gods. If she had not been a giantess, she might have hoped that he would love her also; but she knew that no one who lived in Asgard would ever think kindly of her race, which had caused so much trouble to Balder and his brothers. After her father was killed by the Æsir, however, Skadi had a wise idea.

Skadi put on her helm and corselet and set out for Asgard, meaning to ask a noble price to pay for the sorrow of Thiasse's death. The gods, who had all grown young and boyish once again, were sitting in Valhalla merrily enjoying a banquet in honor of Idun's safe return, when Skadi, clattering with steel, strode into their midst. Heimdal the watchman, astonished at the sight, had let this maiden warrior pass him upon the rainbow bridge. The Æsir set down their cups hastily, and the laughter died upon their lips; for though she looked handsome, Skadi was a terrible figure in her silver armor and with her spear as long as a ship's mast brandished in her giant hand.

The nine Valkyries, Odin's maiden warriors, hurried away to put on their own helmets and shields; for they would not have this other maiden, ten times as huge, see them meekly waiting at table, while they had battle-dresses as fine as hers

to show the stranger.

"Who are you, maiden, and what seek you here?" asked Father Odin.

"I am Skadi, the daughter of Thiasse, whom your folk have slain," answered she, "and I come here for redress."

At these words the coward Loki, who had been at the killing of Thiasse, skulked low behind the table; but Thor, who had done the killing, straightened himself and clenched his fists tightly. He was not afraid of any giant, however fierce, and this maiden with her shield and spear only angered him.

"Well, Skadi," quoth Odin gravely, "your father was a thief, and died for his sins. He stole fair Idun and her magic apples, and for that crime he died, which was only just. Yet because our righteous deed has left you an orphan, Skadi, we will grant you a recompense, so you shall be at peace with us; for it is not fitting that the Æsir should quarrel with women. What is it you ask, O Skadi, as solace for the death of Thiasse?"

Skadi looked like an orphan who was well able to take care of herself; and this indeed her next words showed her to be. "I ask two things," she said, without a moment's hesitation: "I ask the husband whom I shall select from among you; and I ask that you shall make me laugh, for it is many days since grief has let me enjoy a smile."

At this strange request the Æsir looked astonished, and some of them seemed rather startled; for you can fancy that none of them wanted a giantess, however handsome, for his wife. They put their heads together and consulted long whether or not they should allow Skadi her two wishes.

"I will agree to make her laugh," grinned Loki; "but suppose she should choose me for her husband! I am married to one giantess already."

"No fear of that, Loki," said Thor; "you were too near being the cause of her father's death for her to love you overmuch. Nor do I think that she will choose me; so I am safe."

Loki chuckled and stole away to think up a means of making Skadi laugh.

Finally, the gods agreed that Skadi should choose one of them for her husband; but in order that all might have a fair chance of missing this honor which no one coveted, she was to choose in a curious way. All the Æsir were to stand in a row behind the curtain which was drawn across the end of the hall, so that only their feet were seen by Skadi; and by their feet alone Skadi was to select him who was to be her husband.

Now Skadi was very ready to agree to this, for she said to herself, "Surely, I shall know the feet of Balder, for they will be the most beautiful of any."

Amid nervous laughter at this new game, the Æsir ranged themselves in a row behind the purple curtain, with only their line of feet showing below the golden border. There were Father Odin, Thor the Thunderer, and Balder his brother; there was old Niörd the rich, with his fair son Frey; there were Tŷr the bold, Bragi the poet, blind Höd, and Vidar the silent; Vali and Ull the archers, Forseti the wise judge, and Heimdal the gold-toothed watchman. Loki alone, of all the Æsir, was not there; and Loki was the only one who did not shiver as Skadi walked up and down the hall looking at the row of feet.

Up and down, back and forth, went Skadi, looking carefully; and among all those sandaled feet there was one pair more white and fair and beautiful than the rest.

"Surely, these are Balder's feet!" she thought, while her heart thumped with eagerness under her silver corselet. "Oh, if I guess aright, dear Balder will be my husband!"

She paused confidently before the handsomest pair of feet, and, pointing to them with her spear, she cried, "I choose here! Few blemishes are to be found in Balder the beautiful."

A shout of laughter arose behind the curtain, and forth slunk—not young Balder, but old Niörd the rich, king of the ocean wind, the father of those fair twins, Frey and Freia. Skadi had chosen the handsome feet of old Niörd, and

thenceforth he must be her husband.

Niörd was little pleased; but Skadi was heart-broken. Her face grew longer and sadder than before when he stepped up and took her hand sulkily, saying, "Well, I am to be your husband, then, and all my riches stored in Noatûn, the home of ships, are to be yours. You would have chosen Balder, and I wish that this luck had been his! However, it cannot be helped now."

"Nay," answered Skadi, frowning, "the bargain is not yet complete. No one of you has made me laugh. I am so sad now, that it will be a merry jest indeed which can wring laughter from my heavy heart." She sighed, looking at Balder. But Balder loved only Nanna in all the world.

Just then, out came Loki, riding on one of Thor's goat steeds; and the red-bearded fellow cut up such ridiculous capers with the gray-bearded goat that soon not only Skadi, but all the Æsir and Niörd himself were holding their sides with laughter.

"Fairly won, fairly won!" cried Skadi, wiping the tears from her eyes. "I am beaten. I shall not forget that it is Loki to whom I owe this last joke. Some day I shall be quits with you, red joker!" And this threat she carried out in the end, on the day of Loki's punishment.

Skadi was married to old Niörd, both unwilling; and they went to live among the mountains in Skadi's home, which had once been Thiasse's palace, where he had shut Idun in a prison cell. As you can imagine, Niörd and Skadi did not live happily ever after, like the good prince and princess in the story-book. For, in the first place, Skadi was a giantess; and there are few folk, I fancy, who could live happily with a giantess. In the second place, she did not love Niörd, nor did he love Skadi, and neither forgot that Skadi's choosing had been sorrow to them both. But the third reason was the most important of all; and this was because Skadi and Niörd could not agree upon the place which should be their home. For

Niörd did not like the mountain palace of Skadi's people—the place where roaring winds rushed down upon the sea and its ships. The sea with its ships was his friend, and he wanted to dwell in Noatûn, where he had greater wealth than anyone else in the world—where he could rule the fresh sea-wind and tame the wild ocean, granting the prayers of fisher-folk and the seafarers, who loved his name.

Finally, they agreed to dwell first in one place, then in the other, so that each might be happy in turn. For nine days they tarried in Thrymheim, and then they spent three in Noatûn. But even this arrangement could not bring peace. One day they had a terrible quarrel. It was just after they had come down from Skadi's mountain home for their three days in Niörd's sea palace, and he was so glad to be back that he cried—

"Ah, how I hate your hills! How long the nine nights seemed, with the wolves howling until dawn among the dark mountains of Giant Land! What a discord compared to the songs of the swans who sail upon my dear, dear ocean!" Thus rudely he taunted his wife; but Skadi answered him with spirit.

"And I—I cannot sleep by your rolling sea-waves, where the birds are ever calling, calling, as they come from the woods on the shore. Each morning the sea-gull's scream wakes me at some unseemly hour. I will not stay here even for three nights! I will not stay!"

"And I will have no more of your windy mountain-tops," roared Niörd, beside himself with rage. "Go, if you wish! Go back to Thrymheim! I shall not follow you, be sure!"

So Skadi went back to her mountains alone, and dwelt in the empty house of Thiasse, her father. She became a mighty huntress, swift on the skees and ice-runners which she strapped to her feet. Day after day she skimmed over the snow-crusted mountains, bow in hand, to hunt the wild beasts which roamed there. "Skee-goddess," she was called; and

never again did she come to Asgard halls. Quite alone in the cold country, she hunted hardily, keeping ever in her heart the image of Balder the beautiful, whom she loved, but whom she had lost forever by her unlucky choice.

CHAPTER VII
The Dwarf's Gifts

Red Loki had been up to mischief again! Loki, who made quarrels and brought trouble wherever he went. He had a wicked heart, and he loved no one. He envied Father Odin his wisdom and his throne above the world. He envied Balder his beauty, and Tŷr his courage, and Thor his strength. He envied all the good Æsir who were happy; but he would not take the trouble to be good himself. So he was always unhappy, spiteful, and sour. And if anything went wrong in Asgard, the kingdom of the gods, one was almost sure to find Loki at the bottom of the trouble.

Now Thor, the strongest of all the gods, was very proud of his wife's beautiful hair, which fell in golden waves to her feet, and covered her like a veil. He loved it better than anything, except Sif herself. One day, while Thor was away from home, Loki stole into Thrudheim, the realm of clouds, and cut off all Sif's golden hair, till her head was as round and fuzzy as a yellow dandelion. Fancy how angry Thor was when he came rattling home that night in his thunder-chariot and found Sif so ugly to look at! He stamped up and down till the five hundred and forty floors of his cloud palace shook like an earthquake, and lightning flashed from his blue eyes. The people down in the world below cried: "Dear, dear! What a terrible thunderstorm! Thor must be very angry about something. Loki has been up to mischief, it is likely." You see, they also knew Loki and his tricks.

At last Thor calmed himself a little. "Sif, my love," he said, "you shall be beautiful again. Red Loki shall make you so, since his was the unmaking. The villain! He shall pay for this!"

Then, without more ado, off set Thor to find red Loki. He went in his thunder-chariot, drawn by two goats, and the clouds rumbled and the lightning flashed wherever he went; for Thor was the mighty god of thunder. At last he came upon the sly rascal, who was trying to hide. Big Thor seized him by the throat.

"You scoundrel!" he cried, "I will break every bone in your body if you do not put back Sif's beautiful hair upon her head."

"Ow—ow! You hurt me!" howled Loki. "Take off your big hand, Thor. What is done, is done. I cannot put back Sif's hair. You know that very well."

"Then you must get her another head of hair," growled Thor. "That you can do. You must find for her hair of real gold, and it must grow upon her head as if it were her own. Do this, or you shall die."

"Where shall I get this famous hair?" whined Loki, though he knew well enough.

"Get it of the black elves," said Thor; "they are cunning jewelers, and they are your friends. Go, Loki, and go quickly, for I long to see Sif as beautiful as ever."

Then Loki of the burning beard slunk away to the hills where, far under ground, the dwarfs have their furnaces and their workshops. Among great heaps of gold and silver and shining jewels, which they have dug up out of the earth, the little crooked men in brown blink and chatter and scold one another; for they are ugly fellows—the dwarfs. Tink-tank! tink-tank! go their little hammers all day long and all night long, while they make wonderful things such as no man has ever seen, though you shall hear about them.

They had no trouble to make a head of hair for Sif. It was for them a simple matter, indeed. The dwarfs work fast for such a customer as Loki, and in a little while the golden wires were beaten out, and drawn out, made smooth and soft and curly, and braided into a thick golden braid. But when Loki

came away, he carried with him also two other treasures which the clever dwarfs had made. One was a golden spear, and the other was a ship.

Now these do not sound so very wonderful. But wait until you hear! The spear, which was named Gungnir, was bewitched, so that it made no difference if the person who held it was clumsy and careless. For it had this amazing quality, that no matter how badly it was aimed, or how unskillfully it was thrown, it was sure to go straight to the mark—which is a very obliging and convenient thing in one's weapon, as you will readily see.

And Skidbladnir—this was the harsh name of the ship—was even more wonderful. It could be taken to pieces and folded up so small that it would go into one's pocket. But when it was unfolded and put together, it would hold all the gods of Asgard for a sea-journey. Besides all this, when the sails were set, the ship was sure always to have a fair wind, which would make it skim along like a great bird, which was the best part of the charm, as any sailor will tell you.

Now Loki felt very proud of these three treasures, and left the hill cave stretching his neck and strutting like a great red turkey cock. Outside the gate, however, he met Brock, the black dwarf, who was the brother of Sindri, the best workman in all the underworld.

"Hello! what have you there?" asked Brock of the big head, pointing at the bundles which Loki was carrying.

"The three finest gifts in the world," boasted Loki, hugging his treasures tight.

"Pooh!" said Brock, "I don't believe it. Did my brother Sindri make them?"

"No," answered Loki; "they were made by the black elves, the sons of Ivaldi. And they are the most precious gifts that ever were seen."

"Pooh!" again puffed Brock, wagging his long beard crossly. "Nonsense! Whatever they be, my brother Sindri can

make three other gifts more precious; that I know."

"Can he, though?" laughed Loki. "I will give him my head if he can."

"Done!" shouted the dwarf. "Let me see your famous gifts." So Loki showed him the three wonders: the gold hair for Sif, the spear, and the ship. But again the dwarf said: "Pooh! These are nothing. I will show you what the master-smith can do, and you shall lose your bragging red head, my Loki."

Now Loki began to be a little uneasy. He followed Brock back to the smithy in the mountain, where they found Sindri at his forge. Oh, yes! He could beat the poor gifts of which Loki was so proud. But he would not tell what his own three gifts were to be.

First Sindri took a pig's skin and laid it on the fire. Then he went away for a little time; but he set Brock at the bellows and bade him blow—blow—blow the fire until Sindri should return. Now when Sindri was gone, Loki also stole away; for, as usual, he was up to mischief. He had the power of changing his shape and of becoming any creature he chose, which was often very convenient. Thus he turned himself into a huge biting fly. Then he flew back into the smithy where Brock was blow—blow—blowing. Loki buzzed about the dwarf's head, and finally lighted on his hand and stung him, hoping to make him let go the bellows. But no! Brock only cried out, "Oh-ee!" and kept on blowing for dear life. Now soon back came Sindri to the forge and took the pigskin from the fire. Wonder of wonders! It had turned into a hog with golden bristles; a live hog that shone like the sun. Brock was not satisfied, however.

"Well! I don't think much of that," he grumbled.

"Wait a little," said Sindri mysteriously. "Wait and see." Then he went on to make the second gift.

This time he put a lump of gold into the fire. And when he went away, as before, he bade Brock stand at the bellows

to blow—blow—blow without stopping. Again, as before, in buzzed Loki the gadfly as soon as the master-smith had gone out. This time he settled on Brock's swarthy neck, and stung him so sorely that the blood came and the dwarf roared till the mountain trembled. Still Brock did not let go the handle of the bellows, but blew and howled—blew and howled with pain till Sindri returned. And this time the dwarf took from the fire a fine gold ring, round as roundness.

"Um! I don't think so much of that," said Brock, again disappointed, for he had expected some wonderful jewel. But Sindri wagged his head wisely.

"Wait a little," he said. "We shall see what we shall see." He heaved a great lump of iron into the fire to make the third gift. But this time when he went away, leaving Brock at the bellows, he charged him to blow—blow—blow without a minute's rest, or everything would be spoiled. For this was to be the best gift of all.

Brock planted himself wide-legged at the forge and blew—blew—blew. But for the third time Loki, winged as a fly, came buzzing into the smithy. This time he fastened viciously below Brock's bushy eyebrow, and stung him so cruelly that the blood trickled down, a red river, into his eyes and the poor dwarf was blinded. With a howl Brock raised his hand to wipe away the blood, and of course in that minute the bellows stood still. Then Loki buzzed away with a sound that seemed like a mocking laugh. At the same moment in rushed Sindri, panting with fright, for he had heard that sound and guessed what it meant.

"What have you done?" he cried. "You have let the bellows rest! You have spoiled everything!"

"Only a little moment, but one little moment," pleaded Brock, in a panic. "It has done no harm, has it?"

Sindri leaned anxiously over the fire, and out of the flames he drew the third gift—an enormous hammer.

"Oh!" said Brock, much disappointed, "only an old iron


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hammer! I don't think anything of *that.* Look how short the handle is, too."

"That is your fault, brother," returned the smith crossly. "If you had not let the bellows stand still, the handle would have been long enough. Yet as it is—we shall see, we shall see. I think it will at least win for you red Loki's head. Take the three gifts, brother, such as they are, and bear them to Asgard. Let all the gods be judges between you and Loki, which gifts are best, his or yours. But stay—I may as well tell you the secrets of your three treasures, or you will not know how to make them work. Your toy that is not wound up is of no use at all." Which is very true, as we all know. Then he bent over and whispered in Brock's ear. And what he said pleased Brock so much that he jumped straight up into the air and capered like one of Thor's goats.

"What a clever brother you are, to be sure!" he cried.

At that moment Loki, who had ceased to be a gadfly, came in grinning, with his three gifts. "Well, are you ready?" he asked. Then he caught sight of the three gifts which Brock was putting into his sack.

"Ho! A pig, a ring, and a stub-handled hammer!" he shouted. "Is that all you have? Fine gifts, indeed! I was really growing uneasy, but now I see that my head is safe. Let us start for Asgard immediately, where I promise you that I with my three treasures shall be thrice more welcome than you with your stupid pig, your ugly ring, and your half-made hammer."

So together they climbed to Asgard, and there they found the Æsir sitting in the great judgment hall on Ida Plain. There was Father Odin on his high throne, with his two ravens at his head and his two wolves at his feet. There was Queen Frigg by his side; and about them were Balder the beautiful, Frey and Freia, the fair brother and sister; the mighty Thor, with Sif, his crop-haired wife, and all the rest of the great Æsir who lived in the upper world above the homes of men.

"Brother Æsir," said Loki, bowing politely, for he was a smooth rascal, "we have come each with three gifts, the dwarf and I; and you shall judge which be the most worthy of praise. But if I lose—I, your brother—I lose my head to this crooked little dwarf." So he spoke, hoping to put the Æsir on his side from the first. For his head was a very handsome one, and the dwarf was indeed an ill-looking fellow. The gods, however, nodded gravely, and bade the two show what their gifts might be.

Then Loki stepped forward to the foot of Odin's throne. And first he pulled from his great wallet the spear Gungnir, which could not miss aim. This he gave to Odin, the all-wise. And Odin was vastly pleased, as you may imagine, to find himself thenceforth an unequaled marksman. So he smiled upon Loki kindly and said: "Well done, brother."

Next Loki took out the promised hair for Sif, which he handed Thor with a grimace. Now when the golden locks were set upon her head, they grew there like real hair, long and soft and curling—but still real gold. So that Sif was more beautiful than ever before, and more precious, too. You can fancy how pleased Thor was with Loki's gift. He kissed lovely Sif before all the gods and goddesses, and vowed that he forgave Loki for the mischief which he had done in the first place, since he had so nobly made reparation.

Then Loki took out the third gift, all folded up like a paper boat; and it was the ship Skidbladnir—I am sorry they did not give it a prettier name. This he presented to Frey the peaceful. And you can guess whether or not Frey's blue eyes laughed with pleasure at such a gift.

Now when Loki stepped back, all the Æsir clapped their hands and vowed that he had done wondrous well.

"You will have to show us fine things, you dwarf," quoth Father Odin, "to better the gifts of red Loki. Come, what have you in the sack you bear upon your shoulders?"

Then the crooked little Brock hobbled forward, bent

almost double under the great load which he carried. "I have what I have," he said.

First, out he pulled the ring Draupnir, round as roundness and shining of gold. This the dwarf gave to Odin, and though it seemed but little, yet it was much. For every ninth night out of this ring, he said, would drop eight other rings of gold, as large and as fair. Then Odin clapped his hands and cried: "Oh, wondrous gift! I like it even better than the magic spear which Loki gave." And all the other Æsir agreed with him.

Then out of the sack came grunting Goldbristle, the hog, all of gold. Brock gave him to Frey, to match the magic ship of Loki. This Goldbristle was so marvelously forged that he could run more swiftly than any horse, on air or water. Moreover, he was a living lantern. For on the darkest night he bristled with light like a million-pointed star, so that one riding on his back would light the air and the sea like a firefly, wherever he went. This idea pleased Frey mightily, for he was the merriest of the gods, and he laughed aloud.

"'Tis a wondrous fine gift," he said. "I like old Goldbristle even better than the compressible boat. For on this lusty steed I can ride about the world when I am tending the crops and the cattle of men and scattering the rain upon them. Master dwarf, I give my vote to you." And all the other Æsir agreed with him.

Then out of the sack Brock drew the third gift. It was the short-handled hammer named Miölnir. And this was the gift which Sindri had made for Thor, the mightiest of the gods; and it was the best gift of all. For with it Thor could burst the hardest metal and shatter the thickest mountain, and nothing could withstand its power. But it never could hurt Thor himself; and no matter how far or how hard it was thrown, it would always fly back into Thor's own hand. Last of all, whenever he so wished, the great hammer would become so small that he could put it in his pocket, quite out of sight. But Brock was sorry that the handle was so short—all owing to his fault,

because he had let the bellows rest for that one moment.

When Thor had this gift in his hand, he jumped up with a shout of joy. "'Tis a wondrous fine gift," he cried, "with short handle or with long. And I prize it even more than I prize the golden hair of Sif which Loki gave. For with it I shall fight our enemies, the Frost Giants and the mischievous Trolls and the other monsters—Loki's friends. And all the Æsir will be glad of my gift when they see what deeds I shall do therewith. Now, if I may have my say, I judge that the three gifts made by Sindri the dwarf are the most precious that may be. So Brock has gained the prize of Loki's red head—a sorry recompense indeed for gifts so masterly." Then Thor sat down. And all the other Æsir shouted that he had spoken well, and that they agreed with him.

So Loki was like to lose his head. He offered to pay instead a huge price, if Brock would let him go. But Brock refused. "The red head of Loki for my gift," he insisted, and the gods nodded that it must be so, since he had earned his wish.

But when Loki saw that the count was all against him, his eyes grew crafty. "Well, take me, then—if you can!" he shouted. And off he shot like an arrow from a bow. For Loki had on magic shoes, with which he could run over sea or land or sky; and the dwarf could never catch him in the world. Then Brock was furious. He stood stamping and chattering, tearing his long beard with rage.

"I am cheated!" he cried. "I have won—but I have lost." Then he turned to Thor, who was playing with his hammer, bursting a mountain or two and splitting a tree here and there. "Mighty Thor," begged the dwarf, "catch me the fellow who has broken his word. I have given you the best gift—your wonderful hammer. Catch me, then, the boasting red head which I have fairly bought."

Then Thor stopped his game and set out in pursuit of Loki, for he was ever on the side of fairness. No one, however fleet, can escape when Thor follows, for his is the swiftness of

a lightning flash. So he soon brought Loki back to Ida Plain, and gave him up a prisoner to the dwarf.

"I have you now, boaster," said Brock fiercely, "and I will cut off your red head in the twinkling of an eye." But just as he was about to do as he said, Loki had another sly idea.

"Hold, sirrah dwarf," he said. "It is true that you have won my head, but not the neck, not an inch of the neck." And all the gods agreed that this was so. Then Brock was puzzled indeed, for how could he cut off Loki's head without an inch of the neck, too? But this he must not do, or he knew the just Æsir would punish him with death. So he was forced to be content with stopping Loki's boasting in another way. He would sew up the bragging lips.

He brought a stout, strong thread and an awl to bore the holes. And in a twinkling he had stitched up the lips of the sly one, firm and fast. So for a time, at least, he put an end to Loki's boasting and his taunts and his lies.

It is a pity that those mischief-making lips were not fastened up forever; for that would have saved much of the trouble and sorrow which came after. But at last, after a long time, Loki got his lips free, and they made great sorrow in Asgard for the gods and on earth for men, as you shall hear.

Now this is the end of the tale which tells of the dwarf's gifts, and especially of Thor's hammer, which was afterwards to be of such service to him and such bane to the enemies of the Æsir. And that also you shall hear before all is done.

CHAPTER VIII
Loki's Children

Red Loki, the wickedest of all the Æsir, had done something of which he was very much ashamed. He had married a giantess, the ugliest, fiercest, most dreadful giantess that ever lived; and of course he wanted no one to find out what he had done, for he knew that Father Odin would be indignant with him for having wedded one of the enemies of the Æsir, and that none of his brothers would be grateful to him for giving them a sister-in-law so hideous.

But at last All-Father found out the secret that Loki had been hiding for years. Worst of all, he found that Loki and the giantess had three ugly children hidden away in the dark places of the earth—three children of whom Loki was even more ashamed than of their mother, though he loved them too. For two of them were the most terrible monsters which time had ever seen. Hela his daughter was the least ugly of the three, though one could scarcely call her attractive. She was half black and half white, which must have looked very strange; and she was not easily mistaken by anyone who chanced to see her, you can well understand. She was fierce and grim to see, and the very sight of her caused terror and death to him who gazed upon her.

But the other two! One was an enormous wolf, with long fierce teeth and flashing red eyes. And the other was a scaly, slimy, horrible serpent, huger than any serpent that ever lived, and a hundred times more ferocious. Can you wonder that Loki was ashamed of such children as these? The wonder is, how he could find anything about them to love. But Loki's heart loved evil in secret, and it was the evil in these three children of his which made them so ugly.

Now when Odin discovered that three such monsters had been living in the world without his knowledge, he was both angry and anxious, for he knew that these children of mischievous Loki and his wicked giantess-wife were dangerous to the peace of Asgard. He consulted the Norns, the three wise maidens who lived beside the Urdar-well, and who could see into the future to tell what things were to happen in coming years. And they bade him beware of Loki's children; they told him that the three monsters would bring great sorrow upon Asgard, for the giantess their mother would teach them all her hatred of Odin's race, while they would have their father's sly wisdom to help them in all mischief. So Odin knew that his fears had warned him truly. Something must be done to prevent the dangers which threatened Asgard. Something must be done to keep the three out of mischief.

Father Odin sent for all the gods, and bade them go forth over the world, find the children of Loki in the secret places where they were hidden, and bring them to him. Then the Æsir mounted their horses and set out on their difficult errand. They scoured Asgard, Midgard the world of men, Utgard and Jotunheim where the giants lived. And at last they found the three horrible creatures hiding in their mother's cave. They dragged them forth and took them up to Asgard, before Odin's high throne.

Now All-Father had been considering what should be done with the three monsters, and when they came, his mind was made up. Hela, the daughter, was less evil than the other two, but her face was dark and gloomy, and she brought death to those who looked upon her. She must be prisoned out of sight in some far place, where her sad eyes could not look sorrow into men's lives and death into their hearts. So he sent her down, down into the dark, cold land of Niflheim, which lay below one root of the great tree Yggdrasil. Here she must live forever and ever. And, because she was not wholly bad, Odin made her queen of that land, and for her subjects she

was to have all the folk who died upon the earth—except the heroes who perished in battle; for these the Valkyries carried straight to Valhalla in Asgard. But all who died of sickness or of old age, all who met their deaths through accident or men's cruelty, were sent to Queen Hela, who gave them lodgings in her gloomy palace. Vast was her kingdom, huge as nine worlds, and it was surrounded by a high wall, so that no one who had once gone thither could ever return. And here thenceforth Loki's daughter reigned among the shadows, herself half shadow and half light, half good and half bad.

But the Midgard serpent was a more dangerous beast even than Death. Odin frowned when he looked upon this monster writhing before his throne. He seized the scaly length in his mighty arms and hurled it forth over the wall of Asgard. Down, down went the great serpent, twisting and twirling as he fell, while all the sky was black with the smoke from his nostrils, and the sound of his hissing made every creature tremble. Down, down he fell with a great splash into the deep ocean which surrounded the world. There he lay writhing and squirming, growing always larger and larger, until he was so huge that he stretched like a ring about the whole earth, with his tail in his mouth, and his wicked eyes glaring up through the water towards Asgard which he hated. Sometimes he heaved himself up, great body and all, trying to escape from the ocean which was his prison. At those times there were great waves in the sea, snow and stormy winds and rain upon the earth, and everyone would be filled with fear lest he escape and bring horrors to pass. But he was never able to drag out his whole hideous length. For the evil in him had grown with his growth; and a weight of evil is the heaviest of all things to lift.

The third monster was the Fenris wolf, and this was the most dreadful of the three. He was so terrible that at first Father Odin decided not to let him out of his sight. He lived in Asgard then, among the Æsir. Only Tŷr the brave had

courage enough to give him food. Day by day he grew huger and huger, fiercer and fiercer, and finally, when All-Father saw how mighty he had become, and how he bid fair to bring destruction upon all Asgard if he were allowed to prowl and growl about as he saw fit, Odin resolved to have the beast chained up. The Æsir then went to their smithies and forged a long, strong chain which they thought no living creature could break. They took it to the wolf to try its strength, and he, looking sidewise, chuckled to himself and let them do what they would with him. But as soon as he stretched himself, the chain burst into a thousand pieces, as if it were made of twine. Then the Æsir hurried away and made another chain, far, far stronger than the first.

"If you can break this, O Fenrir," they said, "you will be famous indeed."

Again the wolf blinked at his chain; again he chuckled and let them fasten him without a struggle, for he knew that his own strength had been increased since he broke the other; but as soon as the chain was fastened, he shook his great shoulders, kicked his mighty legs, and—snap!—the links of the chain went whirling far and wide, and once more the fierce beast was free.

Then the Æsir were alarmed for fear that they would never be able to make a chain mighty enough to hold the wolf, who was growing stronger every minute; but they sent Skirnir, Frey's trusty messenger, to the land of the dwarfs for help. "Make us a chain," was the message he bore from the Æsir—"make us a chain stronger than any chain that was ever forged; for the Fenris wolf must be captured and bound, or all the world must pay the penalty."

The dwarfs were the finest workmen in the world, as the Æsir knew; for it was they who made Thor's hammer, and Odin's spear, and Balder's famous ship, besides many other wondrous things that you remember. So when Skirnir gave them the message, they set to work with their little hammers

and anvils, and before long they had welded a wonderful chain, such as no man had ever before seen. Strange things went to the making of it—the sound of a cat's footsteps, the roots of a mountain, a bear's sinews, a fish's breath, and other magic materials that only the dwarfs knew how to put together; and the result was a chain as soft and twistable as a silken cord, but stronger than an iron cable. With this chain Skirnir galloped back to Asgard, and with it the gods were sure of chaining Fenrir; but they meant to go about the business slyly, so that the wolf should not suspect the danger which was so near.

"Ho, Fenrir!" they cried. "Here is a new chain for you. Do you think you can snap this as easily as you did the last? We warn you that it is stronger than it looks." They handed it about from one to another, each trying to break the links, but in vain. The wolf watched them disdainfully.

"Pooh! There is little honor in breaking a thread so slender!" he said. "I know that I could snap it with one bite of my big teeth. But there may be some trick about it; I will not let it bind my feet—not I."

"Oho!" cried the Æsir. "He is afraid! He fears that we shall bind him in cords that he cannot loose. But see how slender the chain is. Surely, if you could burst the chain of iron, O Fenrir, you could break this far more easily." Still the wolf shook his head, and refused to let them fasten him, suspecting some trick. "But even if you find that you cannot break our chain," they said, "you need not be afraid. We shall set you free again."

"Set me free!" growled the wolf. "Yes, you will set me free at the end of the world—not before! I know your ways, O Æsir; and if you are able to bind me so fast that I cannot free myself, I shall wait long to have the chain made loose. But no one shall call me coward. If one of you will place his hand in my mouth and hold it there while the others bind me, I will let the chain be fastened."

The gods looked at one another, their mouths drooping. Who would do this thing and bear the fury of the angry wolf when he should find himself tricked and captured? Yet this was their only chance to bind the monster and protect Asgard from danger. At last bold Tŷr stepped forward, the bravest of all the Æsir. "Open your mouth, Fenrir," he cried, with a laugh. "I will pledge my hand to the trial."

Then the wolf yawned his great jaws, and Tŷr thrust in his good right hand, knowing full well that he was to lose it in the game. The Æsir stepped up with the dwarfs' magic chain, and Fenrir let them fasten it about his feet. But when the bonds were drawn tight, he began to struggle; and the more he tugged, the tighter drew the chain, so that he soon saw himself to be entrapped. Then how he writhed and kicked, howled and growled, in his terrible rage! How the heavens trembled and the earth shook below! The Æsir set up a laugh to see him so helpless—all except Tŷr; for at the first sound of laughter the wolf shut his great mouth with a click, and poor brave Tŷr had lost the right hand which had done so many heroic deeds in battle, and which would never again wave sword before the warriors whom he loved and would help to win the victory. But great was the honor which he won that day, for without his generous deed the Fenris wolf could never have been captured.

And now the monster was safely secured by the strong chain which the dwarfs had made, and all his struggles to be free were in vain, for they only bound the silken rope all the tighter. The Æsir took one end of the chain and fastened it through a big rock which they planted far down in the earth, as far as they could drive it with a huge hammer of stone. Into the wolf's great mouth they thrust a sword crosswise, so that the hilt pierced his lower jaw while the point stuck through the upper one; and there in the heart of the world he lay howling and growling, but quite unable to move. Only the foam which dripped from his angry jaws trickled away and over the

earth until it formed a mighty river; from his wicked mouth also came smoke and fire, and the sound of his horrible growls. And when men hear this and see this they run away as fast as they can, for they know that danger still lurks near where the Fenris wolf lies chained in the depths of the earth; and here he will lie until Ragnarök—until the end of all things.

CHAPTER IX
The Quest of the Hammer

One morning Thor the Thunderer awoke with a yawn, and stretching out his knotted arm, felt for his precious hammer, which he kept always under his pillow of clouds. But he started up with a roar of rage, so that all the palace trembled. The hammer was gone!

Now this was a very serious matter, for Thor was the protector of Asgard, and Miölnir, the magic hammer which the dwarf had made, was his mighty weapon, of which the enemies of the Æsir stood so much in dread that they dared not venture near. But if they should learn that Miölnir was gone, who could tell what danger might not threaten the palaces of heaven?

Thor darted his flashing eye into every corner of Cloud Land in search of the hammer. He called his fair wife, Sif of the golden hair, to aid in the search, and his two lovely daughters, Thrude and Lora. They hunted and they hunted; they turned Thrudheim upside down, and set the clouds to rolling wonderfully, as they peeped and pried behind and around and under each billowy mass. But Miölnir was not to be found. Certainly, someone had stolen it.

Thor's yellow beard quivered with rage, and his hair bristled on end like the golden rays of a star, while all his household trembled.

"It is Loki again!" he cried. "I am sure Loki is at the bottom of this mischief!" For since the time when Thor had captured Loki for the dwarf Brock and had given him over to have his bragging lips sewed up, Loki had looked at him with evil eyes; and Thor knew that the red rascal hated him most of all the gods.

But this time Thor was mistaken. It was not Loki who had stolen the hammer—he was too great a coward for that. And though he meant, before the end, to be revenged upon Thor, he was waiting until a safe chance should come, when Thor himself might stumble into danger, and Loki need only to help the evil by a malicious word or two; and this chance came later, as you shall hear in another tale.

Meanwhile Loki was on his best behavior, trying to appear very kind and obliging; so when Thor came rumbling and roaring up to him, demanding, "What have you done with my hammer, you thief?" Loki looked surprised, but did not lose his temper nor answer rudely.

"Have you indeed missed your hammer, brother Thor?" he said, mumbling, for his mouth was still sore where Brock had sewed the stitches. "That is a pity; for if the giants hear of this, they will be coming to try their might against Asgard."

"Hush!" muttered Thor, grasping him by the shoulder with his iron fingers. "That is what I fear. But look you, Loki: I suspect your hand in the mischief. Come, confess."

Then Loki protested that he had nothing to do with so wicked a deed. "But," he added wheedlingly, "I think I can guess the thief; and because I love you, Thor, I will help you to find him."

"Humph!" growled Thor. "Much love you bear to me! However, you are a wise rascal, the nimblest wit of all the Æsir, and it is better to have you on my side than on the other, when giants are in the game. Tell me, then: who has robbed the Thunder-Lord of his bolt of power?"

Loki drew near and whispered in Thor's ear. "Look, how the storms rage and the winds howl in the world below! Some one is wielding your thunder-hammer all unskillfully. Can you not guess the thief? Who but Thrym, the mighty giant who has ever been your enemy and your imitator, and whose fingers have long itched to grasp the short handle of mighty Miölnir, that the world may name him Thunder-Lord instead

of you. But look! What a tempest! The world will be shattered into fragments unless we soon get the hammer back."

Then Thor roared with rage. "I will seek this impudent Thrym!" he cried. "I will crush him into bits, and teach him to meddle with the weapon of the Æsir!"

"Softly, softly," said Loki, smiling maliciously. "He is a shrewd giant, and a mighty. Even you, great Thor, cannot go to him and pluck the hammer from his hand as one would slip the rattle from a baby's pink fist. Nay, you must use craft, Thor; and it is I who will teach you, if you will be patient."

Thor was a brave, blunt fellow, and he hated the ways of Loki, his lies and his deceit. He liked best the way of warriors —the thundering charge, the flash of weapons, and the heavy blow; but without the hammer he could not fight the giants hand to hand. Loki's advice seemed wise, and he decided to leave the matter to the Red One.

Loki was now all eagerness, for he loved difficulties which would set his wit in play and bring other folk into danger. "Look, now," he said. "We must go to Freia and borrow her falcon dress. But you must ask; for she loves me so little that she would scarce listen to me."

So first they made their way to Folkvang, the house of maidens, where Freia dwelt, the loveliest of all in Asgard. She was fairer than fair, and sweeter than sweet, and the tears from her flower-eyes made the dew which blessed the earth-flowers night and morning. Of her Thor borrowed the magic dress of feathers in which Freia was wont to clothe herself and flit like a great beautiful bird all about the world. She was willing enough to lend it to Thor when he told her that by its aid he hoped to win back the hammer which he had lost; for she well knew the danger threatening herself and all the Æsir until Miölnir should be found.

"Now will I fetch the hammer for you," said Loki. So he put on the falcon plumage, and, spreading his brown wings, flapped away up, up, over the world, down, down, across the

great ocean which lies beyond all things that men know. And he came to the dark country where there was no sunshine nor spring, but it was always dreary winter; where mountains were piled up like blocks of ice, and where great caverns yawned hungrily in blackness. And this was Jotunheim, the land of the Frost Giants.

And lo! when Loki came thereto he found Thrym the Giant King sitting outside his palace cave, playing with his dogs and horses. The dogs were as big as elephants, and the horses were as big as houses, but Thrym himself was as huge as a mountain; and Loki trembled, but he tried to seem brave.

"Good-day, Loki," said Thrym, with the terrible voice of which he was so proud, for he fancied it was as loud as Thor's. "How fares it, feathered one, with your little brothers, the Æsir, in Asgard halls? And how dare you venture alone in this guise to Giant Land?"

"It is an ill day in Asgard," sighed Loki, keeping his eye warily upon the giant, "and a stormy one in the world of men. I heard the winds howling and the storms rushing on the earth as I passed by. Some mighty one has stolen the hammer of our Thor. Is it you, Thrym, greatest of all giants—greater than Thor himself?"

This the crafty one said to flatter Thrym, for Loki well knew the weakness of those who love to be thought greater than they are.

Then Thrym bridled and swelled with pride, and tried to put on the majesty and awe of noble Thor; but he only succeeded in becoming an ugly, puffy monster.

"Well, yes," he admitted. "I have the hammer that belonged to your little Thor; and now how much of a lord is he?"

"Alack!" sighed Loki again, "weak enough he is without his magic weapon. But you, O Thrym—surely your mightiness needs no such aid. Give me the hammer, that Asgard may no longer be shaken by Thor's grief for his precious toy."

But Thrym was not so easily to be flattered into parting

with his stolen treasure. He grinned a dreadful grin, several yards in width, which his teeth barred like jagged boulders across the entrance to a mountain cavern.

"Miölnir the hammer is mine," he said, "and I am Thunder-Lord, mightiest of the mighty. I have hidden it where Thor can never find it, twelve leagues below the sea-caves, where Queen Ran lives with her daughters, the white-capped Waves. But listen, Loki. Go tell the Æsir that I will give back Thor's hammer. I will give it back upon one condition—that they send Freia the beautiful to be my wife."

"Freia the beautiful!" Loki had to stifle a laugh. Fancy the Æsir giving their fairest flower to such an ugly fellow as this! But he only said politely, "Ah, yes; you demand our Freia in exchange for the little hammer? It is a costly price, great Thrym. But I will be your friend in Asgard. If I have my way, you shall soon see the fairest bride in all the world knocking at your door. Farewell!"

So Loki whizzed back to Asgard on his falcon wings; and as he went he chuckled to think of the evils which were likely to happen because of his words with Thrym. First he gave the message to Thor—not sparing of Thrym's insolence, to make Thor angry; and then he went to Freia with the word for her—not sparing of Thrym's ugliness, to make her shudder. The spiteful fellow!

Now you can imagine the horror that was in Asgard as the Æsir listened to Loki's words. "My hammer!" roared Thor. "The villain confesses that he has stolen my hammer, and boasts that he is Thunder-Lord! Gr-r-r!"

"The ugly giant!" wailed Freia. "Must I be the bride of that hideous old monster, and live in his gloomy mountain prison all my life?"

"Yes; put on your bridal veil, sweet Freia," said Loki maliciously, "and come with me to Jotunheim. Hang your famous starry necklace about your neck, and don your bravest robe; for in eight days there will be a wedding, and Thor's hammer

is to pay."

Then Freia fell to weeping. "I cannot go! I will not go!" she cried. "I will not leave the home of gladness and Father Odin's table to dwell in the land of horrors! Thor's hammer is mighty, but mightier the love of the kind Æsir for their little Freia! Good Odin, dear brother Frey, speak for me! You will not make me go?"

The Æsir looked at her and thought how lonely and bare would Asgard be without her loveliness; for she was fairer than fair, and sweeter than sweet.

"She shall not go!" shouted Frey, putting his arms about his sister's neck.

"No, she shall not go!" cried all the Æsir with one voice.

"But my hammer," insisted Thor. "I must have Miölnir back again."

"And my word to Thrym," said Loki, "that must be made good."

"You are too generous with your words," said Father Odin sternly, for he knew his brother well. "Your word is not a gem of great price, for you have made it cheap."

Then spoke Heimdal, the sleepless watchman who sits on guard at the entrance to the rainbow bridge which leads to Asgard; and Heimdal was the wisest of the Æsir, for he could see into the future, and knew how things would come to pass. Through his golden teeth he spoke, for his teeth were all of gold.

"I have a plan," he said. "Let us dress Thor himself like a bride in Freia's robes, and send him to Jotunheim to talk with Thrym and to win back his hammer."

But at this word Thor grew very angry. "What! dress me like a girl!" he roared. "I should never hear the last of it! The Æsir will mock me, and call me 'maiden'! The giants, and even the puny dwarfs, will have a lasting jest upon me! I will not go! I will fight! I will die, if need be! But dressed as a woman I will not go!"

But Loki answered him with sharp words, for this was a scheme after his own heart. "What, Thor!" he said. "Would you lose your hammer and keep Asgard in danger for so small a whim? Look, now: if you go not, Thrym with his giants will come in a mighty army and drive us from Asgard; then he will indeed make Freia his bride, and moreover he will have you for his slave under the power of his hammer. How like you this picture, brother of the thunder? Nay, Heimdal's plan is a good one, and I myself will help to carry it out."

Still Thor hesitated; but Freia came and laid her white hand on his arm, and looked up into his scowling face pleadingly.

"To save me, Thor," she begged. And Thor said he would go.

Then there was great sport among the Æsir, while they dressed Thor like a beautiful maiden. Brunhilde and her sisters, the nine Valkyrie, daughters of Odin, had the task in hand. How they laughed as they brushed and curled his yellow hair, and set upon it the wondrous headdress of silk and pearls! They let out seams, and they let down hems, and set on extra pieces, to make it larger, and so they hid his great limbs and knotted arms under Freia's fairest robe of scarlet; but beneath it all he would wear his shirt of mail and his belt of power that gave him double strength. Freia herself twisted about his neck her famous necklace of starry jewels, and Queen Frigg, his mother, hung at his girdle a jingling bunch of keys, such as was the custom for the bride to wear at Norse weddings. Last of all, that Thrym might not see Thor's fierce eyes and the yellow beard, that ill became a maiden, they threw over him a long veil of silver white which covered him to the feet. And there he stood, as stately and tall a bride as even a giant might wish to see; but on his hands he wore his iron gloves, and they ached for but one thing—to grasp the handle of the stolen hammer.

"Ah, what a lovely maid it is!" chuckled Loki; "and how


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glad will Thrym be to see this Freia come! Bride Thor, I will go with you as your handmaiden, for I would fain see the fun."

"Come, then," said Thor sulkily, for he was ill pleased, and wore his maiden robes with no good grace. "It is fitting that you go; for I like not these lies and maskings, and I may spoil the mummery without you at my elbow."

There was loud laughter above the clouds when Thor, all veiled and dainty seeming, drove away from Asgard to his wedding, with maid Loki by his side. Thor cracked his whip and chirruped fiercely to his twin goats with golden hoofs, for he wanted to escape the sounds of mirth that echoed from the rainbow bridge, where all the Æsir stood watching. Loki, sitting with his hands meekly folded like a girl, chuckled as he glanced up at Thor's angry face; but he said nothing, for he knew it was not good to joke too far with Thor, even when Miölnir was hidden twelve leagues below the sea in Ran's kingdom.

So off they dashed to Jotunheim, where Thrym was waiting and longing for his beautiful bride. Thor's goats thundered along above the sea and land and people far below, who looked up wondering as the noise rolled overhead. "Hear how the thunder rumbles!" they said. "Thor is on a long journey tonight." And a long journey it was, as the tired goats found before they reached the end.

Thrym heard the sound of their approach, for his ear was eager. "Hola!" he cried. "Someone is coming from Asgard—only one of Odin's children could make a din so fearful. Hasten, men, and see if they are bringing Freia to be my wife."

Then the lookout giant stepped down from the top of his mountain, and said that a chariot was bringing two maidens to the door.

"Run, giants, run!" shouted Thrym, in a fever at this news. "My bride is coming! Put silken cushions on the benches for a great banquet, and make the house beautiful for the fairest maid in all space! Bring in all my golden-horned cows and my

coal-black oxen, that she may see how rich I am, and heap all my gold and jewels about to dazzle her sweet eyes! She shall find me richest of the rich; and when I have her—fairest of the fair—there will be no treasure that I lack—not one!"

The chariot stopped at the gate, and out stepped the tall bride, hidden from head to foot, and her handmaiden muffled to the chin. "How afraid of catching cold they must be!" whispered the giant ladies, who were peering over one another's shoulders to catch a glimpse of the bride, just as the crowd outside the awning does at a wedding nowadays.

Thrym had sent six splendid servants to escort the maidens: these were the Metal Kings, who served him as lord of them all. There was the Gold King, all in cloth of gold, with fringes of yellow bullion, most glittering to see; and there was the Silver King, almost as gorgeous in a suit of spangled white; and side by side bowed the dark Kings of Iron and Lead, the one mighty in black, the other sullen in blue; and after them were the Copper King, gleaming ruddy and brave, and the Tin King, strutting in his trimmings of gaudy tinsel which looked nearly as well as silver but were more economical. And this fine troop of lackey kings most politely led Thor and Loki into the palace, and gave them of the best, for they never suspected who these seeming maidens really were.

And when evening came there was a wonderful banquet to celebrate the wedding. On a golden throne sat Thrym, uglier than ever in his finery of purple and gold. Beside him was the bride, of whose face no one had yet caught even a glimpse; and at Thrym's other hand stood Loki, the waiting-maid, for he wanted to be near to mend the mistakes which Thor might make.

Now the dishes at the feast were served in a huge way, as befitted the table of giants: great beeves roasted whole, on platters as wide across as a ship's deck; plum-puddings as fat as feather-beds, with plums as big as footballs; and a wedding cake like a snow-capped haymow. The giants ate enormously.

But to Thor, because they thought him a dainty maiden, they served small bits of everything on a tiny gold dish. Now Thor's long journey had made him very hungry, and through his veil he whispered to Loki, "I shall starve, Loki! I cannot fare on these nibbles. I must eat a goodly meal as I do at home." And forthwith he helped himself to such morsels as might satisfy his hunger for a little time. You should have seen the giants stare at the meal which the dainty bride devoured!

For first under the silver veil disappeared by pieces a whole roast ox. Then Thor made eight mouthfuls of eight pink salmon, a dish of which he was very fond. And next he looked about and reached for a platter of cakes and sweetmeats that was set aside at one end of the table for the lady guests, and the bride ate them all. You can fancy how the damsels drew down their mouths and looked at one another when they saw their dessert disappear; and they whispered about the table, "Alack! if our future mistress is to sup like this day by day, there will be poor cheer for the rest of us!" And to crown it all, Thor was thirsty, as well he might be; and one after another he raised to his lips and emptied three great barrels of mead, the foamy drink of the giants. Then indeed Thrym was amazed, for Thor's giant appetite had beaten that of the giants themselves.

"Never before saw I a bride so hungry," he cried, "and never before one half so thirsty!"

But Loki, the waiting-maid, whispered to him softly, "The truth is, great Thrym, that my dear mistress was almost starved. For eight days Freia has eaten nothing at all, so eager was she for Jotunheim."

Then Thrym was delighted, you may be sure. He forgave his hungry bride, and loved her with all his heart. He leaned forward to give her a kiss, raising a corner of her veil; but his hand dropped suddenly, and he started up in terror, for he had caught the angry flash of Thor's eye, which was glaring at him through the bridal veil. Thor was longing for his hammer.

"Why has Freia so sharp a look?" Thrym cried. "It pierces like lightning and burns like fire."

But again the sly waiting-maid whispered timidly, "Oh, Thrym, be not amazed! The truth is, my poor mistress's eyes are red with wakefulness and bright with longing. For eight nights Freia has not known a wink of sleep, so eager was she for Jotunheim."

Then again Thrym was doubly delighted, and he longed to call her his very own dear wife. "Bring in the wedding gift!" he cried. "Bring in Thor's hammer, Miölnir, and give it to Freia, as I promised; for when I have kept my word she will be mine—all mine!"

Then Thor's big heart laughed under his woman's dress, and his fierce eyes swept eagerly down the hall to meet the servant who was bringing in the hammer on a velvet cushion. Thor's fingers could hardly wait to clutch the stubby handle which they knew so well; but he sat quite still on the throne beside ugly old Thrym, with his hands meekly folded and his head bowed like a bashful bride.

The giant servant drew nearer, nearer, puffing and blowing, strong though he was, beneath the mighty weight. He was about to lay it at Thor's feet (for he thought it so heavy that no maiden could lift it or hold it in her lap), when suddenly Thor's heart swelled, and he gave a most unmaidenly shout of rage and triumph. With one swoop he grasped the hammer in his iron fingers; with the other arm he tore off the veil that hid his terrible face, and trampled it under foot; then he turned to the frightened king, who cowered beside him on the throne.

"Thief!" he cried. "Freia sends you this as a wedding gift!" And he whirled the hammer about his head, then hurled it once, twice, thrice, as it rebounded to his hand; and in the first stroke, as of lightning, Thrym rolled dead from his throne; in the second stroke perished the whole giant household—these ugly enemies of the Æsir; and in the third stroke

the palace itself tumbled together and fell to the ground like a toppling play-house of blocks.

But Loki and Thor stood safely among the ruins, dressed in their tattered maiden robes, a quaint and curious sight; and Loki, full of mischief now as ever, burst out laughing.

"Oh, Thor! if you could see"—he began; but Thor held up his hammer and shook it gently as he said—

"Look now, Loki: it was an excellent joke, and so far you have done well—after your crafty fashion, which likes me not. But now I have my hammer again, and the joke is done. From you, nor from another, I brook no laughter at my expense. Henceforth we will have no mention of this masquerade, nor of these rags which now I throw away. Do you hear, red laugher?"

And Loki heard, with a look of hate, and stifled his laughter as best he could; for it is not good to laugh at him who holds the hammer.

Not once after that was there mention in Asgard of the time when Thor dressed him as a girl and won his bridal gift from Thrym the giant.

But Miölnir was safe once more in Asgard, and you and I know how it came there; so someone must have told. I wonder if red Loki whispered the tale to some outsider, after all? Perhaps it may be so, for now he knew how best to make Thor angry; and from that day when Thor forbade his laughing, Loki hated him with the mean little hatred of a mean little soul.

CHAPTER X
The Giantess Who Would Not

Of all the Æsir who sat in the twelve seats about Father Odin's wonder-throne none was so dear to the people of Midgard, the world of men, as Frey. For Frey, the twin brother of Freia the fair, was the god who sent sunshine and rain upon the earth that men's crops might grow and ripen, and the fruits become sweet and mellow. He gave men cattle, and showed them how to till the fields; and it was he who spread peace and prosperity over the world. For he was lord of the Light-Elves, the spirits of the upper air, who were more beautiful than the sun. And these were his servants whom he sent to answer the prayers of the men who loved him. Frey was more beautiful, too, than any of the Æsir except young Balder. This was another reason why he was so beloved by all. But there came a time when Frey found someone who would not love him; and that was a new experience for him, a punishment for the only wrong he ever committed.

You remember that Father Odin had a wonderful throne in the silver-roofed house, a throne whence he could see everything that was happening in all the world? Well, no one was allowed to sit upon this throne except All-Father himself, for he would not have the others spying into affairs which only the King of Asgard was wise enough to understand. But one day, when Odin was away from home, Frey had such a longing to climb up where he might gaze upon all the world which he loved, that he could not resist the temptation. He stole up to the great throne when no one was looking, and mounting the steps, seated himself upon All-Father's wonder-seat.

Oh, marvelous, grand, and beautiful! He looked off into the heavens, and there he saw all the Æsir busy about their

daily work. He looked above, into the shining realm of clear air. And there he saw his messengers, the pretty little Light-Elves, flying about upon their errands of help for men. Some were carrying seeds for the farmers to plant. Some were watering the fields with their little water-pots, making the summer showers. Some were pinching the cheeks of the apples to make them red, and others were reeling silk for the corn-tassels. Then Frey looked down upon the earth, where men were scurrying around like little ants, improving the blessings which his servants were sending, and often stopping their work to give thanks to their beloved Frey. And this made his kind heart glad.

Next he turned his gaze down into the depths of the blue ocean which flowed about Midgard like a great river. And down in the sea-caves he saw the mermaids playing, Queen Ran and her daughters the white-capped Waves, with their nets ready to catch the sailors who might be drowned at sea. And he saw King Œgir, among the whales and dolphins, with all the myriad wondrous creatures who lived in his watery empire. But Frey's father, old Niörd, lord of the ocean wind, would have been more interested than he in such a sight.

Last of all Frey bent his eyes upon the far, cold land of Jotunheim, beyond the ocean, where the giants lived; and as he did so, a beam of brightness dazzled him. He rubbed his eyes and looked again; and lo! the flash was from the bright arms of a beautiful maiden, who was passing from her father's hall to her own little bower. When she raised her arms to open the door, the air and water reflected their brightness so that the whole world was flooded with light, and one shaft shot straight into the heart of Frey, making him love her and long for her more than for anything he had ever seen. But because he knew that she must be a giant's daughter, how could he win her for his bride? Frey descended from Odin's throne very sadly, very hopelessly, and went home with a heavy heart which would let him neither eat nor sleep. This was the

penalty which came for his disobedience in presuming to sit upon Odin's sacred throne.

For hours no one dared speak to Frey, he looked so gloomy and forbidding, quite unlike his own gay self. Niörd his father was greatly worried, and knew not what to do; at last he sent for Skirnir, who was Frey's favorite servant, and bade him find out what was the matter. Skirnir therefore went to his master, whom he found sitting all alone in his great hall, looking as if there were no more joy for him.

"What ails you, master?" asked Skirnir. "From the beginning of time when we were very young we two have lived together, and I have served you with loving care. You ought, then, to have confidence in me and tell me all your troubles."

"Ah, Skirnir, my faithful friend," sighed Frey, "how shall I tell you my sorrow? The sun shines every day, but no longer brings light to my sad heart. And all because I saw more than was good for me!"

So then he told Skirnir all the matter: how he had stolen into Odin's seat, and what he had seen from there; how he loved a giant's daughter whose arms were more bright than silver moonbeams.

"Oh, Skirnir, I love her very dearly," he cried; "but because our races are enemies she would never marry me, I know, even if her father would allow it. Therefore is it that I am so sad."

But Skirnir did not seem to think the case so hopeless. "Give me but your swift horse," he said, "which can bear me even through flames of fire and thick smoke; give me also your magic wand and your sword, which if he be brave who carries it, will smite by itself any giant who comes in its way—and I will see what I can do for you."

Then Skirnir rode forth upon his dangerous errand; for a visit to Giant Land was ever a perilous undertaking, as you may well imagine. As Skirnir rode, he patted his good horse's neck and said to him, "Dark it is, friend, and we have to go

over frosty mountains and among frosty people this night. Bear me well, good horse; for if you fail me the giants will catch us both, and neither of us will return to bring the news to our master Frey."

After a long night of hard riding over mountain and desolate snowfield, Skirnir came to that part of Jotunheim where the giant Gymir dwelt. This was the father of Gerd, the maiden whom Frey had seen and loved. But first he had to ride through a hedge of flame, which the horse passed bravely. Now when he came to the house of Gymir, he found a pack of fierce dogs chained about the door to keep strangers away.

"H'm!" thought Skirnir, "I like this little indeed. I must find out whether there be not some other entrance." So he looked around, and soon he saw a herdsman sitting on a little hill, tending his cattle. Skirnir rode up to him.

"Ho, friend," he cried. "Tell me, how am I to pass these growling curs so that I may speak with the young maiden who dwells in this house?"

"Are you mad, or are you a spirit who is not afraid of death!" exclaimed the herdsman. "Know you not that you can never enter there? That is Gymir's dwelling, and he lets no one speak with his fair and good daughter."

"If I choose to die, you need not weep for me," quoth Skirnir boldly. "But I do not think that I am yet to die. The Norn-maidens spun my fate centuries ago, and they only can tell what is to be." Now Skirnir's voice was loud and the hoof-beats of his horse were mighty. For this was one of the magic steeds of Asgard, used to bearing Frey himself on his broad back. And not without much noise had all these things been said and done. From her room in Gymir's mansion Gerd heard the stranger's voice, and to her waiting-maid she said, "What are these sounds that I hear? The earth is trembling and all the house shakes."

Then the servant ran to look out of the window, and in a minute she popped in her head, crying, "Here is a mighty

stranger who has dismounted from his horse and leads him by the bridle to crop the grass."

Gerd was curious to see who this stranger might be; for her father kept her close and she saw few visitors.

"Bid him enter our hall," she said, "and give him a horn of bright mead to drink. I will see him, though I fear it is the slayer of my brother." For Gerd was the sister of Thiasse whom Thor slew.

So Skirnir came into the hall, and Gerd received him coldly. "Who are you?" she asked. "Which of the wise Æsir are you? For I know that only one of the mighty ones from Asgard would have the courage and the power to pass through the raging flames that surround my father's land."

"I come from Frey, O maiden," said Skirnir, "from Frey, whom all folk love. I come to beg that you also will love him and consent to be his wife. For Frey has seen your beauty, and you are very dear to him."

Gerd laughed carelessly. "I have heard of your fair Frey," she said, "and how he is more dear to all than sunshine and the sweet smell of flowers. But he is not dear to me. I do not wish the love of Frey, nor any of that race of giant-killers. Tell him that I will not be his bride."

"Stay, be not so hasty," urged Skirnir. "We have more words to exchange before I start for home. Look, I will give you eleven golden apples from Asgard's magic tree if you will go with me to Frey's dwelling."

Gerd would hear nothing of the golden apples. Then Skirnir promised her the golden ring, Draupnir, which the dwarfs had made for Odin, out of which every ninth night dropped eight other rings as large and bright. But neither would Gerd listen to word of this generous gift. "I have gold enough in my father's house," she said disdainfully. "With such trifles you cannot tempt me to marry your Frey."

Then Skirnir was very angry, and he began to storm and threaten. "I will strike you with the bright sword which I hold

in my hand!" he cried. "It is Frey's magic sword, under which even that stout old giant your father must sink if he comes within its reach." But again Gerd laughed, though with less mirth in her laughter. "I will tame you with Frey's magic wand!" he threatened, "the wand with which he rules the Light-Elves, and changes folk into strange shapes. You shall vanish from the sight of men, and pass your life on the eagle's mount far above the sky, where you shall sit all day, too sad to eat. And when you come thence, after countless ages, you will be a hideous monster at which all creatures will stare in mockery and scorn."

These were dreadful words, and Gerd no longer laughed when she heard them. But she was obstinate. "I do not love Frey," she said, "and I will not be his bride."

Then Skirnir was angry indeed, and his fury blazed out in threats most horrible. "If you will not marry my dear master," he cried, "you shall be the most unhappy girl that ever lived. You shall cry all day long and never see joy again. You shall marry a hideous old three-headed giant, and from day to day you shall ever be in terror of some still more dreadful fate to come!"

Now Gerd began to tremble, for she saw that Frey's servant meant every word that he spoke. But she was not ready to yield. "Go back to the land of Elves," she taunted; "I will not be their Queen at any cost."

Now Skirnir grasped the magic wand, and waving it over her, spoke his last words of threat and anger. "The gods are angry with you, evil maiden!" he cried. "Odin sees your obstinacy from his throne, and will punish you for your cruelty to kind Frey. Frey himself, instead of loving, will shun you when the gods arm themselves to destroy you and all your race. Listen, Giants, Dwarfs, Light-Elves, Men, and all friends of the Æsir! I forbid anyone to have aught to do with this wicked girl—only the old giant who shall carry her to his gloomy castle, barred and bolted and grated across. Misery, pain, and

madness—this, Gerd, is the fate which I wave over you with my wand, unless speedily you repent and do my will."

Poor Gerd gasped and trembled under this dreadful doom. Her willfulness was quite broken, and now she sought only to make Skirnir unsay the words of horror. "Hold!" she cried; "be welcome, youth, in the name of your powerful master, Frey. I cannot afford to be enemy of such as he. Drink this icy cup of welcome filled with the giant's mead, and take with it my consent to be the bride of Frey. But alas! I never thought to be a friend to one of Asgard's race."

"You shall never repent, fair Gerd," said Skirnir gently. For now that he had won his will, he was all smiles and friendliness. "And when you see my dear master, you will be glad indeed that you did not insist upon wedding the old three-headed giant. For Frey is fair—ay, as fair as are you yourself. And that is saying much, sweet lady."

So Gerd promised that in nine days she would come to be the bride of Frey. And the more she thought it over, the less unpleasant seemed the idea. So that before the time was passed, she was almost as eager as Frey for their happy meeting; not quite so eager, for you must remember that she had not yet seen him and knew not all his glory, while he knew what it was to long and long for what he had once seen.

Indeed, when Skirnir galloped back to Frey as fast as the good horse could take him, still Frey chided him for being slow. And when the faithful fellow told the good news of the bride who was to be his master's in nine short days, still Frey frowned and grumbled impatiently.

"How can I wait to see her?" he cried. "One day is long; two days are a century; nine days seem forever. Oh, Skirnir, could you not have done better than that for your dear master?"

But Skirnir forgave Frey for his impatience, for he knew that thenceforward his master would love all the better him who had done so nobly to win the beloved bride.

When Gerd married Frey and went with him to live in Elf Land, where he and she were king and queen, they were the happiest folk that the world ever saw. And Gerd was as grateful to Skirnir as Frey himself. For she could not help thinking of that dreadful old three-headed giant whom but for him she might have married, instead of her beautiful, kind Frey.

So you see that sometimes one is happier in the end if she is not allowed to have her own way.

CHAPTER XI
Thor's Visit to the Giants

Nowadays, since their journey to get the stolen hammer, Thor and Loki were good friends, for Loki seemed to have turned over a new leaf and to be a very decent sort of fellow; but really he was the same sly rascal at heart, only biding his time for mischief. However, in this tale he behaves well enough.

It was a long time since Thor had slain any giants, and he was growing restless for an adventure. "Come, Loki," he said one day, "let us fare forth to Giant Land and see what news there is among the Big Folk."

Loki laughed, saying, "Let us go, Thor. I know I am safe with you;" which was a piece of flattery that happened to be true.

So they mounted the goat chariot as they had done so many times before and rumbled away out of Asgard. All day they rode; and when evening came they stopped at a little house on the edge of a forest, where lived a poor peasant with his wife, his son, and daughter.

"May we rest here for the night, friend?" asked Thor; and noting their poverty, he added, "We bring our own supper, and ask but a bed to sleep in." So the peasant was glad to have them stay. Then Thor, who knew what he was about, killed and cooked his two goats, and invited the family of peasants to sup with him and Loki; but when the meal was ended, he bade them carefully save all the bones and throw them into the goatskins which he had laid beside the hearth. Then Thor and Loki lay down to sleep.

In the morning, very early, before the rest were awake, Thor rose, and taking his hammer, Miölnir, went into the

kitchen, where were the remains of his faithful goats. Now the magic hammer was skillful, not only to slay, but to restore, when Thor's hand wielded it. He touched with it the two heaps of skin and bones, and lo! up sprang the goats, alive and well, and as good as new. No, not quite as good as new. What was this? Thor roared with anger, for one of the goats was lame in one of his legs, and limped sorely. "Some one has meddled with the bones!" he cried. "Who has touched the bones that I bade be kept so carefully?"

Thialfi, the peasant's son, had broken one of the thighbones in order to get at the sweet marrow, and this Thor soon discovered by the lad's guilty face; then Thor was angry indeed. His knuckles grew white as he clenched the handle of Miölnir, ready to hurl it and destroy the whole unlucky house and family; but the peasant and the other three fell upon their knees, trembling with fear, and begged him to spare them. They offered him all that they owned—they offered even to become his slaves—if he would but spare their wretched lives.

They looked so miserable that Thor was sorry for them, and resolved at last to punish them only by taking away Thialfi, the son, and Röskva, the daughter, thenceforth to be his servants. And this was not so bad a bargain for Thor, for Thialfi was the swiftest of foot of any man in the whole world.

So he left the goats behind, and fared forth with his three attendants straight towards the east and Jotunheim. Thialfi carried Thor's wallet with their scanty store of food. They crossed the sea and came at last to a great forest, through which they tramped all day, until once more it was night; and now they must find a place in which all could sleep safely until morning. They wandered about here and there, looking for some sign of a dwelling, and at last they came to a big, queer-shaped house. Very queer indeed it was; for the door at one end was as broad as the house itself! They entered, and lay down to sleep; but at midnight Thor was wakened by a terrible noise. The ground shook under them like an earthquake,

and the house trembled as if it would fall to pieces. Thor arose and called to his companions that there was danger about, and that they must be on guard. Groping in the dark, they found a long, narrow chamber on the right, where Loki and the two peasants hid trembling, while Thor guarded the doorway, hammer in hand. All night long the terrible noises continued, and Thor's attendants were frightened almost to death; but early in the morning Thor stole forth to find out what it all meant. And lo! close at hand in the forest lay an enormous giant, sound asleep and snoring loudly. Then Thor understood whence all their night's terror had proceeded, for the giant was so huge that his snoring shook even the trees of the forest, and made the mountains tremble. So much the better! Here at last was a giant for Thor to tackle. He buckled his belt of power more tightly to increase his strength, and laid hold of Miölnir to hurl it at the giant's forehead; but just at that moment the giant waked, rose slowly to his feet, and stood staring mildly at Thor. He did not seem a fierce giant, so Thor did not kill him at once. "Who are you?" asked Thor sturdily.

"I am the giant Skrymir, little fellow," answered the stranger, "and well I know who you are, Thor of Asgard. But what have you been doing with my glove?"

Then the giant stooped and picked up—what do you think?—the queer house in which Thor and his three companions had spent the night! Loki and the two others had run out of their chamber in affright when they felt it lifted; and their chamber was the thumb of the giant's glove. That was a giant indeed, and Thor felt sure that they must be well upon their way to Giant Land.

When Skrymir learned where they were going, he asked if he might not wend with them, and Thor said that he was willing. Now Skrymir untied his wallet and sat down under a tree to eat his breakfast, while Thor and his party chose another place, not far away, for their picnic. When all had

finished, the giant said, "Let us put our provisions together in one bag, my friends, and I will carry it for you." This seemed fair enough, for Thor had so little food left that he was not afraid to risk losing it; so he agreed, and Skrymir tied all the provisions in his bag and strode on before them with enormous strides, so fast that even Thialfi could scarcely keep up with him.

The day passed, and late in the evening Skrymir halted under a great oak-tree, saying, "Let us rest here. I must have a nap, and you must have your dinner. Here is the wallet—open it and help yourselves." Then he lay down on the moss, and was soon snoring lustily.

Thor tried to open the wallet, in vain; he could not loosen a single knot of the huge thongs that fastened it. He strained and tugged, growing angrier and redder after every useless attempt. This was too much; the giant was making him appear absurd before his servants. He seized his hammer, and bracing his feet with all his might, struck Skrymir a blow on his head. Skrymir stirred lazily, yawned, opened one eye, and asked whether a leaf had fallen on his forehead, and whether his companions had dined yet. Thor bit his lip with vexation, but he answered that they were ready for bed; so he and his three followers retired to rest under another oak.

But Thor did not sleep that night. He lay thinking how he had been put to shame, and how Loki had snickered at the sight of Thor's vain struggles with the giant's wallet, and he resolved that it should not happen again. At about midnight, once more he heard the giant's snore resounding like thunder through the forest. Thor arose, clenching Miölnir tight, and stole over to the tree where Skrymir slept; then with all his might he hurled the hammer and struck the giant on the crown of his head, so hard that the hammer sank deep into his skull. At this the giant awoke with a start, exclaiming, "What is that? Did an acorn fall on my head? What are you doing there, Thor?"

Thor stepped back quickly, answering that he had waked up, but that it was only midnight, so they might all sleep some hours longer. "If I can only give him one more blow before morning," he thought, "he will never see daylight again." So he lay watching until Skrymir had fallen asleep once more, which was near daybreak; then Thor arose as before, and going very softly to the giant's side, smote him on the temple so sore that the hammer sank into his skull up to the very handle. "Surely, he is killed now," thought Thor.

But Skrymir only raised himself on his elbow, stroked his chin, and said, "There are birds above me in the tree. Methinks that just now a feather fell upon my head. What, Thor! are you awake? I am afraid you slept but poorly this night. Come, now, it is high time to rise and make ready for the day. You are not far from our giant city—Utgard we call it. Aha! I have heard you whispering together. You think that I am big; but you will see fellows taller still when you come to Utgard. And now I have a piece of advice to give you. Do not pride yourselves overmuch upon your importance. The followers of Utgard's king think little of such manikins as you, and will not bear any nonsense, I assure you. Be advised; return homeward before it is too late. If you will go on, however, your way lies there to the eastward. Yonder is my path, over the mountains to the north."

So saying, Skrymir hoisted his wallet upon his shoulders, and turning back upon the path that led into the forest, left them staring after him and hoping that they might never see his big bulk again.

Thor and his companions journeyed on until noon, when they saw in the distance a great city, on a lofty plain. As they came nearer, they found the buildings so high that the travelers had to bend back their necks in order to see the tops. "This must be Utgard, the giant city," said Thor. And Utgard indeed it was. At the entrance was a great barred gate, locked so that no one might enter. It was useless to try to force a

passage in; even Thor's great strength could not move it on its hinges. But it was a giant gate, and the bars were made to keep out other giants, with no thought of folk so small as these who now were bent upon finding entrance by one way or another. It was not dignified, and noble Thor disliked the idea. Yet it was their only way; so one by one they squeezed and wriggled between the bars, until they stood in a row inside. In front of them was a wonderful great hall with the door wide open. Thor and the three entered, and found themselves in the midst of a company of giants, the very hugest of their kind. At the end of the hall sat the king upon an enormous throne. Thor, who had been in giant companies ere now, went straight up to the throne and greeted the king with civil words. But the giant merely glanced at him with a disagreeable smile, and said—

"It is wearying to ask travelers about their journey. Such little fellows as you four can scarcely have had any adventures worth mentioning. Stay, now! Do I guess aright? Is this manikin Thor of Asgard, or no? Ah, no! I have heard of Thor's might. You cannot really be he, unless you are taller than you seem, and stronger too. Let us see what feats you and your companions can perform to amuse us. No one is allowed here who cannot excel others in some way or another. What can you do best?"

At this word, Loki, who had entered last, spoke up readily: "There is one thing that I can do—I can eat faster than any man." For Loki was famished with hunger, and thought he saw a way to win a good meal.

Then the king answered, "Truly, that is a noble accomplishment of yours, if you can prove your words true. Let us make the test." So he called forth from among his men Logi—whose name means "fire"—and bade him match his powers with the stranger.

Now a trough full of meat was set upon the floor, with Loki at one end of it and the giant Logi at the other. Each

began to gobble the meat as fast as he could, and it was not a pretty sight to see them. Midway in the trough they met, and at first it would seem as if neither had beaten the other. Loki had indeed done wondrous well in eating the meat from the bones so fast; but Logi, the giant, had in the same time eaten not only meat but bones also, and had swallowed his half of the trough into the bargain. Loki was vanquished at his own game, and retired looking much ashamed and disgusted.

The king then pointed at Thialfi, and asked what that young man could best do. Thialfi answered that of all men he was the swiftest runner, and that he was not afraid to race with anyone whom the king might select.

"That is a goodly craft," said the king, smiling; "but you must be a swift runner indeed if you can win a race from my Hugi. Let us go to the racing-ground."

They followed him out to the plain where Hugi, whose name means "thought," was ready to race with young Thialfi. In the first run Hugi came in so far ahead that when he reached the goal he turned about and went back to meet Thialfi. "You must do better than that, Thialfi, if you hope to win," said the king, laughing, "though I must allow that no one ever before came here who could run so fast as you."

They ran a second race; and this time when Hugi reached the goal there was a long bow-shot between him and Thialfi.

"You are truly a good runner," exclaimed the king. "I doubt not that no man can race like you; but you cannot win from my giant lad, I think. The last time shall show." Then they ran for the third time, and Thialfi put forth all his strength, speeding like the wind; but all his skill was in vain. Hardly had he reached the middle of the course when he heard the shouts of the giants announcing that Hugi had won the goal. Thialfi, too, was beaten at his own game, and he withdrew, as Loki had done, shamefaced and sulky.

There remained now only Thor to redeem the honor of his party, for Röskva the maiden was useless here. Thor had

watched the result of these trials with surprise and anger, though he knew it was no fault of Loki or of Thialfi that they had been worsted by the giants. And Thor was resolved to better even his own former great deeds. The king called to Thor, and asked him what he thought he could best do to prove himself as mighty as the stories told of him. Thor answered that he would undertake to drink more mead than any one of the king's men. At this proposal the king laughed aloud, as if it were a giant joke. He summoned his cup-bearer to fetch his horn of punishment, out of which the giants were wont to drink in turn. And when they returned to the hall, the great vessel was brought to the king.

"When anyone empties this horn at one draught, we call him a famous drinker," said the king. "Some of my men empty it in two trials; but no one is so poor a manikin that he cannot empty it in three. Take the horn, Thor, and see what you can do with it."

Now Thor was very thirsty, so he seized the horn eagerly. It did not seem to him so very large, for he had drunk from other mighty vessels ere now. But indeed, it was deep. He raised it to his lips and took a long pull, saying to himself, "There! I have emptied it already, I know." Yet when he set the horn down to see how well he had done, he found that he seemed scarcely to have drained a drop; the horn was brimming as before. The king chuckled.

"Well, you have drunk but little," he said. "I would never have believed that famous Thor would lower the horn so soon. But doubtless you will finish all at a second draught."

Instead of answering, Thor raised the horn once more to his lips, resolved to do better than before. But for some reason the tip of the horn seemed hard to raise, and when he set the vessel down again his heart sank, for he feared that he had drunk even less than at his first trial. Yet he had really done better, for now it was easy to carry the horn without spilling. The king smiled grimly. "How now, Thor!" he cried. "You

have left too much for your third trial. I fear you will never be able to empty the little horn in three draughts, as the least of my men can do. Ho, ho! You will not be thought so great a hero here as the folk deem you in Asgard, if you cannot play some other game more skillfully than you do this one."

At this speech Thor grew very angry. He raised the horn to his mouth and drank lustily, as long as he was able. But when he looked into the horn, he found that some drops still remained. He had not been able to empty it in three draughts. Angrily he flung down the horn, and said that he would have no more of it.

"Ah, Master Thor," taunted the king, "it is now plain that you are not so mighty as we thought you. Are you inclined to try some other feats? For indeed, you are easily beaten at this one."

"I will try whatever you like," said Thor; "but your horn is a wondrous one, and among the Æsir such a draught as mine would be called far from little. Come, now—what game do you next propose, O King?"

The king thought a moment, then answered carelessly, "There is a little game with which my youngsters amuse themselves, though it is so simple as to be almost childish. It is merely the exercise of lifting my cat from the ground. I should never have dared suggest such a feat as this to you, Thor of Asgard, had I not seen that great tasks are beyond your skill. It may be that you will find this hard enough." So he spoke, smiling slyly, and at that moment there came stalking into the hall a monstrous gray cat, with eyes of yellow fire.

"Ho! Is this the creature I am to lift?" queried Thor. And when they said that it was, he seized the cat around its gray, huge body and tugged with all his might to lift it from the floor. Then the wretched cat, lengthening and lengthening, arched its back like the span of a bridge; and though Thor tugged and heaved his best, he could manage to lift but one of its huge feet off the floor. The other three remained as

firmly planted as iron pillars.

"Oho, oho!" laughed the king, delighted at this sight. "It is just as I thought it would be. Poor little Thor! My cat is too big for him."

"Little I may seem in this land of monsters," cried Thor wrathfully, "but now let him who dares come hither and try a hug with me."

"Nay, little Thor," said the king, seeking to make him yet more angry, "there is not one of my men who would wrestle with you. Why, they would call it child's play, my little fellow. But, for the joke of it, call in my old foster-mother, Elli. She has wrestled with and worsted many a man who seemed no weaker than you, O Thor. She shall try a fall with you."

Now in came the old crone, Elli, whose very name meant "age." She was wrinkled and gray, and her back was bent nearly double with the weight of the years which she carried, but she chuckled when she saw Thor standing with bared arm in the middle of the floor. "Come and be thrown, dearie," she cried in her cracked voice, grinning horribly.

"I will not wrestle with a woman!" exclaimed Thor, eyeing her with pity and disgust, for she was an ugly creature to behold. But the old woman taunted him to his face and the giants clapped their hands, howling that he was "afraid." So there was no way but that Thor must grapple with the hag.

The game began. Thor rushed at the old woman and gripped her tightly in his iron arms, thinking that as soon as she screamed with the pain of his mighty hug, he would give over. But the crone seemed not to mind it at all. Indeed, the more he crushed her old ribs together the firmer and stronger she stood. Now in her turn the witch attempted to trip up Thor's heels, and it was wonderful to see her power and agility. Thor soon began to totter, great Thor, in the hands of a poor old woman! He struggled hard, he braced himself, he turned and twisted. It was no use; the old woman's arms were as strong as knotted oak. In a few moments Thor sank upon

one knee, and that was a sign that he was beaten. The king signaled for them to stop. "You need wrestle no more, Thor," he said, with a curl to his lip, "we see what sort of fellow you are. I thought that old Elli would have no difficulty in bringing to his knees him who could not lift my cat. But come, now, night is almost here. We will think no more of contests. You and your companions shall sup with us as welcome guests and bide here till the morrow."

Now as soon as the king had pleased himself in proving how small and weak were these strangers who had come to the giant city, he became very gracious and kind. But you can fancy whether or no Thor and the others had a good appetite for the banquet where all the giants ate so merrily. You can fancy whether or no they were happy when they went to bed after the day of defeats, and you can guess what sweet dreams they had.

The next morning at daybreak the four guests arose and made ready to steal back to Asgard without attracting any more attention. For this adventure alone of all those in which Thor had taken part had been a disgraceful failure. Silently and with bowed heads they were slipping away from the hall when the king himself came to them and begged them to stay.

"You shall not leave Utgard without breakfast," he said kindly, "nor would I have you depart feeling unfriendly to me."

Then he ordered a goodly breakfast for the travelers, with store of choicest dainties for them to eat and drink. When the four had broken fast, he escorted them to the city gate where they were to say farewell. But at the last moment he turned to Thor with a sly, strange smile and asked—

"Tell me now truly, brother Thor; what think you of your visit to the giant city? Do you feel as mighty a fellow as you did before you entered our gates, or are you satisfied that there are folk even sturdier than yourself?"

At this question Thor flushed scarlet, and the lightning

flashed angrily in his eye. Briefly enough he answered that he must confess to small pride in his last adventure, for that his visit to the king had been full of shame to the hero of Asgard. "My name will become a joke among your people," quoth he. "You will call me Thor the puny little fellow, which vexes me more than anything; for I have not been wont to blush at my name."

Then the king looked at him frankly, pleased with the humble manner of Thor's speech. "Nay," he said slowly, "hang not your head so shamedly, brave Thor. You have not done so ill as you think. Listen, I have somewhat to tell you, now that you are outside Utgard—which, if I live, you shall never enter again. Indeed, you should not have entered at all had I guessed what noble strength was really yours—strength which very nearly brought me and my whole city to destruction."

To these words Thor and his companions listened with open-mouthed astonishment. What could the king mean, they wondered? The giant continued:—

"By magic alone were you beaten, Thor. Of magic alone were my triumphs—not real, but seeming to be so. Do you remember the giant Skrymir whom you found sleeping and snoring in the forest? That was I. I learned your errand and resolved to lower your pride. When you vainly strove to untie my wallet, you did not know that I had fastened it with invisible iron wire, in order that you might be baffled by the knots. Thrice you struck me with your hammer—ah! what mighty blows were those! The least one would have killed me, had it fallen on my head as you deemed it did. In my hall is a rock with three square hollows in it, one of them deeper than the others. These are the dents of your wondrous hammer, my Thor. For, while you thought I slept, I slipped the rock under the hammer-strokes, and into this hard crust Miölnir bit. Ha, ha! It was a pretty jest."

Now Thor's brow was growing black at this tale of the

giant's trickery, but at the same time he held up his head and seemed less ashamed of his weakness, knowing now that it had been no weakness, but lack of guile. He listened frowningly for the rest of the tale. The king went on:—

"When you came to my city, still it was magic that worsted your party at every turn. Loki was certainly the hungriest fellow I ever saw, and his deeds at the trencher were marvelous to behold. But the Logi who ate with him was Fire, and easily enough fire can consume your meat, bones, and wood itself. Thialfi, my boy, you are a runner swift as the wind. Never before saw I such a race as yours. But the Hugi who ran with you was Thought, my thought. And who can keep pace with the speed of winged thought? Next, Thor, it was your turn to show your might. Bravely indeed you strove. My heart is sick with envy of your strength and skill. But they availed you naught against my magic. When you drank from the long horn, thinking you had done so ill, in truth you had performed a miracle—never thought I to behold the like. You guessed not that the end of the horn was out in the ocean, which no one might drain dry. Yet, mighty one, the draughts you swallowed have lowered the tide upon the shore. Henceforth at certain times the sea will ebb; and this is by great Thor's drinking. The cat also which you almost lifted—it was no cat, but the great Midgard serpent himself who encircles the whole world. He had barely length enough for his head and tail to touch in a circle about the sea. But you raised him so high that he almost touched heaven. How terrified we were when we saw you heave one of his mighty feet from the ground! For who could tell what horror might happen had you raised him bodily. Ah, and your wrestling with old Elli! That was the most marvelous act of all. You had nearly overthrown Age itself; yet there has never lived one, nor will such ever be found, whom Elli, old age, will not cast to earth at last. So you were beaten, Thor, but by a mere trick. Ha, ha! How angry you looked—I shall never forget! But now we

must part, and I think you see that it will be best for both of us that we should not meet again. As I have done once, so can I always protect my city by magic spells. Yes, should you come again to visit us, even better prepared than now, yet you could never do us serious harm. Yet the wear and tear upon the nerves of both of us is something not lightly forgotten."

He ceased, smiling pleasantly, but with a threatening look in his eye. Thor's wrath had been slowly rising during this tedious, grim speech, and he could control it no longer.

"Cheat and trickster!" he cried, "your wiles shall avail you nothing now that I know your true self. You have put me to shame, now my hammer shall shame you beyond all reckoning!" and he raised Miölnir to smite the giant deathfully. But at that moment the king faded before his very eyes. And when he turned to look for the giant city that he might destroy it—as he had so many giant dwellings—there was in the place where it had been but a broad, fair plain, with no sign of any palace, wall, or gate. Utgard had vanished. The king had kept one trick of magic for the last.

Then Thor and his three companions wended their way back to Asgard. But they were slower than usual about answering questions concerning their last adventure, their wondrous visit to the giant city. Truth to tell, magic or no magic, Thor and Loki had showed but a poor figure that day. For the first time in all their meeting with Thor the giants had not come off any the worse for the encounter. Perhaps it was a lesson that he sorely needed. I am afraid that he was rather inclined to think well of himself. But then, he had reason, had he not?

CHAPTER XII
Thor's Fishing

Once upon a time the Æsir went to take dinner with old Œgir, the king of the ocean. Down under the green waves they went to the coral palace where Œgir lived with his wife, Queen Ran, and his daughters, the Waves. But Œgir was not expecting so large a party to dinner, and he had not mead enough for them all to drink. "I must brew some more mead," he said to himself. But when he came to look for a kettle in which to make the brew, there was none in all the sea large enough for the purpose. At first Œgir did not know what to do; but at last he decided to consult the gods themselves, for he knew how wise and powerful his guests were, and he hoped that they might help him to a kettle.

Now when he told the Æsir his trouble they were much interested, for they were hungry and thirsty, and longed for some of Œgir's good mead. "Where can we find a kettle?" they said to one another. "Who has a kettle huge enough to hold mead for all the Æsir?"

Then Týr the brave turned to Thor with a grand idea. "My father, the giant Hymir, has such a kettle," he said. "I have seen it often in his great palace near Elivâgar, the river of ice. This famous kettle is a mile deep, and surely that is large enough to brew all the mead we may need."

"Surely, surely it is large enough," laughed Œgir. "But how are we to get the kettle, my distinguished guests? Who will go to Giant Land to fetch the kettle a mile deep?"

"That will I," said brave Thor. "I will go to Hymir's dwelling and bring thence the little kettle, if Týr will go with me to show me the way." So Thor and Týr set out together for the land of snow and ice, where the giant Hymir lived. They

traveled long and they traveled fast, and finally they came to the huge house which had once been Tŷr's home, before he went to live with the good folk in Asgard.

Well Tŷr knew the way to enter, and it was not long before they found themselves in the hall of Hymir's dwelling, peering about for some sign of the kettle which they had come so far to seek; and sure enough, presently they discovered eight huge kettles hanging in a row from one of the beams in the ceiling. While the two were wondering which kettle might be the one they sought, there came in Tŷr's grandmother—and a terrible grandmother she was. No wonder that Tŷr had run away from home when he was very little; for this dreadful creature was a giantess with nine hundred heads, each more ugly than the others, and her temper was as bad as were her looks. She began to roar and bellow; and no one knows what this evil old person would have done to her grandson and his friend had not there come into the hall at this moment another woman, fair and sweet, and glittering with golden ornaments. This was Tŷr's good mother, who loved him dearly, and who had mourned his absence during long years.

With a cry of joy she threw herself upon her son's neck, bidding him welcome forty times over. She welcomed Thor also when she found out who he was; but she sent away the wicked old grandmother, that she might not hear, for Thor's name was not dear to the race of giants, to so many of whom he had brought dole and death.

"Why have you come, dear son, after so many years?" she cried. "I know that some great undertaking calls you and this noble fellow to your father's hall. Danger and death wait here for such as you and he; and only some quest with glory for its reward could have brought you to such risks. Tell me your secret, Tŷr, and I will not betray it."

Then they told her how that they had come to carry away the giant kettle; and Tŷr's mother promised that she would help them all she could. But she warned them that it would

be dangerous indeed, for that Hymir had been in a terrible temper for many days, and that the very sight of a stranger made him wild with rage. Hastily she gave them meat and drink, for they were nearly famished after their long journey; and then she looked around to see where she should hide them against Hymir's return, who was now away at the hunt.

"Aha!" she cried. "The very thing! You shall hide in the great kettle itself; and if you escape Hymir's terrible eye, it may hap that you will find a way to make off with your hiding-place, which is what you want." So the kind creature helped them to climb into the great kettle where it hung from one of the rafters in a row with seven others; but this one was the biggest and the strongest of them all.

Hardly had they snuggled down out of sight when Tŷr's mother began to tremble. "Hist!" she cried. "I hear him coming. Keep as still as ever you can, O Tŷr and Thor!" The floor also began to tremble, and the eight kettles to clatter against one another, as Hymir's giant footsteps approached the house. Outside they could hear the icebergs shaking with a sound like thunder; indeed, the whole earth quivered as if with fear when the terrible giant Hymir strode home from the hunt. He came into the hall puffing and blowing, and immediately the air of the room grew chilly; for his beard was hung with icicles and his face was frosted hard, while his breath was a winter wind—a freezing blast.

"Ho! wife," he growled, "what news, what news? For I see by the footprints in the snow outside that you have had visitors today."

Then indeed the poor woman trembled; but she tried not to look frightened as she answered, "Yes, you have a guest, O Hymir!—a guest whom you have long wished to see. Your son Tŷr has returned to visit his father's hall."

"Humph!" growled Hymir, with a terrible frown. "Whom has he brought here with him, the rascal? There are prints of two persons' feet in the snow. Come, wife, tell me all; for I

shall soon find out the truth, whether or no."

"He has brought a friend of his—a dear friend, O Hymir!" faltered the mother. "Surely, our son's friends are welcome when he brings them to this our home, after so long an absence."

But Hymir howled with rage at the word "friend." "Where are they hidden?" he cried. "Friend, indeed! It is one of those bloody fellows from Asgard, I know—one of those giant-killers whom my good mother taught me to hate with all my might. Let me get at him! Tell me instantly where he is hidden, or I will pull down the hall about your ears!"

Now when the wicked old giant spoke like this, his wife knew that he must be obeyed. Still she tried to put off the fateful moment of the discovery. "They are standing over there behind that pillar," she said. Instantly Hymir glared at the pillar towards which she pointed, and at his frosty glance —snick-snack!—the marble pillar cracked in two, and down crashed the great roof-beam which held the eight kettles. Smash! went the kettles; and there they lay shivered into little pieces at Hymir's feet—all except one, the largest of them all, and that was the kettle in which Thor and Tŷr lay hidden, scarcely daring to breathe lest the giant should guess where they were. Tŷr's mother screamed when she saw the big kettle fall with the others: but when she found that this one, alone of them all, lay on its side unbroken, because it was so tough and strong, she held her breath to see what would happen next.

And what happened was this: out stepped Thor and Tŷr, and making low bows to Hymir, they stood side by side, smiling and looking as unconcerned as if they really enjoyed all this hubbub; and I dare say that they did indeed, being Tŷr the bold and Thor the thunderer, who had been in Giant Land many times ere this.

Hymir gave scarcely a glance at his son, but he eyed Thor with a frown of hatred and suspicion, for he knew that this

was one of Father Odin's brave family, though he could not tell which one. However, he thought best to be civil, now that Thor was actually before him. So with gruff politeness he invited the two guests to supper.

Now Thor was a valiant fellow at the table as well as in war, as you remember; and at sight of the good things on the board his eyes sparkled. Three roast oxen there were upon the giant's table, and Thor fell to with a will and finished two of them himself! You should have seen the giant stare.

"Truly, friend, you have a goodly appetite," he said. "You have eaten all the meat that I have in my larder; and if you dine with us tomorrow, I must insist that you catch your own dinner of fish. I cannot undertake to provide food for such an appetite!"

Now this was not hospitable of Hymir, but Thor did not mind. "I like well to fish, good Hymir," he laughed; "and when you fare forth with your boat in the morning, I will go with you and see what I can find for my dinner at the bottom of the sea."

When the morning came, the giant made ready for the fishing, and Thor rose early to go with him.

"Ho, Hymir," exclaimed Thor, "have you bait enough for us both?"

Hymir answered gruffly, "You must dig your own bait when you go fishing with me. I have no time to waste on you, sirrah."

Then Thor looked about to see what he could use for bait; and presently he spied a herd of Hymir's oxen feeding in the meadow. "Aha! just the thing!" he cried; and seizing the hugest ox of all, he trotted down to the shore with it under his arm, as easily as you would carry a handful of clams for bait. When Hymir saw this, he was very angry. He pushed the boat off from shore and began to row away as fast as he could, so that Thor might not have a chance to come aboard. But Thor made one long step and planted himself snugly in the

stern of the boat.

"No, no, brother Hymir," he said, laughing. "You invited me to go fishing, and a-fishing I will go; for I have my bait, and my hope is high that great luck I shall see this day." So he took an oar and rowed mightily in the stern, while Hymir the giant rowed mightily at the prow; and no one ever saw boat skip over the water so fast as this one did on the day when these two big fellows went fishing together.

Far and fast they rowed, until they came to a spot where Hymir cried, "Hold! Let us anchor here and fish; this is the place where I have best fortune."

"And what sort of little fish do you catch here, O Hymir?" asked Thor.

"Whales!" answered the giant proudly. "I fish for nothing smaller than whales."

"Pooh!" cried Thor. "Who would fish for such small fry! Whales, indeed; let us row out further, where we can find something really worth catching," and he began to pull even faster than before.

"Stop! stop!" roared the giant. "You do not know what you are doing. These are the haunts of the dreadful Midgard serpent, and it is not safe to fish in these waters."

"Oho! The Midgard serpent!" said Thor, delighted. "That is the very fish I am after. Let us drop in our lines here."

Thor baited his great hook with the whole head of the ox which he had brought, and cast his line, big round as a man's arm, over the side of the boat. Hymir also cast his line, for he did not wish Thor to think him a coward; but his hand trembled as he waited for a bite, and he glanced down into the blue depths with eyes rounded as big as dinner-plates through fear of the horrible creature who lived down below those waves.

"Look! You have a bite!" cried Thor, so suddenly that Hymir started and nearly tumbled out of the boat. Hand over hand he pulled in his line, and lo! he had caught two whales

—two great flopping whales—on his one hook! That was a catch indeed.

Hymir smiled proudly, forgetting his fear as he said, "How is that, my friend? Let us see you beat this catch in your morning's fishing."

Lo, just at that moment Thor also had a bite—such a bite! The boat rocked to and fro, and seemed ready to capsize every minute. Then the waves began to roll high and to be lashed into foam for yards and yards about the boat, as if some huge creature were struggling hard below the water.

"I have him!" shouted Thor; "I have the old serpent, the brother of the Fenris wolf! Pull, pull, monster! But you shall not escape me now!"

Sure enough, the Midgard serpent had Thor's hook fixed in his jaw, and struggle as he might, there was no freeing himself from the line; for the harder he pulled the stronger grew Thor. In his Æsir-might Thor waxed so huge and so forceful that his legs went straight through the bottom of the boat and his feet stood on the bottom of the sea. With firm bottom as a brace for his strength, Thor pulled and pulled, and at last up came the head of the Midgard serpent, up to the side of the boat, where it thrust out of the water mountain high, dreadful to behold; his monstrous red eyes were rolling fiercely, his nostrils spouted fire, and from his terrible sharp teeth dripped poison, that sizzled as it fell into the sea. Angrily they glared at each other, Thor and the serpent, while the water streamed into the boat, and the giant turned pale with fear at the danger threatening him on all sides.

Thor seized his hammer, preparing to smite the creature's head; but even as he swung Miölnir high for the fatal blow, Hymir cut the fish-line with his knife, and down into the depths of ocean sank the Midgard serpent amid a whirlpool of eddies. But the hammer had sped from Thor's iron fingers. It crushed the serpent's head as he sank downward to his lair on the sandy bottom; it crushed, but did not kill him, thanks

to the giant's treachery. Terrible was the disturbance it caused beneath the waves. It burst the rocks and made the caverns of the ocean shiver into bits. It wrecked the coral groves and tore loose the draperies of sea-weed. The fishes scurried about in every direction, and the sea-monsters wildly sought new places to hide themselves when they found their homes destroyed. The sea itself was stirred to its lowest depths, and the waves ran trembling into one another's arms. The earth, too, shrank and shivered. Hymir, cowering low in the boat, was glad of one thing, which was that the terrible Midgard serpent had vanished out of sight. And that was the last that was ever seen of him, though he still lived, wounded and sore from the shock of Thor's hammer.

Now it was time to return home. Silently and sulkily the giant swam back to land; Thor, bearing the boat upon his shoulders, filled with water and weighted as it was with the great whales which Hymir had caught, waded ashore, and brought his burden to the giant's hall. Here Hymir met him crossly enough, for he was ashamed of the whole morning's work, in which Thor had appeared so much more of a hero than he. Indeed, he was tired of even pretending hospitality towards this unwelcome guest, and was resolved to be rid of him; but first he would put Thor to shame.

"You are a strong fellow," he said, "good at the oar and at the fishing; most wondrously good at the hammer, by which I know that you are Thor. But there is one thing which you cannot do, I warrant—you cannot break this little cup of mine, hard though you may try."

"That I shall see for myself," answered Thor; and he took the cup in his hand. Now this was a magic cup, and there was but one way of breaking it, but one thing hard enough to shatter its mightiness. Thor threw it with all his force against a stone of the flooring; but instead of breaking the cup, the stone itself was cracked into splinters. Then Thor grew angry, for the giant and all his servants were laughing as if this were

the greatest joke ever played.

"Ho, ho! Try again, Thor!" cried Hymir, nearly bursting with delight; for he thought that now he should prove how much mightier he was than the visitor from Asgard. Thor clutched the cup more firmly and hurled it against one of the iron pillars of the hall; but like a rubber ball the magic cup merely bounded back straight into Hymir's hand. At this second failure the giants were full of merriment and danced about, making all manner of fun at the expense of Thor. You can fancy how well Thor the mighty enjoyed this! His brow grew black, and the glance of his eye was terrible. He knew there was some magic in the trick, but he knew not how to meet it. Just then he felt the soft touch of a woman's hand upon his arm, and the voice of Týr's mother whispered in his ear—

"Cast the cup against Hymir's own forehead, which is the hardest substance in the world." No one except Thor heard the woman say these words, for all the giant folk were doubled up with mirth over their famous joke. But Thor dropped upon one knee, and seizing the cup fiercely, whirled it about his head, then dashed it with all his might straight at Hymir's forehead. Smash! Crash! What had happened? Thor looked eagerly to see. There stood the giant, looking surprised and a little dazed; but his forehead showed not even a scratch, while the strong cup was shivered into little pieces.

"Well done!" exclaimed Hymir hastily, when he had recovered a little from his surprise. But he was mortified at Thor's success, and set about to think up a new task to try his strength. "That was very well," he remarked patronizingly; "now you must perform a harder task. Let us see you carry the mead kettle out of the hall. Do that, my fine fellow, and I shall say you are strong indeed."

The mead kettle! The very thing Thor had come to get! He glanced at Týr; he shot a look at Týr's mother; and both of them caught the sparkle, which was very like a wink. To

himself Thor muttered, "I must not fail in this! I must not, will not fail!"

"First let me try," cried Tŷr; for he wanted to give Thor time for a resting-spell. Twice Tŷr the mighty strained at the great kettle, but he could not so much as stir one leg of it from the floor where it rested. He tugged and heaved in vain, growing red in the face, till his mother begged him to give over, for it was quite useless.

Then Thor stepped forth upon the floor. He grasped the rim of the kettle, and stamped his feet through the stone of the flooring as he braced himself to lift. One, two, three! Thor straightened himself, and up swung the giant kettle to his head, while the iron handle clattered about his feet. It was a mighty burden, and Thor staggered as he started for the door; but Tŷr was close beside him, and they had covered long leagues of ground on their way home before the astonished giants had recovered sufficiently to follow them. When Thor and Tŷr looked back, however, they saw a vast crowd of horrible giants, some of them with a hundred heads, swarming out of the caverns in Hymir's land, howling and prowling upon their track.

"You must stop them, Thor, or they will never let us get away with their precious kettle—they take such long strides!" cried Tŷr. So Thor set down the kettle, and from his pocket drew out Miölnir, his wondrous hammer. Terribly it flashed in the air as he swung it over his head; then forth it flew towards Jotunheim; and before it returned to Thor's hand it had crushed all the heads of those many-headed giants, Hymir's ugly mother and Hymir himself among them. The only one who escaped was the good and beautiful mother of Tŷr. And you may be sure she lived happily ever after in the palace which Hymir and his wicked old mother had formerly made so wretched a home for her.

Now Tŷr and Thor had the giant kettle which they had gone so far and had met so many dangers to obtain. They took

it to Œgir's sea-palace, where the banquet was still going on, and where the Æsir were still waiting patiently for their mead; for time does not go so fast below the quiet waves as on shore. Now that King Œgir had the great kettle, he could brew all the mead they needed. So everyone thanked Tŷr and congratulated Thor upon the success of their adventure.

"I was sure that Thor would bring the kettle," said fair Sif, smiling upon her brave husband.

"What Thor sets out to do, that he always accomplishes," said Father Odin gravely. And that was praise enough for anyone.

CHAPTER XIII
Thor's Duel

In the days that are past a wonderful race of horses pastured in the meadows of heaven, steeds more beautiful and more swift than any which the world knows today. There was Hrîmfaxi, the black, sleek horse who drew the chariot of Night across the sky and scattered the dew from his foaming bit. There was Glad, behind whose flying heels sped the swift chariot of Day. His mane was yellow with gold, and from it beamed light which made the whole world bright. Then there were the two shining horses of the sun, Arvakur the watchful, and Alsvith the rapid; and the nine fierce battle-chargers of the nine Valkyries, who bore the bodies of fallen heroes from the field of fight to the blessedness of Valhalla. Each of the gods had his own glorious steed, with such pretty names as Gold-mane and Silver-top, Light-foot and Precious-stone; these galloped with their masters over clouds and through the blue air, blowing flame from their nostrils and glinting sparks from their fiery eyes. The Æsir would have been poor indeed without their faithful mounts, and few would be the stories to tell in which these noble creatures do not bear at least a part.

But best of all the horses of heaven was Sleipnir, the eight-legged steed of Father Odin, who because he was so well supplied with sturdy feet could gallop faster over land and sea than any horse which ever lived. Sleipnir was snow-white and beautiful to see, and Odin was very fond and proud of him, you may be sure. He loved to ride forth upon his good horse's back to meet whatever adventure might be upon the way, and sometimes they had wild times together.

One day Odin galloped off from Asgard upon Sleipnir straight towards Jotunheim and the Land of Giants, for it was

long since All-Father had been to the cold country, and he wished to see how its mountains and ice-rivers looked. Now as he galloped along a wild road, he met a huge giant standing beside his giant steed.

"Who goes there?" cried the giant gruffly, blocking the way so that Odin could not pass. "You with the golden helmet, who are you, who ride so famously through air and water? For I have been watching you from this mountain-top. Truly, that is a fine horse which you bestride."

"There is no finer horse in all the world," boasted Odin. "Have you not heard of Sleipnir, the pride of Asgard? I will match him against any of your big, clumsy giant horses."

"Ho!" roared the giant angrily, "an excellent horse he is, your little Sleipnir. But I warrant he is no match for my Gullfaxi here. Come, let us try a race; and at its end I shall pay you for your insult to our horses of Jotunheim."

So saying, the giant, whose ugly name was Hrungnir, sprang upon his horse and spurred straight at Odin in the narrow way. Odin turned and galloped back towards Asgard with all his might; for not only must he prove his horse's speed, but he must save himself and Sleipnir from the anger of the giant, who was one of the fiercest and wickedest of all his fierce and wicked race.

How the eight slender legs of Sleipnir twinkled through the blue sky! How his nostrils quivered and shot forth fire and smoke! Like a flash of lightning he darted across the sky, and the giant horse rumbled and thumped along close behind like the thunder following the flash.

"Hi, hi!" yelled the giant. "After them, Gullfaxi! And when we have overtaken the two, we will crush their bones between us!"

"Speed, speed, my Sleipnir!" shouted Odin. "Speed, good horse, or you will never again feed in the dewy pastures of Asgard with the other horses. Speed, speed, and bring us safe within the gates!"

Well Sleipnir understood what his master said, and well he knew the way. Already the rainbow bridge was in sight, with Heimdal the watchman prepared to let them in. His sharp eyes had spied them afar, and had recognized the flash of Sleipnir's white body and of Odin's golden helmet. Gallop and thud! The twelve hoofs were upon the bridge, the giant horse close behind the other. At last Hrungnir knew where he was, and into what danger he was rushing. He pulled at the reins and tried to stop his great beast. But Gullfaxi was tearing along at too terrible a speed. He could not stop. Heimdal threw open the gates of Asgard, and in galloped Sleipnir with his precious burden, safe. Close upon them bolted in Gullfaxi, bearing his giant master, puffing and purple in the face from hard riding and anger. Cling-clang! Heimdal had shut and barred the gates, and there was the giant prisoned in the castle of his enemies.

Now the Æsir were courteous folk, unlike the giants, and they were not anxious to take advantage of a single enemy thus thrown into their power. They invited him to enter Valhalla with them, to rest and sup before the long journey of his return. Thor was not present, so they filled for the giant the great cups which Thor was wont to drain, for they were nearest to the giant size. But you remember that Thor was famous for his power to drink deep. Hrungnir's head was not so steady; Thor's draught was too much for him. He soon lost his wits, of which he had but few; and a witless giant is a most dreadful creature. He raged like a madman, and threatened to pick up Valhalla like a toy house and carry it home with him to Jotunheim. He said he would pull Asgard to pieces and slay all the gods except Freia the fair and Sif, the golden-haired wife of Thor, whom he would carry off like little dolls for his toy house.

The Æsir knew not what to do, for Thor and his hammer were not there to protect them, and Asgard seemed in danger with this enemy within its very walls. Hrungnir called for

more and more mead, which Freia alone dared to bring and set before him. And the more he drank the fiercer he became. At last the Æsir could bear no longer his insults and his violence. Besides, they feared that there would be no more mead left for their banquets if this unwelcome visitor should keep Freia pouring out for him Thor's mighty goblets. They bade Heimdal blow his horn and summon Thor; and this Heimdal did in a trice.

Now rumbling and thundering in his chariot of goats came Thor. He dashed into the hall, hammer in hand, and stared in amazement at the unwieldy guest whom he found there.

"A giant feasting in Asgard hall!" he roared. "This is a sight which I never saw before. Who gave the insolent fellow leave to sit in my place? And why does fair Freia wait upon him as if he were some noble guest at a feast of the high gods? I will slay him at once!" and he raised the hammer to keep his word.

Thor's coming had sobered the giant somewhat, for he knew that this was no enemy to be trifled with. He looked at Thor sulkily and said: "I am Odin's guest. He invited me to this banquet, and therefore I am under his protection."

"You shall be sorry that you accepted the invitation," cried Thor, balancing his hammer and looking very fierce; for Sif had sobbed in his ear how the giant had threatened to carry her away.

Hrungnir now rose to his feet and faced Thor boldly, for the sound of Thor's gruff voice had restored his scattered wits. "I am here alone and without weapons," he said. "You would do ill to slay me now. It would be little like the noble Thor, of whom we hear tales, to do such a thing. The world will count you braver if you let me go and meet me later in single combat, when we shall both be fairly armed."

Thor dropped the hammer to his side. "Your words are true," he said, for he was a just and honorable fellow.

"I was foolish to leave my shield and stone club at home," went on the giant. "If I had my arms with me, we would fight at this moment. But I name you a coward if you slay me now, an unarmed enemy."

"Your words are just," quoth Thor again. "I have never before been challenged by any foe. I will meet you, Hrungnir, at your Stone City, midway between heaven and earth. And there we will fight a duel to see which of us is the better fellow."

Hrungnir departed for Stone City in Jotunheim; and great was the excitement of the other giants when they heard of the duel which one of their number was to fight with Thor, the deadliest enemy of their race.

"We must be sure that Hrungnir wins the victory!" they cried. "It will never do to have Asgard victorious in the first duel that we have fought with her champion. We will make a second hero to aid Hrungnir."

All the giants set to work with a will. They brought great buckets of moist clay, and heaping them up into a huge mound, moulded the mass with their giant hands as a sculptor does his image, until they had made a man of clay, an immense dummy, nine miles high and three miles wide. "Now we must make him live; we must put a heart into him!" they cried. But they could find no heart big enough until they thought of taking that of a mare, and that fitted nicely. A mare's heart is the most cowardly one that beats.

Hrungnir's heart was a three-cornered piece of hard stone. His head also was of stone, and likewise the great shield which he held before him when he stood outside of Stone City waiting for Thor to come to the duel. Over his shoulder he carried his club, and that also was of stone, the kind from which whetstones are made, hard and terrible. By his side stood the huge clay man, Möckuralfi, and they were a dreadful sight to see, these two vast bodies whom Thor must encounter.

But at the very first sight of Thor, who came thundering to the place with swift Thialfi his servant, the timid mare's heart in the man of clay throbbed with fear; he trembled so that his knees knocked together, and his nine miles of height rocked unsteadily.

Thialfi ran up to Hrungnir and began to mock him, saying, "You are careless, giant. I fear you do not know what a mighty enemy has come to fight you. You hold your shield in front of you; but that will serve you nothing. Thor has seen this. He has only to go down into the earth and he can attack you conveniently from beneath your very feet."

At this terrifying news Hrungnir hastened to throw his shield upon the ground and to stand upon it, so that he might be safe from Thor's under-stroke. He grasped his heavy club with both hands and waited. He had not long to wait. There came a blinding flash of lightning and a peal of crashing thunder. Thor had cast his hammer into space. Hrungnir raised his club with both hands and hurled it against the hammer which he saw flying towards him. The two mighty weapons met in the air with an earsplitting shock. Hard as was the stone of the giant's club, it was like glass against the power of Miölnir. The club was dashed into pieces; some fragments fell upon the earth; and these, they say, are the rocks from which whetstones are made unto this day. They are so hard that men use them to sharpen knives and axes and scythes. One splinter of the hard stone struck Thor himself in the forehead, with so fierce a blow that he fell forward upon the ground, and Thialfi feared that he was killed. But Miölnir, not even stopped in its course by meeting the giant's club, sped straight to Hrungnir and crushed his stony skull, so that he fell forward over Thor, and his foot lay on the fallen hero's neck. And that was the end of the giant whose head and heart were of stone.

Meanwhile Thialfi the swift had fought with the man of clay, and had found little trouble in toppling him to earth. For the mare's cowardly heart in his great body gave him little

strength to meet Thor's faithful servant; and the trembling limbs of Möckuralfi soon yielded to Thialfi's hearty blows. He fell like an unsteady tower of blocks, and his brittle bulk shivered into a thousand fragments.

Thialfi ran to his master and tried to raise him. The giant's great foot still rested upon his neck, and all Thialfi's strength could not move it away. Swift as the wind he ran for the other Æsir, and when they heard that great Thor, their champion, had fallen and seemed like one dead, they came rushing to the spot in horror and confusion. Together they all attempted to raise Hrungnir's foot from Thor's neck that they might see whether their hero lived or no. But all their efforts were in vain. The foot was not to be lifted by Æsir-might.

At this moment a second hero appeared upon the scene. It was Magni, the son of Thor himself; Magni, who was but three days old, yet already in his babyhood he was almost as big as a giant and had nearly the strength of his father. This wonderful youngster came running to the place where his father lay surrounded by a group of sad-faced and despairing gods. When Magni saw what the matter was, he seized Hrungnir's enormous foot in both his hands, heaved his broad young shoulders, and in a moment Thor's neck was free of the weight which was crushing it.

Best of all, it proved that Thor was not dead, only stunned by the blow of the giant's club and by his fall. He stirred, sat up painfully, and looked around him at the group of eager friends. "Who lifted the weight from my neck?" he asked.

"It was I, father," answered Magni modestly. Thor clasped him in his arms and hugged him tight, beaming with pride and gratitude.

"Truly, you are a fine child!" he cried; "one to make glad your father's heart. Now as a reward for your first great deed you shall have a gift from me. The swift horse of Hrungnir shall be yours—that same Gullfaxi who was the beginning of all this trouble. You shall ride Gullfaxi; only a giant steed is

strong enough to bear the weight of such an infant prodigy as you, my Magni."

Now this word did not wholly please Father Odin, for he thought that a horse so excellent ought to belong to him. He took Thor aside and argued that but for him there would have been no duel, no horse to win. Thor answered simply—

"True, Father Odin, you began this trouble. But I have fought your battle, destroyed your enemy, and suffered great pain for you. Surely, I have won the horse fairly and may give it to whom I choose. My son, who has saved me, deserves a horse as good as any. Yet, as you have proved, even Gullfaxi is scarce a match for your Sleipnir. Verily, Father Odin, you should be content with the best." Odin said no more.

Now Thor went home to his cloud-palace in Thrudvang. And there he was healed of all his hurts except that which the splinter of stone had made in his forehead. For the stone was imbedded so fast that it could not be taken out, and Thor suffered sorely therefor. Sif, his yellow-haired wife, was in despair, knowing not what to do. At last she bethought her of the wise woman, Groa, who had skill in all manner of herbs and witch charms. Sif sent for Groa, who lived all alone and sad because her husband Örvandil had disappeared, she knew not whither. Groa came to Thor and, standing beside his bed while he slept, sang strange songs and gently waved her hands over him. Immediately the stone in his forehead began to loosen, and Thor opened his eyes.

"The stone is loosening, the stone is coming out!" he cried. "How can I reward you, gentle dame? Prithee, what is your name?"

"My name is Groa," answered the woman, weeping, "wife of Örvandil who is lost."

"Now, then, I can reward you, kind Groa!" cried Thor, "for I can bring you tidings of your husband. I met him in the cold country, in Jotunheim, the Land of Giants, which you know I sometimes visit for a bit of good hunting. It was by

Elivâgar's icy river that I met Örvandil, and there was no way for him to cross. So I put him in an iron basket and myself bore him over the flood. Br-r-r! But that is a cold land! His feet stuck out through the meshes of the basket, and when we reached the other side one of his toes was frozen stiff. So I broke it off and tossed it up into the sky that it might become a star. To prove that what I relate is true, Groa, there is the new star shining over us at this very moment. Look! From this day it shall be known to men as Örvandil's Toe. Do not you weep any longer. After all, the loss of a toe is a little thing; and I promise that your husband shall soon return to you, safe and sound, but for that small token of his wanderings in the land where visitors are not welcome."

At these joyful tidings poor Groa was so overcome that she fainted. And that put an end to the charm which she was weaving to loosen the stone from Thor's forehead. The stone was not yet wholly free, and thenceforth it was in vain to attempt its removal; Thor must always wear the splinter in his forehead. Groa could never forgive herself for the carelessness which had thus made her skill vain to help one to whom she had reason to be so grateful.

Now because of the bit of whetstone in Thor's forehead, folk of olden times were very careful how they used a whetstone; and especially they knew that they must not throw or drop one on the floor. For when they did so, the splinter in Thor's forehead was jarred, and the good Asa suffered great pain.

CHAPTER XIV
In the Giant's House

Although Thor had slain Thiasse the giant builder, Thrym the thief, Hrungnir, and Hymir, and had rid the world of whole families of wicked giants, there remained many others in Jotunheim to do their evil deeds and to plot mischief against both gods and men; and of these Geirröd was the fiercest and the wickedest. He and his two ugly daughters—Gialp of the red eyes, and Greip of the black teeth—lived in a large palace among the mountains, where Geirröd had his treasures of iron and copper, silver and gold; for, since the death of Thrym, Geirröd was the Lord of the Mines, and all the riches that came out of the earth-caverns belonged to him.

Thrym had been Geirröd's friend, and the tale of Thrym's death through the might of Thor and his hammer had made Geirröd very sad and angry. "If I could but catch Thor, now, without his weapons," he said to his daughters, "what a lesson I would give him! How I would punish him for his deeds against us giants!"

"Oh, what would you do, father?" cried Gialp, twinkling her cruel red eyes, and working her claw fingers as if she would like to fasten them in Thor's golden beard.

"Oh, what would you do, father?" cried Greip, smacking her lips and grinding her black teeth as if she would like a bite out of Thor's stout arm.

"Do to him!" growled Geirröd fiercely. "Do to him! Gr-r-r! I would chew him all up! I would break his bones into little bits! I would smash him into jelly!"

"Oh, good, good! Do it, father, and then give him to us to play with," cried Gialp and Greip, dancing up and down till

the hills trembled and all the frightened sheep ran home to their folds thinking that there must be an earthquake; for Gialp was as tall as a pine-tree and many times as thick, while Greip, her little sister, was as large around as a haystack and high as a flagstaff. They both hoped some day to be as huge as their father, whose legs were so long that he could step across the river valleys from one hilltop to another, just as we human folk cross a brook on stepping-stones; and his arms were so stout that he could lift a yoke of oxen in each fist, as if they were red-painted toys.

Geirröd shook his head at his two playful daughters and sighed. "We must catch Master Thor first, my girls, before we do these fine things to him. We must catch him without his mighty hammer, that never fails him, and without his belt, that doubles his strength whenever he puts it on, or even I cannot chew and break and smash him as he deserves; for with these his weapons he is the mightiest creature in the whole world, and I would rather meddle with thunder and lightning than with him. Let us wait, children."

Then Gialp and Greip pouted and sulked like two great babies who cannot have the new plaything which they want; and very ugly they were to see, with tears as big as oranges rolling down their cheeks.

Sooner than they expected they came very near to having their heart's desire fulfilled. And if it had happened as they wished, and if Asgard had lost its goodliest hero, its strongest defense, that would have been red Loki's fault, all Loki's evil planning; for you are now to hear of the wickedest thing that up to this time Loki had ever done. As you know, it was Loki who was Thor's bitterest enemy; and for many months he had been awaiting the chance to repay the Thunder Lord for the dole which Thor had brought upon him at the time of the dwarf's gifts to Asgard.

This is how it came about: Loki had long remembered the fun of skimming as a great bird in Freia's falcon feathers. He

had longed to borrow the wings once again and to fly away over the round world to see what he could see; for he thought that so he could learn many secrets which he was not meant to know, and plan wonderful mischief without being found out. But Freia would not again loan her feather dress to Loki. She owed him a grudge for naming her as Thrym's bride; and besides, she remembered his treatment of Idun, and she did not trust his oily tongue and fine promises. So Loki saw no way but to borrow the feathers without leave; and this he did one day when Freia was gone to ride in her chariot drawn by white cats. Loki put on the feather dress, as he had done twice before—once when he went to Jotunheim to bring back stolen Idun and her magic apples, once when he went to find out about Thor's hammer.

Away he flew from Asgard as birdlike as you please, chuckling to himself with wicked thoughts. It did not make any particular difference to him where he went. It was such fun to flap and fly, skim and wheel, looking and feeling for all the world like a big brown falcon. He swooped low, thinking, "I wonder what Freia would say to see me now! Whee-e-e! How angry she would be!" Just then he spied the high wall of a palace on the mountains.

"Oho!" said Loki. "I never saw that place before. It may be a giant's dwelling. I think this must be Jotunheim, from the bigness of things. I must just peep to see." Loki was the most inquisitive of creatures, as wily minded folk are apt to be.

Loki the falcon alighted and hopped to the wall, then giving a flap of his wings he flew up and up to the window ledge, where he perched and peered into the hall. And there within he saw the giant Geirröd with his daughters eating their dinner. They looked so ugly and so greedy, as they sat there gobbling their food in giant mouthfuls, that Loki on the window-sill could not help snickering to himself. Now at that sound Geirröd looked up and saw the big brown bird peeping in at the window.

"Heigha!" cried the giant to one of his servants. "Go you and fetch me the big brown bird up yonder in the window."

Then the servant ran to the wall and tried to climb up to get at Loki; but the window was so high that he could not reach. He jumped and slipped, scrambled and slipped, again and again, while Loki sat just above his clutching fingers, and chuckled so that he nearly fell from his perch. "Te-he! te-he!" chattered Loki in the falcon tongue. It was such fun to see the fellow grow black in the face with trying to reach him that Loki thought he would wait until the giant's fingers almost touched him, before flying away.

But Loki waited too long. At last, with a quick spring, the giant gained a hold upon the window ledge, and Loki was within reach. When Loki flapped his wings to fly, he found that his feet were tangled in the vine that grew upon the wall. He struggled and twisted with all his might—but in vain. There he was, caught fast. Then the servant grasped him by the legs, and so brought him to Geirröd, where he sat at table. Now Loki in his feather dress looked exactly like a falcon—except for his eyes. There was no hiding the wise and crafty look of Loki's eyes. As soon as Geirröd looked at him, he suspected that this was no ordinary bird.

"You are no falcon, you!" he cried. "You are spying about my palace in disguise. Speak, and tell me who you are." Loki was afraid to tell, because he knew the giants were angry with him for his part in Thrym's death—small though his part had really been in that great deed. So he kept his beak closed tight, and refused to speak. The giant stormed and raged and threatened to kill him; but still Loki was silent.

Then Geirröd locked the falcon up in a chest for three long months without food or water, to see how that would suit his bird-ship. You can imagine how hungry and thirsty Loki was at the end of that time—ready to tell anything he knew, and more also, for the sake of a crumb of bread and a drop of water.

So then Geirröd called through the keyhole, "Well, Sir Falcon, now will you tell me who you are?" And this time Loki piped feebly, "I am Loki of Asgard; give me something to eat!"

"Oho!" quoth the giant fiercely. "You are that Loki who went with Thor to kill my brother Thrym! Oho! Well, you shall die for that, my feathered friend!"

"No, no!" screamed Loki. "Thor is no friend of mine. I love the giants far better! One of them is my wife!"—which was indeed true, as were few of Loki's words.

"Then if Thor is no friend of yours, to save your life will you bring him into my power?" asked Geirröd.

Loki's eyes gleamed wickedly among the feathers. Here all at once was his chance to be free, and to have his revenge upon Thor, his worst enemy. "Ay, that I will!" he cried eagerly. "I will bring Thor into your power."

So Geirröd made him give a solemn promise to do that wrong; and upon this he loosed Loki from the chest and gave him food. Then they formed the wicked plan together, while Gialp and Greip, the giant's ugly daughters, listened and smacked their lips.

Loki was to persuade Thor to come with him to Geirrödsgard. More; he must come without his mighty hammer, and without the iron gloves of power, and without the belt of strength; for so only could the giant have Thor at his mercy.

After their wicked plans were made, Loki bade a friendly farewell to Geirröd and his daughters and flew back to Asgard as quickly as he could. You may be sure he had a sound scolding from Freia for stealing her feather dress and for keeping it so long. But he told such a pitiful story of being kept prisoner by a cruel giant, and he looked in truth so pale and thin from his long fast, that the gods were fain to pity him and to believe his story, in spite of the many times that he had deceived them. Indeed, most of his tale was true, but he told only half of the truth; for he spoke no word of his promise to the giant.

This he kept hidden in his breast.

Now, one day not long after this, Loki invited Thor to go on a journey with him to visit a new friend who, he said, was anxious to know the Thunder Lord. Loki was so pleasant in his manner and seemed so frank in his speech that Thor, whose heart was simple and unsuspicious, never dreamed of any wrong, not even when Loki added—"And by the bye, my Thor, you must leave behind your hammer, your belt, and your gloves; for it would show little courtesy to wear such weapons in the home of a new friend."

Thor carelessly agreed; for he was pleased with the idea of a new adventure, and with the thought of making a new friend. Besides, on their last journey together, Loki had behaved so well that Thor believed him to have changed his evil ways and to have become his friend. So together they set off in Thor's goat chariot, without weapons of any kind except those which Loki secretly carried. Loki chuckled as they rattled over the clouds, and if Thor had seen the look in his eyes, he would have turned the chariot back to Asgard and to safety, where he had left gentle Sif his wife. But Thor did not notice, and so they rumbled on.

Soon they came to the gate of Giant Land. Thor thought this strange, for he knew they were like to find few friends of his dwelling among the Big Folk. For the first time he began to suspect Loki of some treacherous scheme. However, he said nothing, and pretended to be as gay and careless as before. But he thought of a plan to find out the truth.

Close by the entrance was the cave of Grid, a good giantess, who alone of all her race was a friend of Thor and of the folk in Asgard.

"I will alight here for a moment, Loki," said Thor carelessly. "I long for a draught of water. Hold you the goats tightly by the reins until I return."

So he went into the cave and got his draught of water. But while he was drinking, he questioned good mother Grid to

some purpose.

"Who is this friend Geirröd whom I go to see?" he asked her.

"Geirröd your friend! You go to see Geirröd!" she exclaimed. "He is the wickedest giant of us all, and no friend to you. Why do you go, dear Thor?"

"H'm!" muttered Thor. "Red Loki's mischief again!" He told her of the visit that Loki had proposed, and how he had left at home the belt, the gloves, and the hammer which made him stronger than any giant. Then Grid was frightened.

"Go not, go not, Thor!" she begged. "Geirröd will kill you, and those ugly girls, Gialp and Greip, will have the pleasure of crunching your bones. Oh, I know them well, the hussies!"

But Thor declared that he would go, whether or no. "I have promised Loki that I will go," he said, "and go I will; for I always keep my word."

"Then you shall have three little gifts of me," quoth she. "Here is my belt of power—for I also have one like your own." And she buckled about his waist a great belt, at whose touch he felt his strength redoubled. "This is my iron glove," she said, as she put one on his mighty hand, "and with it, as with your own, you can handle lightning and touch unharmed the hottest of red-hot metal. And here, last of all," she added, "is Gridarvöll, my good staff, which you may find useful. Take them, all three; and may Sif see you safe at home again by their aid."

Thor thanked her and went out once more to join Loki, who never suspected what had happened in the cave. For the belt and the glove were hidden under Thor's cloak. And as for the staff, it was quite ordinary looking, as if Thor might have picked it up anywhere along the road.

On they journeyed until they came to the river Vimer, the greatest of all rivers, which roared and tossed in a terrible way between them and the shore which they wanted to reach. It seemed impossible to cross. But Thor drew his belt a little

tighter, and planting Grid's staff firmly on the bottom, stepped out into the stream. Loki clung behind to his cloak, frightened out of his wits. But Thor waded on bravely, his strength doubled by Grid's belt, and his steps supported by her magic staff. Higher and higher the waves washed over his knees, his waist, his shoulders, as if they were fierce to drown him. And Thor said—

"Ho there, river Vimer! Do not grow any larger, I pray. It is of no use. The more you crowd upon me, the mightier I grow with my belt and my staff!"

But lo! as he nearly reached the other side, Thor spied someone hiding close down by the bank of the river. It was Gialp of the red eyes, the big elder daughter of Geirröd. She was splashing the water upon Thor, making the great waves that rolled up and threatened to drown him.

"Oho!" cried he. "So it is you who are making the river rise, big little girl. We must see to that;" and seizing a huge boulder, he hurled it at her. It hit her with a thud, for Thor's aim never missed. Giving a scream as loud as a steam-whistle, Gialp limped home as best she could to tell her father, and to prepare a warm reception for the stranger who bore Loki at his back.

When Thor had pulled himself out of the river by some bushes, he soon came to the palace which Loki had first sighted in his falcon dress. And there he found everything most courteously made ready for him. He and Loki were received like dear old friends, with shouts of rejoicing and ringing of bells. Geirröd himself came out to meet them, and would have embraced his new friend Thor; but the Thunder Lord merely seized him by the hand and gave him so hearty a squeeze with the iron glove that the giant howled with pain. Yet he could say nothing, for Thor looked pleased and gentle. And Geirröd said to himself, "Ho, ho, my fine little Thor! I will soon pay you for that handshake, and for many things beside."

All this time Gialp and Greip did not appear, and Loki also had taken himself away, to be out of danger when the hour of Thor's death should come. For he feared that dreadful things might happen before Thor died; and he did not want to be remembered by the big fist of the companion whom he had betrayed. Loki, having kept his promise to the giant, was even now far on the road back to Asgard, where he meant with a sad face to tell the gods that Thor had been slain by a horrible giant; but never to tell them how.

So Thor was all alone when the servants led him to the chamber which Geirröd had made ready for his dear friend. It was a wonderfully fine chamber, to be sure; but the strange thing about it was that among the furnishings there was but one chair, a giant chair, with a drapery all about the legs. Now Thor was very weary with his long journey, and he sat down in the chair to rest. Then, wonderful to tell!—if elevators had been invented in those days, he might have thought he was in one. For instantly the seat of the chair shot up towards the roof, and against this he was in danger of being crushed as Geirröd had longed to see him. But quick as a flash Thor raised the staff which good old Grid had given him, and pushed it against the rafters with all his might to stop his upward journey. It was a tremendous push that he gave. Something cracked; something crashed; the chair fell to the ground as Thor leaped off the seat, and there were two terrible screams.

Then Thor found—what do you think? Why, that Gialp and Greip, the giant's daughters, had hidden under the seat of the chair, and had lifted it up on their backs to crush Thor against the roof! But instead of that, it was Thor who had broken their backs, so that they lay dead upon the floor like limp rag dolls.

Now this little exercise had only given Thor an excellent appetite for supper. So that when word came bidding him to the banquet, he was very glad.

"First," said big Geirröd, grinning horribly, for he did not know what had happened to his daughters—"first we will see some games, friend Thor."

Then Thor came into the hall, where fires were burning in great chimney places along the walls. "It is here that we play our little games," cried Geirröd. And on the moment, seizing a pair of tongs, he snatched a red-hot wedge of iron from one of the fires and hurled it straight at Thor's head. But Thor was quicker than he. Swift as a flash he caught the flying spark in his iron glove, and calling forth all the might of Grid's belt, he cast the wedge back at the giant. Geirröd dodged behind an iron pillar, but it was in vain. Thor's might was such as no iron could meet. Like a bolt of lightning the wedge passed through the pillar, through Geirröd himself, through the thick wall of the palace, and buried itself deep in the ground, where it lodges to this day, unless some one has dug it up to sell for old iron.

So perished Geirröd and his children, one of the wickedest families of giants that ever lived in Jotunheim. And so Thor escaped from the snares of Loki, who had never done deed worse than this.

When Thor returned home to Asgard, where from Loki's lying tale he found all the gods mourning him as dead, you can fancy what a joyful reception he had. But for Loki, the false-hearted, false-tongued traitor to them all, there was only hatred. He no longer had any friends among the good folk. The wicked giants and the monsters of Utgard were now his only friends, for he had grown to be like them, and even these did not trust him overmuch.

CHAPTER XV
Balder and the Mistletoe

Loki had given up trying to revenge himself upon Thor. The Thunder Lord seemed proof against his tricks. And indeed nowadays Loki hated him no more than he did the other gods. He hated some because they always frowned at him; he hated others because they only laughed and jeered. Some he hated for their distrust and some for their fear. But he hated them all because they were happy and good and mighty, while he was wretched, bad, and of little might. Yet it was all his own fault that this was so. He might have been an equal with the best of them, if he had not chosen to set himself against everything that was good. He had made them all his enemies, and the more he did to injure them, the more he hated them —which is always the way with evil-doers. Loki longed to see them all unhappy. He slunk about in Asgard with a glum face and wrinkled forehead. He dared not meet the eyes of anyone, lest they should read his heart. For he was plotting evil, the greatest of evils, which should bring sorrow to all his enemies at once and turn Asgard into a land of mourning. The Æsir did not guess the whole truth, yet they felt the bitterness of the thoughts which Loki bore; and whenever in the dark he passed unseen, the gods shuddered as if a breath of evil had blown upon them, and even the flowers drooped before his steps.

Now at this time Balder the beautiful had a strange dream. He dreamed that a cloud came before the sun, and all Asgard was dark. He waited for the cloud to drift away, and for the sun to smile again. But no; the sun was gone forever, he thought; and Balder awoke feeling very sad. The next night Balder had another dream. This time he dreamed that

it was still dark as before; the flowers were withered and the gods were growing old; even Idun's magic apples could not make them young again. And all were weeping and wringing their hands as though some dreadful thing had happened. Balder awoke feeling strangely frightened, yet he said no word to Nanna his wife, for he did not want to trouble her.

When it came night again Balder slept and dreamed a third dream, a still more terrible one than the other two had been. He thought that in the dark, lonely world there was nothing but a sad voice, which cried, "The sun is gone! The spring is gone! Joy is gone! For Balder the beautiful is dead, dead, dead!"

This time Balder awoke with a cry, and Nanna asked him what was the matter. So he had to tell her of his dream, and he was sadly frightened; for in those days dreams were often sent to folk as messages, and what the gods dreamed usually came true. Nanna ran sobbing to Queen Frigg, who was Balder's mother, and told her all the dreadful dream, asking what could be done to prevent it from coming true.

Now Balder was Queen Frigg's dearest son. Thor was older and stronger, and more famous for his great deeds; but Frigg loved far better gold-haired Balder. And indeed he was the best-beloved of all the Æsir; for he was gentle, fair, and wise, and wherever he went folk grew happy and light-hearted at the very sight of him, just as we do when we first catch a glimpse of spring peeping over the hilltop into Winterland. So when Frigg heard of Balder's woeful dream, she was frightened almost out of her wits.

"He must not die! He shall not die!" she cried. "He is so dear to all the world, how could there be anything which would hurt him?"

And then a wonderful thought came to Frigg. "I will travel over the world and make all things promise not to injure my boy," she said. "Nothing shall pass my notice. I will get the word of everything."

So first she went to the gods themselves, gathered on Ida Plain for their morning exercise; and telling them of Balder's dream, she begged them to give the promise. Oh, what a shout arose when they heard her words!

"Hurt Balder!—our Balder! Not for the world, we promise! The dream is wrong—there is nothing so cruel as to wish harm to Balder the beautiful!" they cried. But deep in their hearts they felt a secret fear which would linger until they should hear that all things had given their promise. What if harm were indeed to come to Balder! The thought was too dreadful.

Then Frigg went to see all the beasts who live in field or forest or rocky den. Willingly they gave their promise never to harm hair of gentle Balder. "For he is ever kind to us," they said, "and we love him as if he were one of ourselves. Not with claws or teeth or hoofs or horns will any beast hurt Balder."

Next Frigg spoke to the birds and fishes, reptiles and insects. And all—even the venomous serpents—cried that Balder was their friend, and that they would never do aught to hurt his dear body. "Not with beak or talon, bite or sting or poison fang, will one of us hurt Balder," they promised.

After doing this, the anxious mother traveled over the whole round world, step by step; and from all the things that are she got the same ready promise never to harm Balder the beautiful. All the trees and plants promised; all the stones and metals; earth, air, fire, and water; sun, snow, wind, and rain, and all diseases that men know—each gave to Frigg the word of promise which she wanted. So at last, footsore and weary, she came back to Asgard with the joyful news that Balder must be safe, for that there was nothing in the world but had promised to be his harmless friend.

Then there was rejoicing in Asgard, as if the gods had won one of their great victories over the giants. The noble Æsir and the heroes who had died in battle upon the earth, and who had come to Valhalla to live happily ever after, gathered

on Ida Plain to celebrate the love of all nature for Balder.

There they invented a famous game, which was to prove how safe he was from the bite of death. They stationed Balder in the midst of them, his face glowing like the sun with the bright light which ever shone from him. And as he stood there all unarmed and smiling, by turns they tried all sorts of weapons against him; they made as if to beat him with sticks, they stoned him with stones, they shot at him with arrows and hurled mighty spears straight at his heart.

It was a merry game, and a shout of laughter went up as each stone fell harmless at Balder's feet, each stick broke before it touched his shoulders, each arrow overshot his head, and each spear turned aside. For neither stone nor wood nor flinty arrow-point nor barb of iron would break the promise which each had given. Balder was safe with them, just as if he were bewitched. He remained unhurt among the missiles which whizzed about his head, and which piled up in a great heap around the charmed spot whereon he stood.

Now among the crowd that watched these games with such enthusiasm, there was one face that did not smile, one voice that did not rasp itself hoarse with cheering. Loki saw how everyone and everything loved Balder, and he was jealous. He was the only creature in all the world that hated Balder and wished for his death. Yet Balder had never done harm to him. But the wicked plan that Loki had been cherishing was almost ripe, and in this poison fruit was the seed of the greatest sorrow that Asgard had ever known.

While the others were enjoying their game of love, Loki stole away unperceived from Ida Plain, and with a wig of gray hair, a long gown, and a staff, disguised himself as an old woman. Then he hobbled down Asgard streets till he came to the palace of Queen Frigg, the mother of Balder.

"Good-day, my lady," quoth the old woman, in a cracked voice. "What is that noisy crowd doing yonder in the green meadow? I am so deafened by their shouts that I can hardly


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hear myself think."

"Who are you, good mother, that you have not heard?" said Queen Frigg in surprise. "They are shooting at my son Balder. They are proving the word which all things have given me—the promise not to injure my dear son. And that promise will be kept."

The old crone pretended to be full of wonder. "So, now!" she cried. "Do you mean to say that every single thing in the whole world has promised not to hurt your son? I can scarce believe it; though, to be sure, he is as fine a fellow as I ever saw." Of course this flattery pleased Frigg.

"You say true, mother," she answered proudly, "he is a noble son. Yes, everything has promised—that is, everything except one tiny little plant that is not worth mentioning."

The old woman's eyes twinkled wickedly. "And what is that foolish little plant, my dear?" she asked coaxingly.

"It is the mistletoe that grows in the meadow west of Valhalla. It was too young to promise, and too harmless to bother with," answered Frigg carelessly.

After this her questioner hobbled painfully away. But as soon as she was out of sight from the Queen's palace, she picked up the skirts of her gown and ran as fast as she could to the meadow west of Valhalla. And there sure enough, as Frigg had said, was a tiny sprig of mistletoe growing on a gnarled oak-tree. The false Loki took out a knife which she carried in some hidden pocket and cut off the mistletoe very carefully. Then she trimmed and shaped it so that it was like a little green arrow, pointed at one end, but very slender.

"Ho, ho!" chuckled the old woman. "So you are the only thing in all the world that is too young to make a promise, my little mistletoe. Well, young as you are, you must go on an errand for me today. And maybe you shall bear a message of my love to Balder the beautiful."

Then she hobbled back to Ida Plain, where the merry game was still going on around Balder. Loki quietly passed

unnoticed through the crowd, and came close to the elbow of a big dark fellow who was standing lonely outside the circle of weapon-throwers. He seemed sad and forgotten, and he hung his head in a pitiful way. It was Höd, the blind brother of Balder.

The old woman touched his arm. "Why do you not join the game with the others?" she asked, in her cracked voice. "Are you the only one to do your brother no honor? Surely, you are big and strong enough to toss a spear with the best of them yonder."

Höd touched his sightless eyes madly. "I am blind," he said. "Strength I have, greater than belongs to most of the Æsir. But I cannot see to aim a weapon. Besides, I have no spear to test upon him. Yet how gladly would I do honor to dear Balder!" and he sighed deeply.

"It were a pity if I could not find you at least a little stick to throw," said Loki sympathetically. "I am only a poor old woman, and of course I have no weapon. But ah—here is a green twig which you can use as an arrow, and I will guide your arm, poor fellow."

Höd's dark face lighted up, for he was eager to take his turn in the game. So he thanked her, and grasped eagerly the little arrow which she put into his hand. Loki held him by the arm, and together they stepped into the circle which surrounded Balder. And when it was Höd's turn to throw his weapon, the old woman stood at his elbow and guided his big arm as it hurled the twig of mistletoe towards where Balder stood.

Oh, the sad thing that befell! Straight through the air flew the little arrow, straight as magic and Loki's arm could direct it. Straight to Balder's heart it sped, piercing through jerkin and shirt and all, to give its bitter message of "Loki's love," as he had said. With a cry Balder fell forward on the grass. And that was the end of sunshine and spring and joy in Asgard, for the dream had come true, and Balder the beautiful was dead.

When the Æsir saw what had happened, there was a great shout of fear and horror, and they rushed upon Höd, who had thrown the fatal arrow.

"What is it? What have I done?" asked the poor blind brother, trembling at the tumult which had followed his shot.

"You have slain Balder!" cried the Æsir. "Wretched Höd, how could you do it?"

"It was the old woman—the evil old woman, who stood at my elbow and gave me a little twig to throw," gasped Höd. "She must be a witch."

Then the Æsir scattered over Ida Plain to look for the old woman who had done the evil deed; but she had mysteriously disappeared.

"It must be Loki," said wise Heimdal. "It is Loki's last and vilest trick."

"Oh, my Balder, my beautiful Balder!" wailed Queen Frigg, throwing herself on the body of her son. "If I had only made the mistletoe give me the promise, you would have been saved. It was I who told Loki of the mistletoe—so it is I who have killed you. Oh, my son, my son!"

But Father Odin was speechless with grief. His sorrow was greater than that of all the others, for he best understood the dreadful misfortune which had befallen Asgard. Already a cloud had come before the sun, so that it would never be bright day again. Already the flowers had begun to fade and the birds had ceased to sing. And already the Æsir had begun to grow old and joyless—all because the little mistletoe had been too young to give a promise to Queen Frigg.

"Balder the beautiful is dead!" the cry went echoing through all the world, and everything that was sorrowed at the sound of the Æsir's weeping.

Balder's brothers lifted up his beautiful body upon their great war shields and bore him on their shoulders down to the seashore. For, as was the custom in those days, they were going to send him to Hela, the Queen of Death, with all the

things he best had loved in Asgard. And these were—after Nanna his wife—his beautiful horse, and his ship Hringhorni. So that they would place Balder's body upon the ship with his horse beside him, and set fire to this wonderful funeral pile. For by fire was the quickest passage to Hela's kingdom.

But when they reached the shore, they found that all the strength of all the Æsir was unable to move Hringhorni, Balder's ship, into the water. For it was the largest ship in the world, and it was stranded far up the beach.

"Even the giants bore no ill-will to Balder," said Father Odin. "I heard the thunder of their grief but now shaking the hills. Let us for this once bury our hatred of that race and send to Jotunheim for help to move the ship."

So they sent a messenger to the giantess Hyrrockin, the hugest of all the Frost People. She was weeping for Balder when the message came.

"I will go, for Balder's sake," she said. Soon she came riding fast upon a giant wolf, with a serpent for the bridle; and mighty she was, with the strength of forty Æsir. She dismounted from her wolf-steed, and tossed the wriggling reins to one of the men-heroes who had followed Balder and the Æsir from Valhalla. But he could not hold the beast, and it took four heroes to keep him quiet, which they could only do by throwing him upon the ground and sitting upon him in a row. And this mortified them greatly.

Then Hyrrockin the giantess strode up to the great ship and seized it by the prow. Easily she gave a little pull and presto! it leaped forward on its rollers with such force that sparks flew from the flint stones underneath and the whole earth trembled. The boat shot into the waves and out toward open sea so swiftly that the Æsir were likely to have lost it entirely, had not Hyrrockin waded out up to her waist and caught it by the stern just in time.

Thor was angry at her clumsiness, and raised his hammer to punish her. But the other Æsir held his arm.

"She cannot help being so strong," they whispered. "She meant to do well. She did not realize how hard she was pulling. This is no time for anger, brother Thor." So Thor spared her life, as indeed he ought, for her kindness.

Then Balder's body was borne out to the ship and laid upon a pile of beautiful silks, and furs, and cloth-of-gold, and woven sunbeams which the dwarfs had wrought. So that his funeral pyre was more grand than anything which had ever been seen. But when Nanna, Balder's gentle wife, saw them ready to kindle the flames under this gorgeous bed, she could bear her grief no longer. Her loving heart broke, and they laid her beside him, that they might comfort each other on their journey to Hela. Thor touched the pile gently with his hammer that makes the lightning, and the flames burst forth, lighting up the faces of Balder and Nanna with a glory. Then they cast upon the fire Balder's war-horse, to serve his master in the dark country to which he was about to go. The horse was decked with a harness all of gold, with jewels studding the bridle and headstall. Last of all Odin laid upon the pyre his gift to Balder, Draupnir, the precious ring of gold which the dwarf had made, from which every ninth night there dropped eight other rings as large and brightly golden.

"Take this with you, dear son, to Hela's palace," said Odin. "And do not forget the friends you leave behind in the now lonely halls of Asgard."

Then Hyrrockin pushed the great boat out to sea, with its bonfire of precious things. And on the beach stood all the Æsir watching it out of sight, all the Æsir and many besides. For there came to Balder's funeral great crowds of little dwarfs and multitudes of huge frost giants, all mourning for Balder the beautiful. For this one time they were all friends together, forgetting their quarrels of so many centuries. All of them loved Balder, and were united to do him honor.

The great ship moved slowly out to sea, sending up a red fire to color all the heavens. At last it slid below the horizon

softly, as you have often seen the sun set upon the water, leaving a brightness behind to lighten the dark world for a little while.

This indeed was the sunset for Asgard. The darkness of sorrow came in earnest after the passing of Balder the beautiful.

But the punishment of Loki was a terrible thing. And that came soon and sore.

CHAPTER XVI
The Punishment of Loki

After the death of Balder the world grew so dreary that no one had any heart left for work or play. The Æsir sat about moping and miserable. They were growing old—there was no doubt about that. There was no longer any gladness in Valhalla, where the Valkyries waited on table and poured the foaming mead. There was no longer any mirth on Ida Plain, when every morning the bravest of earth-heroes fought their battles over again. Odin no longer had any pleasure in the daily news brought by his wise ravens, Thought and Memory, nor did Freia enjoy her falcon dress. Frey forgot to sail in his ship Skidbladnir, and even Thor had almost wearied of his hammer, except as he hoped that it would help him to catch Loki. For the one thought of all of them now was to find and punish Loki.

Yet they waited; for Queen Frigg had sent a messenger to Queen Hela to find if they might not even yet win Balder back from the kingdom of death.

Odin shook his head. "Queen Hela is Loki's daughter," he said, "and she will not let Balder return." But Frigg was hopeful; she had employed a trusty messenger, whose silver tongue had won many hearts against their will.

It was Hermod, Balder's brother, who galloped down the steep road to Hela's kingdom, on Sleipnir, the eight-legged horse of Father Odin. For nine nights and nine days he rode, through valleys dark and chill, until he came to the bridge which is paved with gold. And here the maiden Modgard told him that Balder had passed that way, and showed him the path northward to Hela's city. So he rode, down and down, until he came to the high wall which surrounded the grim

palace where Hela reigned. Hermod dismounted and tightened the saddle-girths of gray Sleipnir, whose eight legs were as frisky as ever, despite the long journey. And when he had mounted once more, the wonderful horse leaped with him over the wall, twenty feet at least!

Then Hermod rode straight into the palace of Hela, straight up to the throne where she sat surrounded by gray shadows and spirit people. She was a dreadful creature to see, was this daughter of Loki—half white like other folk, but half black, which was not sunburn, for there was no sunshine in this dark and dismal land. Yet she was not so bad as she looked; for even Hela felt kindly towards Balder, whom her father had slain, and was sorry that the world had lost so dear a friend. So when Hermod begged of her to let his brother return with him to Asgard, she said very gently—

"Freely would I let him go, brave Hermod, if I might. But a queen cannot always do as she likes, even in her own kingdom. His life must be bought; the price must be paid in tears. If everything upon earth will weep for Balder's death, then may he return, bringing light and happiness to the upper world. Should one creature fail to weep, Balder must remain with me."

Then Hermod was glad, for he felt sure that this price was easily paid. He thanked Hela, and made ready to depart with the hopeful message. Before he went away he saw and spoke with Balder himself, who sat with Nanna upon a throne of honor, talking of the good times that used to be. And Balder gave him the ring Draupnir to give back to Father Odin, as a remembrance from his dear son; while Nanna sent to mother Frigg her silver veil with other rich presents. It was hard for Hermod to part with Balder once again, and Balder also wept to see him go. But Hermod was in duty bound to bear the message back to Asgard as swiftly as might be.

Now when the Æsir heard from Hermod this news, they sent messengers forth over the whole world to bid every

creature weep for Balder's death. Heimdal galloped off upon Goldtop and Frey upon Goldbristle, his famous hog; Thor rumbled away in his goat chariot, and Freia drove her team of cats—all spreading the message in one direction and another. There really seemed little need for them to do this, for already there was mourning in every land and clime. Even the sky was weeping, and the flower eyes were filled with dewy tears.

So it seemed likely that Balder would be ransomed after all, and the Æsir began to hope more strongly. For they had not found one creature who refused to weep. Even the giants of Jotunheim were sorry to lose the gentle fellow who had never done them any harm, and freely added their giant tears to the salt rivers that were coursing over all the world into the sea, making it still more salt.

It was not until the messengers had nearly reached home, joyful in the surety that Balder was safe, that they found an ugly old giantess named Thökt hidden in a black cavern among the mountains.

"Weep, mother, weep for Balder!" they cried. "Balder the beautiful is dead, but your tears will buy him back to life. Weep, mother, weep!"

But the sulky old woman refused to weep.

"Balder is nothing to me," she said. "I care not whether he lives or dies. Let him bide with Hela—he is out of mischief there. I weep dry tears for Balder's death."

So all the work of the messengers was in vain, because of this one obstinate old woman. So all the tears of the sorrowing world were shed in vain. Because there were lacking two salty drops from the eyes of Thökt, they could not buy back Balder from the prison of death.

When the messengers returned and told Odin their sad news, he was wrathful.

"Do you not guess who the old woman was?" he cried. "It was Loki—Loki himself, disguised as a giantess. He has tricked us once more, and for a second time has slain Balder

for us; for it is now too late—Balder can never return to us after this. But it shall be the last of Loki's mischief. It is now time that we put an end to his deeds of shame."

"Come, my brothers!" shouted Thor, flourishing his hammer. "We have wept and mourned long enough. It is now time to punish. Let us hasten back to Thökt's cave, and seize Loki as quickly as may be."

So they hurried back into the mountains where they had left the giantess who would not weep. But when they came to the place, the cave was empty. Loki was too sharp a fellow to sit still and wait for punishment to overtake him. He knew very well that the Æsir would soon discover who Thökt really was. And he had taken himself off to a safer place, to escape the questions which a whole world of not too gentle folk were anxious to ask him.

The one desire of the Æsir was now to seize and punish Loki. So when they were unable to find him as easily as they expected, they were wroth indeed. Why had he left the cave? Whither had he gone? In what new disguise even now was he lurking, perhaps close by?

The truth was that when Loki found himself at war with the whole world which he had injured, he fled away into the mountains, where he had built a strong castle of rocks. This castle had four doors, one looking into the north, one to the south, one to the east, and one to the west; so that Loki could keep watch in all directions and see any enemy who might approach. Besides this, he had for his protection the many disguises which he knew so well how to don. Near the castle was a river and a waterfall, and it was Loki's favorite game to change himself into a spotted pink salmon and splash about in the pool below the fall.

"Ho, ho! Let them try to catch me here, if they can!" he would chuckle to himself. And indeed, it seemed as if he were safe enough.

One day Loki was sitting before the fire in his castle

twisting together threads of flax and yarn into a great fish-net which was his own invention. For no one had ever before thought of catching fish with a net. Loki was a clever fellow; and with all his faults, for this one thing at least the fishermen of today ought to be grateful to him. As Loki sat busily knotting the meshes of the net, he happened to glance out of the south door—and there were the Æsir coming in a body up the hill towards his castle.

Now this is what had happened: from his lookout throne in Asgard, Odin's keen sight had spied Loki's retreat. This throne, you remember, was in the house with a silver roof which Odin had built in the very beginning of time; and whenever he wanted to see what was going on in the remotest corner of Asgard, or to spy into some secret place beyond the sight of gods or men, he would mount this magic throne, whence his eye could pierce thick mountains and sound the deepest sea. So it was that the Æsir had found out Loki's castle, well-hidden though it was among the furthest mountains of the world. They had come to catch him, and there was nothing left for him but to run.

Loki jumped up and threw his half-mended net into the fire, for he did not want the Æsir to discover his invention; then he ran down to the river and leaped in with a great splash. When he was well under water, he changed himself into a salmon, and flickered away to bask in his shady pool and think how safe he was.

By this time the Æsir had entered his castle and were poking among the ashes which they found smouldering on the hearth.

"What is this?" asked Thor, holding up a piece of knotted flax which was not quite burned. "The knave has been making something with little cords."

"Let me see it," said Heimdal, the wisest of the Æsir—he who once upon a time had suggested Thor's clever disguise for winning back his hammer from the giant Thrym. He took

now the little scrap of fish-net and studied it carefully, picking out all the knots and twists of it.

"It is a net," said Heimdal at last. "He has been making a net, and—pfaugh!—it smells of fish. The fellow must have used it to trap fish for his dinner, though I never before heard of such a device."

"I saw a big splash in the river just as we came up," said Thor the keen-eyed—"a very big splash indeed. It seemed too large for any fish."

"It was Loki," declared Heimdal. "He must have been here but a moment since, for this fire has just gone out, and the net is still smouldering. That shows he did not wish us to find this new-fangled idea of his. Why was that? Let me think. Aha! I have it. Loki has changed himself into a fish, and did not wish us to discover the means of catching him."

"Oho!" cried the Æsir regretfully. "If only we had another net!"

"We can make one," said wise Heimdal. "I know how it is done, for I have studied out this little sample. Let us make a net to catch the slyest of all fish."

"Let us make a net for Loki," echoed the Æsir. And they all sat down cross-legged on the floor to have a lesson in net-weaving from Heimdal. He found hemp cord in a cupboard, and soon they had contrived a goodly net, big enough to catch several Lokis, if they should have good fisherman's luck.

They dragged the net to the river and cast it in. Thor, being the strongest, held one end of the net, and all the rest drew the other end up and down the stream. They were clumsy and awkward, for they had never used a net before, and did not know how to make the best of it. But presently Thor exclaimed, "Ha! I felt some live thing touch the meshes!"

"So did we!" cried the others. "It must be Loki!" And Loki it was, sure enough; for the Æsir had happened upon the very pool where the great salmon lay basking so peacefully. But when he felt the net touch him, he darted away and hid in a

cleft between two rocks. So that, although they dragged the net to and fro again and again, they could not catch Loki in its meshes; for the net was so light that it floated over his head.

"We must weight the net," said Heimdal wisely; "then nothing can pass beneath it." So they tied heavy stones all along the under edge, and again they cast the net, a little below the waterfall. Now Loki had seized the chance to swim further down the stream. But ugh! suddenly he tasted salt water. He was being swept out to sea! That would never do, for he could not live an hour in the sea. So he swam back and leaped straight over the net up into the waterfall, hoping that no one had noticed him. But Thor's sharp eyes had spied the flash of pink and silver, and Thor came running to the place.

"He is here!" he shouted. "Cast in the net above the fall! We have him now!"

When Loki saw the net cast again, so that there was no choice for him but to be swept back over the falls and out to sea, or to leap the net once more still further up the river, he hesitated. He saw Thor in the middle of the stream wading towards him; but behind him was sure death. So he set his teeth and once more he leaped the net. There was a huge splash, a scuffle, a scramble, and the water was churned into froth all about Thor's feet. He was struggling with the mighty fish. He caught him once, but the salmon slipped through his fingers. He caught him again, and this time Thor gripped hard. The salmon almost escaped, but Thor's big fingers kept hold of the end of his tail, and he flapped and flopped in vain. It was the grip of Thor's iron glove; and that is why to this day the salmon has so pointed a tail. The next time you see a salmon you must notice this, and remember that he may be a great-great-great-grand-descendant of Loki.

So Loki was captured and changed back into his own shape, sullen and fierce. But he had no word of sorrow for his evil deeds; nor did he ask for mercy, for he knew that it would

be in vain. He kept silent while the Æsir led him all the weary way back to Asgard.

Now the whole world was noisy with the triumph of his capture. As the procession passed along it was joined by all the creatures who had mourned for Balder—all the creatures who longed to see Loki punished. There were the men of Midgard, the place of human folk, shouting, "Kill him! kill him!" at the top of their lungs; there were armies of little mountain dwarfs in their brown peaked caps, who hobbled along, prodding Loki with their picks; there were beasts growling and showing their teeth as if they longed to tear Loki in pieces; there were birds who tried to peck his eyes, insects who came in clouds to sting him, and serpents that sprang up hissing at his feet to poison him with their deadly bite.

But to all these Thor said, "Do not kill the fellow. We are keeping him for a worse punishment than you can give." So the creatures merely followed and jostled Loki into Asgard, shouting, screaming, howling, growling, barking, roaring, spitting, squeaking, hissing, croaking, and buzzing, according to their different ways of showing hatred and horror.

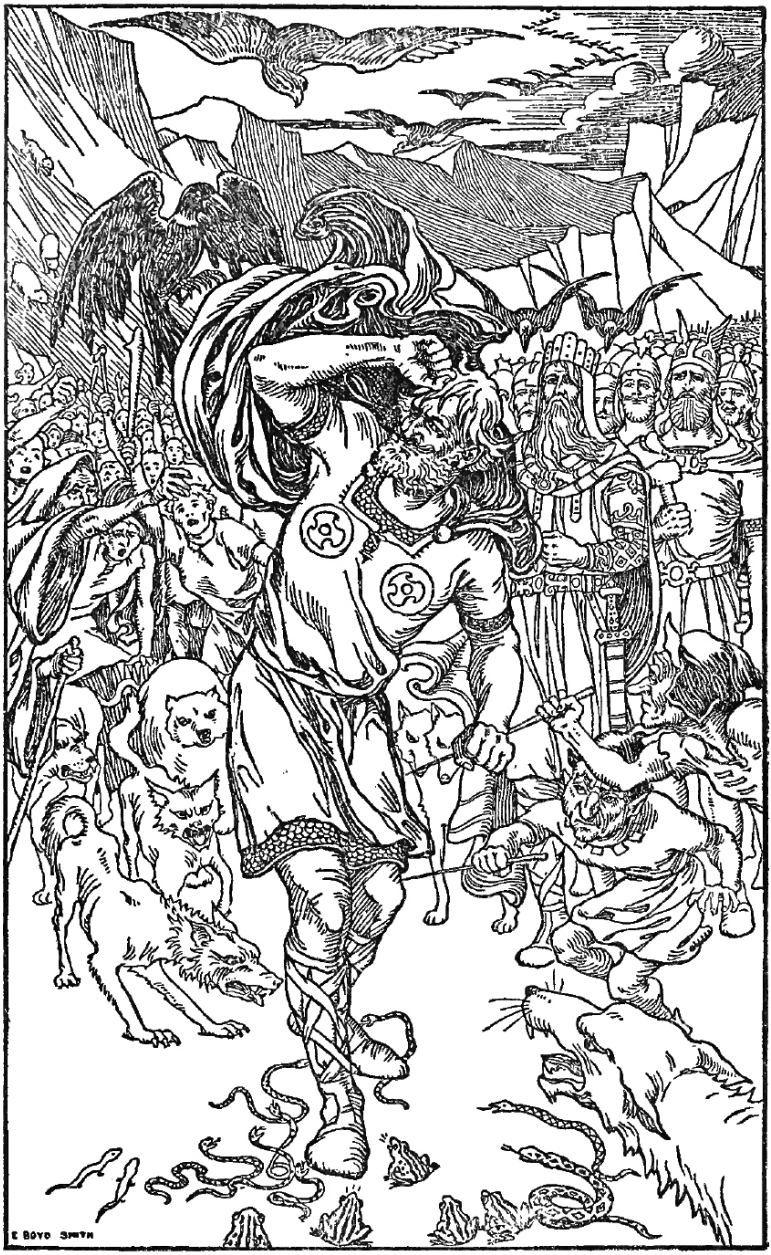
The Æsir met on Ida Plain to decide what should be done with Loki. There were Idun whom he had cheated, and Sif whose hair he had cut off. There were Freia whose falcon dress he had stolen and Thor whom he had tried to kill. There were Höd whom he had made a murderer; Frigg and Odin whose son he had slain. There was not one of them whom Loki had not injured in some way; and besides, there was the whole world into which he had brought sorrow and darkness; for the sake of all these Loki must be punished. But it was hard to think of any doom heavy enough for him. At last, however, they agreed upon a punishment which they thought suited to so wicked a wretch.

The long procession formed again and escorted Loki down, down into a damp cavern underground. Here sunlight never came, but the cave was full of ugly toads, snakes, and

insects that love the dark. These were Loki's evil thoughts, who were to live with him henceforth and torment him always. In this prison chamber side by side they placed three sharp stones, not far apart, to make an uneasy bed. And these were for Loki's three worst deeds, against Thor and Höd and Balder. Upon these rocks they bound Loki with stout thongs of leather. But as soon as the cords were fastened they turned into iron bands, so that no one, though he had the strength of a hundred giants, could loosen them. For these were Loki's evil passions, and the more he strained against them, the more they cut into him and wounded him until he howled with pain.

Over his head Skadi, whose father he had helped to slay, hung a venomous, wriggling serpent, from whose mouth dropped poison into Loki's face, which burned and stung him like fire. And this was the deceit which all his life Loki had spoken to draw folk into trouble and danger. At last it had turned about to torture him, as deceit always will do to him who utters it. Yet from this one torment Loki had some relief; for alone of all the world Sigyn, his wife, was faithful and forgiving. She stood by the head of the painful bed upon which the Red One was stretched, and held a bowl to catch the poison which dropped from the serpent's jaws, so that some of it did not reach Loki's face. But as often as the bowl became full, Sigyn had to go out and empty it; and then the bitter drops fell and burned till Loki made the cavern ring with his cries.

So this was Loki's punishment, and bad enough it was,—but not too bad for such a monster. Under the caverns he lies there still, struggling to be free. And when his great strength shakes the hills so that the whole ground trembles, men call it an earthquake. Sometimes they even see his poisonous breath blowing from the top of a mountain-chimney, and amid it the red flame of wickedness which burns in Loki's heart. Then all cry, "The volcano, the volcano!" and run


E BOYD SMITH

away as fast as they can. For Loki, poisoned though he is, is still dangerous and full of mischief, and it is not good to venture near him in his torment.

But there for his sins he must bide and suffer, suffer and bide, until the end of all sorrow and suffering and sin shall come, with Ragnarök, the ending of the world.

NORSE STORIES

Retold from the Eddas

By Hamilton Wright Mabie

An Introduction

The men who told the stories which are brought together in this book were of our race and had the love of play and of work to a degree which made them bold fighters, brave sailors, and true poets. They loved danger, and their heroes were men who thought little of death and a great deal of getting things done. They pushed obstacles out of their way, and overcame difficulties, not only with fortitude and patience, but with joy in their hearts. They had not the love of beauty which made the Greeks the artists and teachers of the older world, and gave birth to a great group of stories of which the modern world never tires; but they had in their souls a deep love of truth, of power, of action, of the qualities which make men alive, keep them free, and give them authority. They dreamed not of beautiful figures like Apollo, but of masterful Gods like Odin and Thor. They thought of life as a tremendous fight, and they wanted to acquit themselves like men; enduring hardship without repining, doing hard work honestly and with a whole heart, and dying with their faces toward their foes. Their heaven was a place for heroes, and their Gods were men of heroic size and spirit. Their battles were won or lost long ago, but the stories to which they listened in their homes and on their little adventurous ships are part of the history which belongs to us because the men of our race made it. It is a chapter from the romance of life which our ancestors created, because it explained their lives to them.

Hamilton Wright Mabie.
February 27, 1902.

CHAPTER I
The Making of the World

Eight hundred years ago, when the galleys of the bold Norsemen were scudding through storm and mist far into the unknown western seas, or, in the soft summer of the Mediterranean, riding at anchor in the ports of Italy and Northern Africa, the old stories of the battles of the gods and the giants that had been repeated for hundreds of years by Norse firesides in the long winter evenings were brought together by some unknown man in Iceland, and were known henceforth as the Elder Edda; and a hundred years later Snorre Sturleson retold the Lame old stories, with others equally marvellous, in the Younger Edda. These ancient books, which a brave and noble race carried in its heart through all its wide wanderings and conquests, take one back to the beginning of time, and tell of the birth of the worlds and the coming of the gods to rule over them.

Norway faces the sea with a line of cliffs so massive that their foundations seem everlasting. Islands without number rise out of the tossing waves; the deep, tranquil waters of the fjords, overhung with fir-covered mountains, and bright at night with the quenchless splendour of the stars, flow through narrow channels to the outer ocean; and against the sky great mountains stand vast and immovable, as if from eternity to eternity. No Norseman, steering his adventurous galley along these rocky shores, seeing, perhaps, the mighty rush of the polar seas against the North Cape, and hearing the long reverberation of Thor's hammer roll from mountain peak to mountain peak, would have believed that these things had not been as he saw them from the very beginning, if the Eddas, wiser than any wisdom of man, had not told him of a

time when even the gods had not begun to live, and in the vast space where no worlds hung and no heavens shone there was nothing but the unseen spirit of the great All-father, solitary and silent in the depths.

Not even the Eddas are able to reveal his thoughts or to describe his life in the awful solitariness of a silent universe; they can only declare that in his own good time he began to build the worlds, and far in the north Niflheim rose out of the depths, the land of eternal winter wrapped in fogs and mists, and far in the south Muspelheim, the land of quenchless fire, glowing with unspeakable heat and overhung with clouds and fiery sparks, in the midst of whose blinding heat and light sat Surt, guarding the kingdom of fire with a flaming sword. Between the land of ice and the land of fire yawned the bottomless abyss, Ginungagap, black and fathomless, and into it the rivers of Niflheim poured with soundless fury, and as the icy streams fell; into the darkness they congealed and hung in great masses from the northern edges of the abyss; and over the awful chasm and the silent cataracts icy fogs gathered and bitter winds swept.

Against the whirling snows and shifting fogs of Niflheim glowed the wandering flames and floating fires of Muspelheim, throwing broad beams of light far into the sunless abyss, and sending a wide glow through the drifting snow. Glittering sparks shot into the silent space above and floated far off towards the north like stars that had wandered from their courses; and as the icy mist met the burning heat in the upper air, it hung motionless for a brief moment and then fell drop by drop into the abyss, and there, out of heat and cold, fire and fog, in darkness and solitude, the giant Ymer grew into life. To give him food the cow Audhumbla was made, and as she stood nourishing the giant with her milk, she licked the icy stones which were covered with salt, and straightway the head of a man began to take shape, grew larger, and on the third day the man stood upright, fair of face

and mighty of stature; and his name was Bure. Now Bure had a son, whom he called Bor, and Bor, in turn, became the father of Odin, Vile, and Ve, the first of the gods. The giant Ymer also was the father of many children who were frost-giants and enemies of the gods.

Ymer grew to such vast size, and was so full of evil, that Odin, Vile, and Ve could not live in peace with him, and at last they fell upon him, and slew him, and the blood poured in such torrents from his great body that all the giants, save Bergelmer and his wife, were drowned; these two alone escaped on a chest, and from them the whole race of the frost-giants sprang. The gods dragged Ymer's body into the centre of the abyss, and there they fashioned the world out of it. They wrought with divine beauty and power, spreading out the great plains, cutting the deep valleys through the hills, filling the wide seas and sending the waters far up into the deep fjords; and over all they stretched the bending heaven, and north, south, east, and west set a dwarf to keep it in place; and they caught the great sparks that floated out of Muspelheim and set them in the sky, until the splendour of the stars shone over the whole earth. Around the world lay the deep sea, an endless circle of waters, and beyond it were the dreary shores of Jotunheim, the home of the frost-giants.

To the giantess Night, and to her beautiful son Day, whose father was of their own number, the gods gave chariots and swift horses that they might ride through the sky once in every twenty-four hours. Night drove first behind the fleet Hrimfaxe, and as she ended her course at dawn bedewed the waiting earth with drops from his bit; Day flew swiftly after his dusky mother, the shining mane of his horse, Skinfaxe, filling the heavens with light. There was also one Mundilfare, who had a son and daughter of such exceeding beauty that he called the one Maane, or Moon, and the other Sol, or Sun; and the gods were so angry at his daring that they set the one to guide the Sun and the other the Moon in their daily courses

around the world. So day and night, summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, were established.

In the very centre of the earth rose a lofty mountain, and on the top of it was the beautiful plain of Ida, overlooking all lands and seas. Here the gods came when their work was done, and looked upon all that they had made and saw that it was fair; the earth, green and fruitful, blossomed at their feet, and the heavens bent over them radiant with sun by day and filled with the soft splendour of moon and stars by night. And they chose the plain of Ida for their home, and built the shining city of Asgard. In the midst of it stood a hall of pure gold, whose walls were circled with the thrones of the twelve gods, and they called it Gladsheim. There was a noble hall for the goddesses also, and homes for all the gods. They made ready a great smithy, and rilled it with all manner of tools, anvils, hammers, and tongs, with which to forge the weapons that were to slay the giants and keep the world in order. From earth to heaven they stretched Bifrost, the rainbow bridge, over which they passed and repassed in their journeyings.

When the work was done, and Asgard shone like a beautiful cloud overhanging the world, there came a time so peaceful and happy that it was called the Age of Gold. The gods had endless sport in games of skill and strength on the plains of Ida, and day and night the fires blazed in the smithy, as, with wonderful skill, they fashioned all kinds of curious things. There was no care nor sorrow anywhere; no clouds darkened the sun, no blights fell on the growing fields, no mighty tasks pressed on the hearts of the gods summoning them out of ease and pleasure to great enterprises and awful perils. At last the happy time came to an end, for one day the Norns, or fates, the three terrible sisters, Urd, Verdande, and Skuld, who determined the course of events and shaped the lives of things, took their abode at the foot of the tree Ygdrasil, and henceforth not even the gods were free from care.

The earth was fruitful, but no one tilled its field or crossed its seas; the shouts of children at play and the ringing voices of the reapers and harvesters were never heard. So the gods took the earth-mould and out of it they made the dwarfs and set them to work in the veins of metal and in dark caverns under ground. It happened also one day that Odin, Hcener, and Loder were walking together along the shore of the sea, and they came upon an ash and an elm, two beautiful trees, straight and symmetrical and crowned with foliage. Odin looked at them long, and a great thought came into his mind.

"Out of these trees," he said at last, "let us make man to fill the earth and make it fruitful, and he shall be our child, and we will care for him."

And out of the ash and the elm the first man and woman were made, and the gods called the man Ask and the woman Embla.

CHAPTER II
Gods and Men

A great many hundreds of years after the creation of the world, there ruled in Sweden a wise king whose name was Gylfe; and the wisdom of this king, like all wisdom, was in part knowledge and in larger part goodness. He knew how to give as well as how to receive. A wayfaring woman once found shelter at his hands, and, in return told him many wonderful stories; which so pleased the king that he gave her, as a reward, as much land as four oxen could plough in a day and a night. Now this woman was of the race of the gods and her name was Gefjun. She took four great oxen from Jotunheim, who were the offspring of a giant, and set them before the plough and drove them forth into the land which the king had set apart for her. And the plough, being drawn by giants, cut so deep into the soil, that it tore away a great piece of land, and carried it into the sea to the west, and there left it. Gefjun called this new country which she had taken from the mainland, Seeland; and the place from which the land was taken was filled by the sea and formed a lake which is now called Logrinn.

This was but the beginning of King Gylfe's acquaintance with the gods; for he was a seeker after wisdom and he who searches for wisdom must go to the gods to find it. He saw the wonderful things which the gods did and the marvellous ways in which their will was done in Asgard, and upon the earth, and he thought much upon their power and wondered whence it came. He could not make up his mind whether these gods, of whom he had heard and whose mighty works he saw, were powerful by reason of the force in themselves, or whether they were made strong by other and greater gods.

After thinking much about these things and finding that no man could answer the questions which he was continually asking himself, Gylfe assumed the form of a very old man and made the long journey to Asgard, thinking to learn the secrets of the gods without letting them know who he was.

The gods know all things, and they not only knew that the old man who one day came to Asgard was Gylfe, but they knew that he was to make the journey long before he had so much as thought of it. They received him, however, as if they thought he was what he appeared to be, and he learned as much as he could understand; which is as much as a man ever learns.

The gods have often visited men, but men have rarely visited the gods, and the King's coming to Asgard was the beginning of a new wisdom among men.

No sooner did he enter the home of the gods than he found himself in a great hall, so high that he could hardly see over it. And the roof of this hall was thatched with shields of gold in place of shingles:

> Thinking thatchers
> Thatched the roof;
> The beams of the burg
> Beamed with gold.

When Gylfe came to the door of this great hall he saw a man playing with swords with such wonderful quickness and skill that he kept seven flashing in the air at one time. When this player with swords asked his name, the king speaking as an old man, answered that he was Ganglere, or the Walker, that he had come a long distance and that he begged a lodging for the night; and he asked, as if it were a very unimportant matter, who owned the hall. The man, who was a god in disguise, replied that it belonged to their king and that he would take Ganglere to him.

"You may ask him his name yourself when you see him," he added.

Then the man led the way into the hall and no sooner were they within its walls than the doors were shut. There were many rooms under the shining roof and every room seemed to be full of people, some of whom were playing games, and some were drinking out of great horns or cups, and some were fighting with different kinds of weapons; and Gylfe did not understand half of the things he saw. He was not at all frightened by his ignorance, however, and he said to himself:

Gates all,
    Before in you go,
You must examine well;
    For you cannot know
Where enemies sit
    In the house before you.

When Gylfe had looked about him he saw three seats or thrones and upon each of these a man sat high above the throng which played and drank and fought.

"What are the names of these kings?" he asked. And the man who led him into the hall answered that he who sat on the lowest of the three thrones was the king and was called Har, and that he who sat on the throne next above him was called Jafnhar, and he who sat on the highest throne was called Thride. Now these three gods were as many different forms of Odin, and Gylfe was really seeing one god when he seemed to be seeing three.

Then Har, or Odin, spoke in a deep and wonderful tone and asked Gylfe who he was, and why he had come there, and bade him welcome by inviting him to eat and drink as much and often as he chose. But Gylfe was so bent upon learning the secrets of the gods that he did not think of food or drink,

nor did he stop to answer Har's questions. He replied boldly that he wanted to find a wise man if there were one. Then Har answered him, as the gods often answer men, in words which were so full of meaning that he did not understand them until long afterwards:

"You shall not go from this place unharmed unless you go wiser than you came."

It is dangerous to seek the gods, unless we profit by what they tell us; for it is better to be ignorant than to possess knowledge and not live by it.

Then Gylfe stood boldly before Odin, a man standing in the presence of God and seeking for knowledge, and asked many and deep questions about the gods and their ways and power; and about the giants, and their homes; and about the making of the world and the creation of man; and about the sun and moon and stars; and about the seasons and the wind and fire. And Odin answered his questions and told him the things which men are eager to know, but cannot learn unless the gods teach them.

When Odin had told Gylfe all that a man could understand of these deep mysteries he refused to answer any more questions and bade the questioner make the best use of what had been told him, and when Odin had spoken these words Gylfe heard a great noise and found himself standing alone in a great plain, and the hall and Asgard had vanished utterly. Then, filled with wonder by all he had heard and seen, he went home to his own kingdom, and told of the marvellous things which had befallen him on his journey to the home of the gods; and what he said was remembered by those who heard the wonderful stories and told again to their children and their children's children to the latest generations.

Now Gylfe was not the only man who talked with the gods; for Æger, who lived on the island called Hler's Isle and was also a man of great wisdom, made the journey to Asgard and the gods knew of his coming before he came and prepared

a great feast for him. When the feast began Odin had swords brought into the hall and these swords were of such brightness that they lighted the hall without the aid of fire or lamps; and the hall was hung with glittering shields. The gods sat on their thrones and ate and drank with Æger, and Brage told him strange and wonderful tales of the things which had befallen the gods.

And this is the way in which men came to know the stories which are told in this book.

CHAPTER III
Odin's Search for Wisdom

The wonderful ash-tree, Ygdrasil, made a far-spreading shade against the fierce heat of the sun in summer, and a stronghold against the piercing winds of winter. No man could remember when it had been young. Little children played under its branches, grew to be strong men and women, lived to be old and weary and feeble, and died; and yet the ash-tree gave no signs of decay. Forever preserving its freshness and beauty, it was to live as long as there were men to look upon it, animals to feed under it, birds to flutter among its branches. This mighty ash-tree touched and bound all the worlds together in its wonderful circle of life. One root it sent deep down into the sightless depths of Hel, where the dead lived; another it fastened firmly in Jotunheim, the dreary home of the giants; and with the third it grasped Midgard, the dwelling-place of men. Serpents and all kinds of worms gnawed continually at its roots, but were never able to destroy them. Its branches spread out over the whole earth, and the topmost boughs swayed in the clear air of Asgard itself, rustling against the Valhal, the home of the heroes who had done great deeds or died manfully in battle. At the foot of the tree sat the three Norns, wonderful spinners of fate, who weave the thread of every man's life, making it what they will; and a strange weaving it often was, cut off when the pattern was just beginning to show itself.

And every day these Norns sprinkled the tree with the water of life from the Urdar fountain, and so kept it forever green. In the topmost branches sat an eagle singing a strange song about the birth of the world, its decay and death. Under its branches browsed all manner of animals; among its leaves

every kind of bird made its nest; by day the rainbow hung under it; at night the pale northern light flashed over it, and as the winds swept through its rustling branches, the multitudinous murmur of the leaves told strange stories of the past and of the future.

The giants were older than the gods, and knew so much more of the past that the gods had to go to them for wisdom. After a time, however, the gods became wiser than the giants, or they would have ceased to be gods, and been destroyed by the giants, instead of destroying them. When the world was still young, and there were still many things which even the gods had to learn, Odin was so anxious to become wise that he went to a deep well whose waters touched the roots of Ygdrasil itself. The keeper of the well was a very old and very wise giant, named Mimer, or Memory, and he gave no draughts out of the well until he was well paid; for the well contained the water of wisdom, and whoever drank of it became straightway wonderfully wise.

"Give me a draught of this clear water, O Mimer," said Odin, when he had reached the well, and was looking down into its clear, fathomless depths.

Mimer, the keeper, was so old that he could remember everything that had ever happened. His eyes were clear and calm as the stars, his face was noble and restful, and his long white beard flowed down to his waist.

"This water is only to be had at a great price," he said in a wonderfully sweet, majestic tone. "I cannot give to all who ask, but only to those who are able and willing to give greatly in return," he continued.

If Odin had been less of a god he would have thought longer and bargained sharper, but he was so godlike that he cared more to be wise and great than for anything else.

"I will give you whatever you ask," he answered.

Mimer thought a moment. "You must leave an eye," he said at last.

Then he drew up a great draught of the sparkling water, and Odin quenched his divine thirst and went away rejoicing, although he had left an eye behind. Even the gods could not be wise without struggle and toil and sacrifice.

So Odin became the wisest in all the worlds, and there was no god or giant that could contend with him. There was one giant, however, who was called all-wise in Jotunheim, with whom many had contended in knowledge, with curious and difficult questions, and had always been silenced and killed, for then, as now, a man's life often depended on his wisdom. Of this giant, Vafthrudner, and his wisdom many wonderful stories were told, and even among the gods his fame was great. One day as Odin sat thinking of many strange things in the worlds, and many mysterious things in the future, he thought, of Vafthrudner. "I will go to Jotunheim and measure wisdom with Vafthrudner, the wisest of the giants," said he to Frigg, his wife, who was sitting by.

Then Frigg remembered those who had gone to contend with the all-wise giant and had never come back, and a fear came over her that the same fate might befall Odin.

"You are wisest in all the worlds, All-Father," she said; "why should you seek a treacherous giant who knows not half so much as you?"

But Odin, who feared nothing, could not be persuaded to stay, and Frigg sadly said good-by as he passed out of Asgard on his journey to Jotunheim. His blue mantle set with stars and his golden helmet he left behind him, and as he journeyed swiftly those who met him saw nothing godlike in him; nor did Vafthrudner when at last he stood at the giant's door.

"I am a simple traveller, Gangraad by name," he said, as Vafthrudner came gruffly toward him. "I ask your hospitality and a chance to strive with you in wisdom." The giant laughed scornfully at the thought of a man coming to contend with him for mastery in knowledge.

"You shall have all you want of both," he growled, "and if

you cannot answer my questions you shall never go hence alive."

He did not even ask Odin to sit down, but let him stand in the hall, despising him too much to show him any courtesy. After a time he began to ask questions.

"Tell me, if you can, O wise Gangraad, the name of the river which dirides Asgard from Jotunheim."

"The river Ifing, which never freezes over," answered Odin quickly, as if it were the easiest question in the world; and indeed it was to him, although no man could have answered it. Vafthrudner looked up in great surprise when he heard the reply.

"Good," he said, "you have answered rightly. Tell me, now, the names of the horses that carry day and night across the sky."

Before the words were fairly spoken Odin replied, "Skinfaxe and Hrimfaxe." The giant could not conceal his surprise that a man should know these things.

"Once more," he said quickly, as if he were risking everything on one question; "tell me the name of the plain where the Last Battle will be fought."

This was a terrible question, for the Last Battle was still far off in the future, and only the gods and the greatest of the giants knew where and when it would come. Odin bowed his head when he heard the words, for to be ready for that battle was the divine work of his life, and then said, slowly and solemnly, "On the plain of Vigrid, which is one hundred miles on each side."

Vafthrudner rose trembling from his seat. He knew now that Gangraad was some great one in disguise, and that his own life hung on the answers he himself would soon be forced to make.

"Sit here beside me," he said, "for, whoever you are, worthier antagonist has never entered these walls."

Then they sat down together in the rude stone hall, the

mightiest of the gods and the wisest of the giants, and the great contest in wisdom, with a life hanging in either scale, went on between them. Wonderful secrets of the time when no man was and the time when no man will be, those silent walls listened to as Vafthrudner asked Odin one deep question after another, the answer coming swiftly and surely.

After a time the giant could ask no more, for he had exhausted his wisdom.

"It is my turn now," said Odin, and one after another he drew out from Vafthrudner the events of the past, then the wonderful things of the race of giants, and finally he began to question him of that dim, mysterious future whose secrets only the gods know; and as he touched these wonderful things Odin's eyes began to flash, and his form to grow larger and nobler until he seemed no longer the humble Gangraad, but the mighty god he was, and Vafthrudner trembled as he felt the coming doom nearing him with every question.

So hours went by, until at last Odin paused in his swift questioning, stooped down and asked the giant, "What did Odin whisper in the ear of Balder as he ascended the funeral pile?"

Only Odin himself could answer this question, and Vafthrudner replied humbly and with awe, "Who but thyself, All-father, knoweth the words thou didst say to thy son in the days of old? I have brought my doom upon myself, for in my ignorance I have contended with wisdom itself. Thou art ever the wisest of all."

So Odin conquered, and Wisdom was victorious, as she always has been even when she has contended with giants.

CHAPTER IV
How Odin Brought the Mead to Asgard

Besides the gods who lived in Asgard and ruled over Midgard, the world of men, there were the Vans, who ruled the seas and the air. The greatest of these was Njord, who kept the winds in the hollow of his hand and vexed the seas with storms or spread over them the peace of a great calm. His son Frey sent rain and sunshine upon the earth and cared for the harvests, while his daughter Freyja was so full of love that she made the whole world beautiful with tenderness, and filled the hearts of men with the sweetest joys they ever knew.

It happened almost at the beginning that the gods and the Vans went to war with each other, and long and fierce was the struggle between them. When peace was made at last, Njord, Frey, and Freyja found homes for themselves in Asgard, and henceforth they were all as one family.

While the council at which peace was made was being held, a great jar stood in the open space between the two parties, and when the meeting was over the gods were so glad to be rid of the troublesome war that they resolved to create something that should always remind them of the council. So they took the great jar and out of it they moulded the form of a man, and called him Kvaser.

Kvaser was grown up when he was born, and a wonderful man he was too. In all the world there was nobody so wise as he; ask him any question, and he could answer it. He knew how the gods lived, how the world was made, and what sort of places heaven and hell were. Kvaser was good, too, as all really wise men are. He was a great traveller, always going from place to place, and always welcome, because wherever he went he made men wiser and better. People sometimes

think poets rather useless sort of men; but that was not the opinion of the gods, for when they made the first poet they made the very best man they could think of.

But poets cannot keep out of trouble any easier than other men, and sometimes not half so well. One night as Kvaser was travelling along through one of those deep valleys that run down to the sea in that country, he came to the house of two dwarfs with very queer names, Galar and Fjalar. They were not only little in size, but small and mean in nature, and like all other people of little nature, they were very envious and cruel, and they hated Kvaser because he was so much nobler than they. Galar had a dark, ugly face, which looked still uglier when he saw Kvaser coming towards the house.

"Fjalar! Fjalar!" he called out, "here comes the wise man who always talks in rhymes, and thinks he knows so much more than anybody else."

And when Fjalar saw the poet walking across the fields, a black shadow came over his face like a thunder-cloud. "Galar," he whispered, looking around to see that nobody could hear, "we've got him alone; let's kill him, and see how much good his wisdom will do him."

Meanwhile Kvaser was slowly approaching the house, and the sea, as it dashed against the rocks, was making a song in his mind. If you had heard him sing it, you would have heard the voices of the waves as they toss their white caps and chase each other foaming and roaring and tumbling on the beach. When Kvaser came up to the dwarfs they pretended to be very glad to see him, and told him he was the one person above all others they had wanted to see, because they had a question they had been waiting a long time to ask him. Kvaser was so noble himself that he never thought evil of anyone, and when they asked him to go with them into a very dark and lonely part of the valley, so that nobody could hear their talk, he had no suspicion that they meant any harm; but no sooner had they come to the place than they struck him down

from behind. Having killed him, they caught his blood in two jars and a kettle, and mixed it with honey, and so the wonderful mead was made. It took not only sweetness but life to make true poetry.

Not long after this Galar and Fjalar killed a giant named Gilling, and were punished for it too; for the giant's son, Suttung, when he discovered how his father had been put to death, took the dwarfs out to sea and put them on a little rocky island where they would certainly be drowned when the tide came in, and rowed off to leave them; but the rascals begged so hard to be taken off, that he finally promised to let them live if they would give him the mead. Then Suttung took the mead home and put it in his cellar, and told his daughter Gunlad to watch it day and night, for he knew what a precious drink it was. So the mead passed out of the dwarfs' hands into the keeping of a giant.

Now the gods were very fond of Kvaser, and when a long time had passed without any word from him, they asked Galar and Fjalar if they knew anything about him, and the dwarfs said he had been choked by his own wisdom; but Odin knew that this was a false story. He kept his own counsel, and said nothing about what he was going to do, but one day the gods missed him, and knew he had gone on one of his long journeys.

As he walked along nobody took him for a god; he looked like a very handsome labourer, and in fact that is what he really was. He had pretty much the whole world in his charge, and he had to work very hard to keep it in any kind of order. Words could hardly describe the beautiful country through which Odin took his way, its deep, quiet green valleys, with the sparkling cold streams rushing through them; its steep mountains, crowned with fir and pine; its great crags standing put into the sea; and its fjords breaking the coast into numberless bays. Odin enjoyed it all, for the gods love beauty, but he was thinking all the time how he should get the mead

out of the giant's cellar. He knew perfectly well that Suttung would never give it up willingly, and that he must get it either by force or by stratagem. Suttung was very strong, and the cellar was cut out of the solid rock; and the more Odin thought about it the harder it seemed to him. If he had been a man he would have given up, but that was not his way; besides, he had loved Kvaser, and the mead was his blood, and he meant to bring it to heaven.

Now Suttung had a brother named Bauge, who was a farmer, and one afternoon, as his nine thralls were mowing in the fields, they saw a stranger coming towards them. It was a very uncommon thing to see a stranger in that out-of-the-way place, and the men all stopped work to watch him. He was a farm labourer like themselves, but he was very large in stature, and had a very noble face and manner.

"A fine meadow of grass," he said in a deep musical voice as he joined them, "but you find it hard work; your scythes are dull."

They certainly did look tired and overworked.

"Hand me your scythes and I will whet them for you," continued the stranger. The thralls were very glad to have anybody do that for them, so they gave him their scythes without saying a word. In a moment the valley rang with the quick strokes of the stone on the hard metal, and the sparks flew in showers around them. The men had never seen such a whetting of scythes before, and their astonishment grew greater still when they found that the grass seemed to fall like magic before them. The mowing, which had been so hard, was now the easiest thing in the world.

"Sell us the whetstone," they shouted, crowding around the stranger.

"Well," said he very coolly, "I will sell it, but I must have a good price for it."

Then each demanded it for himself, and while they were quarrelling as to which should have it, the stranger threw it

high into the air, and bade them fight for it, which they did so fiercely that each slew his fellow with his scythe, and the stranger was left alone in the field. He threw the whetstone away, walked off, and as the sun was going down, came to the giant's house and asked if he might stay all night. Bauge was willing, as people were in those days, to give supper and a bed to the stranger, and asked him in.

After supper they talked together, and Bauge told the stranger that his nine thralls had been fighting in the field and had killed each other, and that he was in great trouble because he did not know where to get men to do his work.

"I'll do it," said the stranger.

"Yes," said Bauge, "but you are only one."

"That is true," he answered, "but try me and I'll do the work of all nine."

Bauge looked as if he didn't believe it, but it was one good man gained, at least, and that was something.

"What shall I pay you?" continued Bauge, determined to finish the bargain before the man had time to change his mind. The stranger thought a few moments as if he were uncertain what pay he wanted.

"I'll do the work," he said slowly, at last, "if you will give me a drink of the mead in your brother's cellar." Bauge was very much surprised; he could not understand how the man knew anything about the mead. He was very sure, however, that Suttung would not give him a drop of it, and he thought it was a good chance to get his work done for nothing. "Well," said he, "I can't promise you that, for Suttung takes precious good care of the mead, but I'll do what I can to help you get it."

So the bargain was made, and the next morning the stranger was at work; and all summer, early and late, he was in the fields doing the work of nine men. Bauge often wondered what kind of a man his new farm-hand was; but so long as the work was done he cared for nothing more, and he asked no

questions. The stranger once said his name was Bolverk, and that was all he ever said about himself. The months went by, winter came, the work was all done, and Bolverk demanded his pay.

"We'll go and ask my brother about it," said Bauge; so they both went to Suttung. Bauge told his brother the bargain he had made with his workman, and asked for a little of the mead.

"No," said Suttung very crossly, and looking suspiciously at Bolverk; "it's no bargain of mine, and not a drop shall you have."

Bolverk seemed not at all surprised at his ill fortune, and Bauge thought that he had gotten his work done for nothing; but after they had gone a little way together and were hidden from the house by the trees, Bolverk drew out an auger from under his clothing.

"Bauge," said he, "you promised to help me get that mead. I am going into Suttung's cellar for it."

Bauge smiled at the idea of cutting through a thick rock and getting into the cellar with that auger, but when it was handed to him he took it without saying a word and began to bore. It was an astonishing auger, for no sooner had he pressed it against the rock than it began to fly around with wonderful rapidity, the chips of stone fairly making a cloud about him. Once he stopped, for he was afraid he really would get into the cellar, and told Bolverk he had bored through, but Bolverk knew that couldn't be true, because the chips still flew out; so he told Bauge to go on. In a little time the auger slipped through. Bauge looked around, but there was no Bolverk, and while he stared in every direction a large worm crept up the rock and into the hole. When Bauge caught sight of it he thrust the auger hastily into the hole, but Bolverk's voice answered back from the cellar, "Too late, Bauge; you needn't bore any longer."

Then Bauge suspected that a man who had done the work

of nine men all summer, and suddenly changed himself into a worm, must be somebody more than common. Bolverk was actually in Suttung's house, but how was he to get out again with the mead?

Gunlad, the young lady who had been charged by her father to watch the precious drink day and night, was sitting quietly beside it, when she was suddenly surprised, and not a little frightened, by the apparition of a young and beautiful man standing before her. What the handsome young man said to her nobody knows, but he probably told her he was very much exhausted, and hinted that she was very lovely; that he had never seen anyone he admired so much before. At any rate, he persuaded her to let him drink three draughts of the mead, only three. They were certainly the most astonishing draughts anybody ever heard of, for with the first he emptied one jar, with the second he emptied the other jar, and with the third he finished the kettle.

And now another wonderful change took place. Bolverk had entered as a worm, but no sooner had he drunk the mead than in an instant he became an eagle, and before Gunlad knew what had happened, with splendid wings outspread he was rising upward in broad, easy flight. Through the still air, faster and faster, higher and higher, in wide circles that swept far round the summits of the mountains, in swift majestic flight he rose until the earth had vanished out of sight, and his mighty pinions beat against the gates of Asgard.

So Odin brought the mead to heaven, where it remains to this day, and only those whom the gods love are permitted to drink of it.

CHAPTER V
The Wooing of Gerd

Frey was busy enough in summer, when the sunlight was to fall warm and fruitful along the mountain ridges and deep into the valleys, and the gentle showers were to be gathered far out at sea and driven by the winds across the heavens, weaving soft draperies of mist about the hills, or folding the landscape in with blinding curtains of rain as they passed; for the sowing and the harvesting and the ripening of the fruit were his to watch over and care for. But when winter came, Frey was idle day in and day out, and so it happened, in this long dull season, that he was wandering restlessly one morning about Asgard, when he saw that Odin's throne was empty. To sit upon it and look out over the world was the thought that flashed into Frey's mind and out again, leaving him more idle and restless than before. Neither man nor god, save Odin, had dared to sit in that awful seat, from which nothing was hidden; but when one has nothing to do, it is easy to do wrong. Frey wandered about a little longer, and then boldly mounted the steps and sat down on the throne of the world.

What a wonderful view it was! There lay Asgard beautiful in the morning light; there were the rolling clouds like great waves in the clear heaven; there was the world with its steep mountains and tossing seas; and there was Jotunheim, the home of the giants, gloomy and forbidding, great black cliffs standing along the coast like grim sentinels. Frey looked long and earnestly at this dreary place where the enemies of the gods lived, hating the sunshine and the summer, and always plotting to bring back winter and barrenness to the earth; and as he looked he saw a massive house standing alone amid the hills. Dark shadows lay across the gloomy landscape, cold

winds swept over the stony valleys, and not one bright or beautiful thing was visible in all the country round. In a moment, however, a figure moved out of the shadows, and a maiden walked slowly to the desolate house, mounted the steps, paused a moment at the door, and then raised her arms to loosen the latch. Straightway a wonderful warmth and light stole over the hills. As she stood with uplifted arms she was so beautiful that earth and air were flooded with her loveliness, and even the heavens were radiant. When she opened the door and closed it behind her the shadows deepened among the hills, and Frey's heart was fast bound among the rocks of Jotunheim. He had been punished for sitting in the seat of Odin.

For days Frey neither ate, slept, nor spoke. He wandered about, silent and gloomy as a cloud, and no one dared ask him why he was so sorrowful. Njord, Frey's father, waited until he could wait no longer, and then with a heavy heart sent for Skirner, whom Frey loved as his own brother, and begged him to find the cause of all this sadness. Skirner came upon Frey walking about with folded arms and eyes cast gloomily upon the ground.

"Why do you stay here all day alone?" he asked. "Where are the light and joy that have always been yours?"

"The sun shines every day, but not for me," answered Frey.

"We were children together," said Skirner, laying his hand on Frey's arm; "we trust each other's truth; tell me your sorrow."

And Frey told him how he had climbed into the seat of Odin and looked upon Jotunheim and seen the beautiful maiden like a sunbeam among shadows, like a sudden coming of summer when snows are deep, and that he could never be happy again until he had won her for himself.

"If that is all, it is easily managed," said Skirner when he had heard the story. "Give me your swiftest horse that can

ride through fire and flame, and the sword which swings itself when giants are opposed, and I will go to Jotunheim."

Frey was too glad to get the desire of his heart to delay about giving up the horse and the sword, and Skirner was soon mounted and riding like the wind on his dreary journey. Night came on, the black shadows of the mountains lay across the fjords as he passed, and one by one the endless procession of the stars moved along the summits of the hills as if they would bear him company. All night the hard hoofs rang on the stony way, scattering showers of sparks at every step. Faster and faster the daring rider drove the faithful horse until his flight was like the flash and roar of the thunderbolt.

"Rush on, brave horse," shouted Skirner; "we shall return with the prize or the mighty giant will keep us both."

At last the long journey was over and the gloomy house reached. It was the home of the frost-giant Gymer, and the beautiful maiden who stood at the door when Frey was on Odin's throne was Gerd, the giant's daughter. Fierce dogs were chained about the gate and rushed savagely upon Skirner, barking furiously as if they would tear him limb from limb. So he turned aside and rode up to a shepherd sitting on a mound near by.

"Shepherd, how shall I quiet these dogs and speak with Gymer's daughter?" he asked.

The shepherd looked at him with wonder in his eyes.

"Who are you," he answered, "and whence do you come? Are you doomed to die, or are you a ghost already? Whoever you are, you will never get speech with Gymer's daughter."

"I am not afraid," said Skirner proudly; "fate has already fixed the day of my death, and it cannot be changed."

Skirner's voice rang clear and strong above the howling of the dogs, and Gerd in her chamber heard the brave words.

"What noise is that?" she called to her maidens. "The very earth shakes and the foundations tremble."

One of the maidens looked out and saw Skirner.

"A warrior stands without the wall," she answered; "and while he waits, his horse eats the grass before the gates."

"Bid him enter at once and quaff the pleasant mead, for I fear the slayer of my brother has come."

Skirner needed no second invitation, and, quickly springing to the ground, walked through the stony halls and stood before the beautiful Gerd. She looked keenly at him for a moment and knew, from his brightness and beauty that he was from Asgard.

"Are you god, or elf?" she asked; "and why have you come through night and flame to visit Gymer's halls?"

"I am neither elf nor god," said Skirner; "and yet I have come to your home through night and flame. Frey, beautiful among the gods and loved of all the earth, has seen your beauty and can never be happy again until he has won you for himself. I bring you eleven beautiful apples if you will go back with me."

"I will not go," was Gerd's quick answer.

"This wonderful ring, which every ninth night drops eight other rings as rich as itself, shall be yours," said Skirner, holding Draupnerin his hand and gently urging her.

Gerd frowned angrily. "I will not take your wondrous ring. I have gold enough in my father's house."

"Then," said Skirner, casting aside his gentleness, "look at this flashing sword! If you will not return I will strike your fair head from your body."

Gerd drew herself up to her full height and answered, with flashing eyes, "I will never be won by force. As for your threats, my father will meet you sword for sword."

"I will quickly slay him," said Skirner angrily. But Gerd only smiled scornfully; she was too cold to be won by gifts and too proud to be moved by threats.

Skirner's face suddenly changed. He drew out a magic wand, and with eyes fixed upon her and in a solemn voice, as he waved it over her, he chanted an awful mystic curse. There

was breathless silence in the room while Skirner with slow movements of the wand wove about Gerd dread enchantments and breathed over her the direful incantation:

"If you refuse, may you sit in everlasting darkness on some dreary mountain top; may terrors crowd round you in awful shapes and tears never cease to fall from your eyes; hated of gods and men, may you pass your life in solitude and desolation!

> "'Tis done! I wind the mystic charm;
> Thus, thus I trace the giant form;
> And three fell characters below,
> Fury, and Lust, and Restless Woe.
> E'en as I wound, I straight unwind
> This fatal spell, if you are kind."[1]

Skirner stopped, and an awful stillness followed. Gerd, trembling under the terrible curse, stood quivering with bowed head and clasped hands. Her pride could not yield, but something told her that to live with a god was better than to stay in the home of a frost-giant. A gentle warmth seemed to steal through and melt her icy coldness. She raised her face, and it was so softened that they hardly knew her.

"I greet you," she said, "with this brimming cup of mead, but I did not think that I should ever love a god."

When Skirner pressed her to go back with him, she promised to meet Frey nine days hence and become his bride in the groves of Bar-isle.

Skirner was soon mounted and riding homeward as fast as his horse could carry him. He was so happy in the thought of Frey's happiness that the distance seemed short, and as he drew near he saw Frey standing before his father's halls, looking anxiously for his coming.

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1 Andersen's Norse Mythology.

"She is yours!" he shouted, urging his horse into swifter flight.

"When?" said Frey eagerly.

"Nine days hence, in the groves of Bar-isle," joyfully replied Skirner, who expected to be loaded with thanks. Frey, however, was so eager that he forgot what night and flame his friend had ridden through for love of him.

"One day is long; long, indeed, are two. How shall I wait for three?" was all the thanks Skirner got.

The days that followed were long enough for Frey; but even the longest day comes to an end, and at last the ninth day came. Never sun shone so brightly or south wind blew so musically as on the morning when at Bar-isle, under the branches of the great trees, Frey found the beautiful Gerd waiting for his coming, far lovelier than when she stood before her father's door. And the whole earth was happy in them, for while they stood with clasped hands the skies grew soft, the trees put on a tender green, the flowers blossomed along the mountain side, the ripening grain swayed in the fields, and summer lay warm and fragrant over the land.

CHAPTER VI
The Making of the Hammer

One day as Sif, Thor's beautiful wife, was sitting in the palace Bilskirner in Thrudvang, or thunder-world, she fell asleep, with her long hair falling about her shoulders like a shower of gold. She made a very pretty picture as she sat there in the sunlight; at least Loke thought so as he passed by and saw her motionless, like the statue of a goddess in a great temple, instead of a living goddess in her own palace. Loke never saw anything beautiful without the wish that somehow he might spoil it; and when he noticed that Sif was asleep he thought it was a good time to carry off her golden hair, and so rob her of that of which Thor was most proud. As noiselessly as he could, and more like a thief than a god, he stole into the palace, cut off the golden locks and carried them away, without leaving one behind as a trace of his evil deed. When Sif awoke and found her beautiful hair gone, she went and hid herself, lest Thor coming home should miss the beauty which had always been like light to his eyes.

And presently Thor came; but no Sif was there to meet him, making him forget with one proud look from her tender eyes the dangers and labours of his life. She had never failed to greet him at the threshold before; and the strong god's heart, which had never beat a second quicker at sight of the greatest giant in the world, grew faint with fear that in his absence some mishap had befallen her. He ran quickly from room to room in the palace, and at last he came upon Sif, hidden behind a pillar, her shorn head in her hands, weeping bitterly. In a few broken words she told Thor what had happened, and as she went on, Thor's wrath grew hotter and hotter until he was terrible to behold. Lightnings flashed out

of his deep-set eyes, the palace trembled under his angry strides, and it seemed as if his fury would burst forth like some awful tempest uprooting and destroying everything in its path.

"I know who did it," he shouted, when Sif had ended her story. "It was that rascally Loke, and I'll break every bone in his thievish body;" and without as much as saying good-by to his sobbing wife, he strode off like a thunder-cloud to Asgard, and there, coming suddenly upon Loke, he seized him by the neck and would have killed him on the spot had not Loke confessed his deed and promised to restore the golden hair.

"I'll get the swarthy elves to make a crown of golden hair for Sif more beautiful than she used to wear," gasped Loke, in the iron grasp of the angry Thor; and Thor, who cared more for Sif's beauty than for Loke's punishment, let the thief go, having bound him by solemn pledges to fulfil his promise without delay.

Loke lost no time, but went far underground to the gloomy smithy of the dwarfs, who were called Ivald's sons, and who were wonderful workers in gold and brass.

"Make me a crown of golden hair," said Loke, "that will grow like any other hair, and I will give you whatever you want for your work."

The bargain was quickly made, and the busy little dwarfs were soon at their task, and in a little time they had done all that Loke asked, and more too; for in addition to the shining hair they gave Loke the spear Gungner and the famous ship Skidbladner.

With these treasures in his arms Loke came into Asgard and began boasting of the wonderful things he had brought from the smithy of Ivald's sons.

"Nobody like the sons of Ivald to work in metal!" he said. "The other dwarfs are all stupid little knaves compared with them."

Now it happened that the dwarf Brok was standing by and heard Loke's boasting; his brother Sindre was so cunning a

workman that most of the dwarfs thought him by far the best in the world. It made Brok angry, therefore, to hear the sons of Ivald called the best workmen, and he spoke up and said, "My brother Sindre can make more wonderful things of gold and iron and brass than ever the sons of Ivald thought of."

"Your brother Sindre," repeated Loke scornfully. "Who is your brother Sindre?"

"The best workman in the world," answered Brok.

Loke laughed loud and long. "Go to your wonderful brother Sindre," said he, "and tell him if he can make three such precious things as the spear, the ship, and the golden hair, he shall have my head for his trouble." And Loke laughed longer and louder than before.

Brok was off to the underworld before the laugh died out of his ears, determined to have Loke's head if magic and hard work could do it. He went straight to Sindre and told him of the wager he had laid with Loke, and in a little while Sindre was hard at work in his smithy. It was a queer place for such wonderful work as was done in it, for it was nothing but a great cavern underground, with tools piled up in little heaps around its sides, and thick darkness everywhere when the furnace fire was not sending its glow out into the blackness. If you had looked in now, you would have seen a broad glare of light streaming out from the furnace, for Brok was blowing the bellows with all his might, and the coals were fairly blazing with heat. When all was ready Sindre took a swine-skin, put it into the furnace, and telling Brok to blow the bellows until his return, went out of the smithy. Brok kept steadily at work, although a gad-fly flew in, buzzed noisily about, and, finally settling on his hand, stung him so that he could hardly bear it. After a while Sindre came back and took out of the furnace a wonderful boar with bristles of pure gold.

Then Sindre took some gold, and placing it in the furnace bade Brok blow as if his life depended on it, and went out a second time. Brok had no sooner begun blowing than the

troublesome gad-fly came back, and fastening upon his neck stung him so fiercely that he could hardly keep his hands away from his neck; but Brok was a faithful dwarf, who meant to do his work thoroughly if he died for it, and so he blew away as if it were the easiest thing in the world, until Sindre came back and took a shining ring from the fire. The third time Sindre put iron into the fire, and bidding Brok blow without ceasing, went out again. No sooner had he gone than the gad-fly flew in, and settling between Brok's eyes stung him so sharply that drops of blood ran down into his eyes, and he could not see what he was doing. He blew away as bravely as he could for some time, but the pain was so keen, and he was so blind, that at last he raised his hand quickly to brush the fly away. That very instant Sindre returned.

"You have almost spoiled it," he said, as he took out of the glowing furnace the wonderful hammer Mjolner. "See how short you have made the handle! But you can't lengthen it now. So carry the gifts to Asgard, and bring me Loke's head."

Brok started off with the golden boar, the shining ring, and the terrible hammer.

When he came through the great gate of Asgard the gods were very anxious to see the end of this strange contest, and taking their seats on their shining thrones they appointed Odin, Thor, and Frey to judge between Loke and Brok, as to which had the most wonderful things. Then Loke brought out the spear Gungner, which never misses its mark, and gave it to Odin; and the golden hair he gave to Thor, who placed it on Sif's head, and straightway it began to grow like any other hair, and Sif was as beautiful as on the day when Loke saw her in Thor's palace, and robbed her of her tresses; and to Frey he gave the marvellous ship Skidbladner, which always found a breeze to drive it wherever its master would go, no matter how the sea was running, nor from what quarter the wind was blowing, and which could be folded up and carried in one's pocket. Then Loke laughed scornfully.

"Bring out the trinkets which that wonderful brother of yours has made," he said.

Brok came forward, and stood before the wondering gods with his treasures.

"This ring," said he, handing it to Odin, "will cast off, every ninth night, eight other rings as pure and heavy as itself. This boar," giving it to Frey, "will run more swiftly in the air, and on the sea, by night or by day, than the swiftest horse, and no night will be so dark, no world so gloomy, that the shining of these bristles shall not make it light as noonday. And this hammer," placing Mjolner in Thor's strong hands, "shall never fail, no matter how big nor how hard that which it smites may be; no matter how far it is thrown, it will always return to your hand; you may make it so small that it can be hidden in your bosom, and its only fault is the shortness of its handle."

Thor swung it round his head, and lightning flashed and flamed through Asgard, deep peals of thunder rolled through the sky, and mighty masses of cloud piled quickly up about him. The gods gathered around, and passed the hammer from one to the other, saying that it would be their greatest protection against their enemies, the frost-giants, who were always trying to force their way into Asgard, and they declared that Brok had won the wager. Brok's swarthy little face was as bright as his brother's furnace fire, so delighted was he to have beaten the boastful Loke. But how was he to get his wager, now he had won it? It was no easy matter to take the head off a god's shoulders. Brok thought a moment. "I will take Loke's head," he said finally, thinking some of the other gods might help him.

"I will give you whatever you want in place of my head," growled Loke, angry that he was beaten, and having no idea of paying his wager by losing his head.

"I will have your head or I will have nothing," answered the plucky little dwarf, determined not to be cheated out of

his victory.

"Well, then, take it," shouted Loke; but by the time Brok reached the place where he had been standing, Loke was far away, for he wore shoes with which he could run through the air or over the water. Then Brok asked Thor to find Loke and bring him back, which Thor did promptly, for the gods always saw to it that people kept their promises. When Loke was brought back Brok wanted to cut his head off at once.

"You may cut off my head, but you have no right to touch my neck," said Loke, who was cunning, as well as wicked. That was true, and of course the head could not be taken off without touching the neck, so Brok had to give it up.

But he determined to do something to make Loke feel that he had won his wager, so he took an awl and a thong and sewed his lips together so tightly that he could make no more boastings.

CHAPTER VII
Odin in Geirrod's Palace

It was as lovely a morning as ever dawned when Geirrod and Agnar, sons of old King Hraudung, pushed their boat out from the rocky shore for a day's fishing. The sky overhead was as blue as Odin's wonderful mantle; and the sea beneath them as blue as the sky. They could see the mountain tops far off behind them and every rock along the beach for miles and miles away. It was happiness just to be out of doors in such weather, and as the rowers bent to their work there was such strength and joy in them that the boat skimmed over the water like a living thing. When they were fairly out where the wind blew freshly and the waves danced merrily, they let their lines into the sea and began to lay wagers on the luck. Geirrod, who was selfish and pushing, generally got the best of things, and was very certain that he would carry home more fish than Agnar. But before they had talked much about it they were too busy to talk at all. Such luck befell them as they had never had before. No sooner did the line touch the water than it was travelling off in the mouth of some hungry fish who was quickly landed in the bottom of the boat. All the morning the boys were so busy that they did not once look at the sky, and when the sun began to sink a little toward the west they took no thought of the dark clouds scudding along overhead nor of the rising wind whistling over the white caps. And while they let down and drew up their lines the sky grew darker and darker, until not a spot of blue was to be seen anywhere, and the wind rose higher and higher, driving the sea in spray before it. When at last the storm broke on Geirrod and Agnar it was too late to reach the shore. The waves ran so high that the boat was almost swamped in the trough of

the sea, and the next minute the angry waters had snatched both oars out of the hands of the rowers and flung them far off to leeward. There was nothing to do but to sit still and be carried on by wave and wind. The boys were good Norsemen, and though they were drenched to the skin, and blinded by spray, they were cool and brave. The roar of the sea and the tempest was sweeter music in their ears than the melody of harp-strings in their father's palace. Holding on as best they could they watched the rushing clouds until darkness fell on the sea and they were alone with the tempest. They could not speak to each other, for the uproar of the wind and the waves drowned all other sounds; they could do nothing; they could only wait; and as they waited the night wore on. Suddenly there came a sound they both knew, and which made even their bold hearts beat a little faster, the sound of the breakers. They strained their eyes, peering anxiously into the darkness, but not a thing could they see. They were driven on faster and faster, until a mighty wave lifted the boat a moment in mid-air and then flung it broken and shattered on to the rocks. How Geirrod and Agnar got ashore they could never tell. They remembered nothing but an awful crash, a blinding rush of waters, and then, coming slowly back to life they found themselves bruised and bleeding on the shore of an island far off the coast they had sailed from. When morning broke at last, clear and cold, as if the earth had been made over instead of torn to pieces in the night, they made their way slowly and painfully back from the shore. They had gone but a little way when they were overjoyed to see a thin column of smoke rising into the clear air, and a moment after they were at the door of a little farm-house. The farmer was very poor, for the island was small and rocky, but he had a striking form, and a face more noble than any the boys had ever seen at their father's court.

"We have been wrecked upon this island," said Geirrod, who was always the first to speak. "Can you give us food?"

The farmer looked at them thoughtfully, as if he saw a great deal in their faces that was interesting.

"Certainly we can," said he, in a deep, musical voice. "No man ever went hungry from Grimner's door. Here, wife," turning back to the open door, "set what you have before these young sailors."

Geirrod and Agnar had sat at kings' tables all their lives, but they had never eaten at such a feast as the farmer's good wife spread for them on the plain table. Like her husband, she was very large of form and beautiful of feature, and she looked as if she might be the mother of half of the world, as indeed she was, and of the other half too. Breakfast over, the boys told the story of their parentage, their fishing, the storm and the wreck, the farmer glancing at his wife, from time to time, as if it greatly pleased him.

"Boys," said he when the story was told, "the season changed with the storm which brought you here. Winter has set in, and you must stay under our roof until spring. The house is not very large, but it will keep us all, I trust."

The good wife nodded approval, and the boys themselves were not sorry to stay, so great a fancy had they already taken to the pair. What a winter that was! The days were so short that they could hardly be called days at all. The cold was bitter, the winds roared about the little island, and the sea rushed upon it as if it meant to sweep the little piece of earth out of sight forever; but the boys cared for none of these things. Agnar spent all his time with the farmer's wife, and learned to love her as if she were his mother; but Geirrod never left Grimner's side for an hour if he could help it. Never was there such a farmer before. He seemed to know everything, and he was willing to tell the boy all he knew himself. He told him stories of the strong and valiant Norsemen who had made perilous voyages and performed mighty deeds of valour; he described the wonders of the heavens and the secrets of the sea and the mysteries of earth; he even once or

twice spoke of the gods themselves, and of Asgard, where they dwelt a glorious company of strong spirits; and when he spoke of these things his eyes flashed and his form grew so large that he seemed to Geirrod no longer the island farmer, but a god in human guise. He spoke of courage too, and of honour, truthfulness and hospitality, until the boy's selfish heart grew generous for a little while, and he wanted to do some noble thing himself.

In such talks as these, and with short wanderings about the storm-beaten shores of the island, the winter passed quickly away, and before the boys were ready to go the sky had grown soft and the water calm again. Grimner built a new boat for them, and one morning, when all was ready, they pushed out, with many farewells, from the home that had sheltered them so many months, and rowed swiftly homeward. Grimner's last earnest word to Geirrod was, "Be true and noble." But Geirrod was too selfish to carry away the great thoughts which the farmer had given him; the burning words, the stories of great deeds he had listened to had made him ambitious to be strong, but not to be good. No sooner were the boys afloat than evil thoughts took possession of him and held him until the boat touched shore on the mainland, and then they mastered him entirely, so that he sprang out on to the land and gave the boat a mighty lurch back into the sea, shouting to Agnar, "Go away and may the evil spirits seize you!" Then, without looking back, he hastened to the palace, where he was at once greeted as King, for his father was dead. Agnar, after many adventures, landed in a far-off part of the country, and ended by marrying a giantess.

Years passed away, and Geirrod had almost forgotten the evil he had done his brother; but the Fates never let the sins of men go unpunished. It happened one day that as Odin, the father of the gods and of men, and his wife Frigg were sitting upon their throne overlooking the whole earth, they spoke of the boys who had been with them on the island; for the farmer

Grimner and his wife were none other than the greatest of the gods.

"Look at Agnar," said Odin, "whom you brought up, wasting his time with a giantess, while my foster son Geirrod rules his kingdom right royally."

Now although Frigg was a goddess, she had some weaknesses like the rest of us, and she was annoyed that her teaching had done so little for Agnar, and that Odin should notice it too, so she answered, "It's all very well to talk about Geirrod's reigning right royally, but he is no true King, for he puts his guests to torture."

Odin was indignant that such a charge should be brought against his favourite, and after much dispute the two laid a wager, and Odin said he would visit Geirrod in disguise and settle the matter himself.

Now Geirrod was not really inhospitable, but Frigg sent word to him to keep a sharp look-out for a dangerous wizard who was coming his way; and so it happened that one morning when a very old man, in a long robe of grey fur, stopped at the door and asked shelter, the King had him brought into the great council chamber, and began to question him. He asked him who he was, from what country he came, and what was the end of his journey, but not a word would the old man answer. Whereupon Geirrod, getting very angry and not a little frightened, had two fires built on the stone floor, and bound the stranger between them. Eight days the old man sat there in the awful heat, silent and motionless. No one gave him a thought of pity or a word of comfort save little Agnar, Geirrod's son, who brought him a cooling drink, and told him how cruel he thought his father was. On the last day the fires had crept so near that the fur coat began to burn, and then suddenly the old man found his voice, and what a voice it was! It filled the council chamber like the tones of some great organ, so sweet and deep and wonderful it was. Bound between the blazing flames that joined their fiery tongues above

his head and beat fiercely against the vaulted roof, the old man broke into such a song as had never been heard on earth before. He sang the birth of gods, the glories of Asgard, the secrets of fate, such things as only Odin himself could know; and as the song deepened in its tone, and the awful secrets of the other world were revealed, Geirrod's throne trembled beneath him, for in the tortured stranger he saw now the mighty Odin himself. He started up to break the bonds and scatter the flaming brands, dropped his sword, caught it by a swift thrust, slipped suddenly, fell on the glittering blade, and rolled dead at Odin's feet. His sin was punished. Odin vanished, and little Agnar was King.

CHAPTER VIII
The Apples of Idun

Once upon a time Odin, Loke, and Hosier started on a journey. They had often travelled together before on all sorts of errands, for they had a great many things to look after, and more than once they had fallen into trouble through the prying, meddlesome, malicious spirit of Loke, who was never so happy as when he was doing wrong. When the gods went on a journey they travelled fast and hard, for they were strong, active spirits who loved nothing so much as hard work, hard blows, storm, peril, and struggle. There were no roads through the country over which they made their way, only high mountains to be climbed by rocky paths, deep valleys into which the sun hardly looked during half the year, and swift-rushing streams, cold as ice, and treacherous to the surest foot and the strongest arm. Not a bird flew through the air, not an animal sprang through the trees. It was as still as a desert. The gods walked on and on, getting more tired and hungry at every step. The sun was sinking low over the steep, pine-crested mountains, and the travellers had neither breakfasted nor dined. Even Odin was beginning to feel the pangs of hunger, like the most ordinary mortal, when suddenly, entering a little valley, the famished gods came upon a herd of cattle. It was the work of a minute to kill a great ox and to have the carcass swinging in a huge pot over a roaring fire.

But never were gods so unlucky before! In spite of their hunger the pot would not boil. They piled on the wood until the great flames crackled and licked the pot with their fiery tongues, but every time the cover was lifted there was the meat just as raw as when it was put in. It is easy to imagine that the travellers were not in very good humor. As they were

talking about it, and wondering how it could be, a voice called out from the branches of the oak overhead, "If you will give me my fill I'll make the pot boil." The gods looked first at each other and then into the tree, and there they discovered a great eagle. They were glad enough to get their supper on almost any terms, so they told the eagle he might have what he wanted if he would only get the meat cooked. The bird was as good as his word, and in less time than it takes to tell it supper was ready. Then the eagle flew down and picked out both shoulders and both legs. This was a pretty large share, it must be confessed, and Loke, who was always angry when anybody got more than he, no sooner saw what the eagle had taken than he seized a great pole and began to beat the rapacious bird unmercifully. Whereupon a very singular thing happened, as singular things always used to happen when the gods were concerned: the pole stuck fast in the huge talons of the eagle at one end, and Loke stuck fast at the other end. Struggle as he might, he could not get loose, and as the great bird sailed away over the tops of the trees, Loke went pounding along on the ground, striking against rocks and branches until he was bruised half to death.

The eagle was not an ordinary bird by any means, as Loke soon found when he begged for mercy. The giant Thjasse happened to be flying abroad in his eagle plumage when the hungry travellers came under the oak and tried to cook the ox. It was into his hands that Loke had fallen, and he was not to get away until he had promised to pay roundly for his freedom.

If there was one thing which the gods prized above their other treasures in Asgard, it was the beautiful fruit of Idun, kept by the goddess in a golden casket and given to the gods to keep them forever young and fair. Without these Apples all their power could not have kept them from getting old like the meanest of mortals. Without these Apples of Idun Asgard itself would have lost its charm; for what would heaven be

without youth and beauty forever shining through it?

Thjasse told Loke that he could not go unless he would promise to bring him the Apples of Idun. Loke was wicked enough for anything; but when it came to robbing the gods of their immortality, even he hesitated. And while he hesitated the eagle dashed hither and thither, flinging him against the sides of the mountains and dragging him through the great tough boughs of the oaks until his courage gave out entirely, and he promised to steal the Apples out of Asgard and give them to the giant.

Loke was bruised and sore enough when he got on his feet again to hate the giant who handled him so roughly, with all his heart, but he was not unwilling to keep his promise to steal the Apples, if only for the sake of tormenting the other gods. But how was it to be done? Idun guarded the golden fruit of immortality with sleepless watchfulness. No one ever touched it but herself, and a beautiful sight it was to see her fair hands spread it forth for the morning feasts in Asgard. The power which Loke possessed lay not so much in his own strength, although he had a smooth way of deceiving people, as in the goodness of others who had no thought of his doing wrong because they never did wrong themselves.

Not long after all this happened, Loke came carelessly up to Idun as she was gathering her Apples to put them away in the beautiful carven box which held them.

"Good morning, goddess," said he. "How fair and golden your Apples are!"

"Yes," answered Idun; "the bloom of youth keeps them always beautiful."

"I never saw anything like them," continued Loke slowly, as if he were talking about a matter of no importance, "until the other day."

Idun looked up at once with the greatest interest and curiosity in her face. She was very proud of her Apples, and she knew no earthly trees, however large and fair, bore the

immortal fruit.

"Where have you seen any Apples like them?" she asked.

"Oh, just outside the gates," said Loke indifferently. "If you care to see them I'll take you there. It will keep you but a moment. The tree is only a little way off."

Idun was anxious to go at once.

"Better take your Apples with you to compare them with the others," said the wily god, as she prepared to go.

Idun gathered up the golden Apples and went out of Asgard, carrying with her all that made it heaven. No sooner was she beyond the gates than a mighty rushing sound was heard, like the coming of a tempest, and before she could think or act, the giant Thjasse, in his eagle plumage, was bearing her swiftly away through the air to his desolate, icy home in Thrymheim, where, after vainly trying to persuade her to let him eat the Apples and be forever young like the gods, he kept her a lonely prisoner.

Loke, after keeping his promise and delivering Idun into the hands of the giant, strayed back into Asgard as if nothing had happened. The next morning, when the gods assembled for their feast, there was no Idun. Day after day went past, and still the beautiful goddess did not come. Little by little the light of youth and beauty faded from the home of the gods, and they themselves became old and haggard. Their strong, young faces were lined with care and furrowed by age, their raven locks passed from gray to white, and their flashing eyes became dim and hollow. Brage, the god of poetry, could make no music while his beautiful wife was gone he knew not whither.

Morning after morning the faded light broke on paler and ever paler faces, until even in heaven the eternal light of youth seemed to be going out forever.

Finally the gods could bear the loss of power and joy no longer. They made rigorous inquiry. They tracked Loke on that fair morning when he led Idun beyond the gates; they

seized him and brought him into solemn council, and when he read in their haggard faces the deadly hate which flamed in all their hearts against his treachery, his courage failed, and he promised to bring Idun back to Asgard if the goddess Freyja would lend him her falcon-guise. No sooner said than done; and with eager gaze the gods watched him as he flew away, becoming at last only a dark moving speck against the sky.

After long and weary flight Loke came to Thrymheim, and was glad enough to find Thjasse gone to sea and Idun alone in his dreary house. He changed her instantly into a nut, and taking her thus disguised in his talons, flew away as fast as his falcon wings could carry him. And he had need of all his speed, for Thjasse, coming suddenly home and finding Idun and her precious fruit gone, guessed what had happened, and, putting on his eagle plumage, flew forth in a mighty rage, with vengeance in his heart. Like the rushing wings of a tempest, his mighty pinions beat the air and bore him swiftly onward. From mountain peak to mountain peak he measured his wide course, almost grazing at times the murmuring pine forests, and then sweeping high in mid-air with nothing above but the arching sky, and nothing beneath but the tossing sea.

At last he sees the falcon far ahead, and now his flight becomes like the flash of the lightning for swiftness, and like the rushing of clouds for uproar. The haggard faces of the gods line the walls of Asgard and watch the race with tremulous eagerness. Youth and immortality are staked upon the winning of Loke. He is weary enough and frightened enough too, as the eagle sweeps on close behind him; but he makes desperate efforts to widen the distance between them. Little by little the eagle gains on the falcon. The gods grow white with fear; they rush off and prepare great fires upon the walls. With fainting, drooping wing the falcon passes over and drops exhausted by the wall. In an instant the fires have been lighted, and the great flames roar to heaven. The eagle sweeps across

the fiery line a second later, and falls, maimed and burned, to the ground, where a dozen fierce hands smite the life out of him, and the great giant Thjasse perishes among his foes.

Idun resumes her natural form as Brage rushes to meet her. The gods crowd round her. She spreads the feast, the golden Apples gleaming with unspeakable lustre in the eyes of the gods. They eat; and once more their faces glow with the beauty of immortal youth, their eyes flash with the radiance of divine power, and, while Idun stands like a star for beauty among the throng, the song of Brage is heard once more; for poetry and immortality are wedded again.

CHAPTER IX
Thor Goes a Fishing

Midway between Niflheim and Muspelheim lay Midgard, the home of men, its round disk everywhere encircled by the ocean, which perpetually rushed upon it, gently in still summer afternoons, but with a terrible uproar in winter. Ages ago, when the Midgard-serpent had grown so vast that even the gods were afraid of him, Odin cast him into the sea, and he lay flat at the bottom of the ocean, grown to such monstrous size that his scaly length encircled the whole world. Holding the end of his tail in his mouth, he sometimes lay motionless for weeks at a time, and looking across the water no one would have dreamed that such a monster was asleep in its depths. But when the Midgard serpent was aroused his wrath was terrible to behold. He lashed the ocean into great sheets of foam, he piled the waves mountain high, he dashed the spray into the very heavens, and woe to the galleys that were sailing homeward.

It happened once that the gods were feasting with Æger, the sea-god, and the ale gave out, and Æger had no kettle in which to brew a new supply.

"Thor," said Æger, after he had thought a moment, "will you get me a kettle?"

Thor was always ready for any hard or dangerous thing.

"Of course I will," was his quick reply, "only tell me where to get one."

That, however, was no easy thing to do. Kettles big enough to brew ale for Asgard were not to be picked up at a moment's notice. Everybody wanted more ale, but nobody could tell Thor where to find a kettle, until Tyn the god of courage, spoke up: "East of the rivers Elivagar lives my father,

Hymer, who has a kettle marvellously strong and one mile deep."

This was large enough even for the gods.

"Do you think we can get it?" asked Thor, who always wanted to succeed in his undertakings.

"If we cannot get it by force we can by stratagem," answered Tyr, and they started off at once, Thor taking the disguise of a young man.

The goats drew them swiftly to Egil, with whom Thor left them while he and Tyr pushed on to finish the journey afoot. It was rough and perilous travelling, but they reached Hymer's hall without accident, and there Tyr found his grandmother, a frightfully ugly giantess, and his mother, a wonderfully beautiful woman, with fair hair, and a face so radiant that the sun seemed to be always shining upon it. The latter advised them to hide under the great kettles in the hall, because when Hymer came home in bad temper he was sometimes cruel to strangers. Late in the evening Hymer came home from his fishing. A cold wind swept through the hall as he entered, his eyes were piercing as the stars on a winter's night, and his beard was white with frost.

"I welcome you home," said Tyr's beautiful mother; "our son, for whom we have been looking so long, has come home, bringing with him the enemy of giants and the protector of Asgard. See how they hide themselves behind that pillar yonder."

She pointed to a pillar at the farther end of the hall. Hymer turned and looked at it with his piercing, icy glance, and in an instant it snapped into a thousand pieces; the beam overhead broke, and eight kettles fell with a crash on the stone floor. Only one out of the eight remained unbroken, and from it Thor and Tyr came forth. Hymer was not glad to see Thor standing there under his own roof, but he could not turn him out, so he made the best of it and ordered three oxen to be served for supper. Thor had travelled a long distance

and was very hungry, and ate two of the oxen before he was satisfied.

"If you eat like that," said Hymer, "we will have to live on fish tomorrow."

Early the next morning, before the sun was up, Thor heard Hymer getting ready for a day of fishing. He dressed himself quickly and went out to the giant. "Good morning, Hymer," he said pleasantly. "I am fond of fishing; let me row out to sea with you."

"Oho," answered the giant scornfully, not at all pleased with the idea of having his powerful enemy in the boat with him, "such a puny young fellow can be of no use to me, and if I go as far out to sea as I generally do, and stay as long, you will catch a cold that will be the death of you."

Thor was so angry at this insult that he wanted to let his hammer ring on the giant's head, but he wisely kept his temper.

"I will row as far from the land as you care to go," was his answer, "and it is by no means certain that I shall be the first to want to put in again. What do you bait with?"

"Find a bait for yourself," was the giant's surly reply.

Thor ran up to a herd of Hymer's cattle, seized the largest bull, wrung off its head without any trouble, and put it in the boat. Then they both pushed off and were soon rowing seaward. Thor rowed aft, and the boat fairly shot through the water. Hymer could pull a strong oar, but he had never seen such a stroke as Thor's before. The boat fairly trembled under the force of it. In a few moments they reached Hymer's fishing-ground, and he called out to Thor to stop.

"Oh, no, not yet," said Thor, bending steadily over his oars; "we must go a good distance beyond this."

Thor pulled with such tremendous power that they were soon far out to sea, and Hymer began to be frightened.

"If you don't stop," he called out, "we shall be over the Midgard-serpent."

Thor paid no attention, but rowed on until they were far out of sight of land and about where he thought the great snake was coiled in the bottom of the sea; then he laid down the oars as fresh and strong apparently as when he got into the boat. It was the strangest fishing party the world ever saw, and the most wonderful fishing. No sooner had Hymer's bait touched water than it was seized by two whales. Thor smiled quietly at the giant's luck, took out a fishing-line, made with wonderful skill, and so strong that it could not be broken, fastened the bull's head upon the hook and cast it into the sea. The Midgard-serpent instantly seized it, and in a second the hook was fast in its palate. Then came a furious struggle between the strong god and the terrible monster which was the dread of the whole earth.

Stung by the pain, the serpent writhed and pulled so hard that Thor had to brace himself against the side of the boat. When he found that the snake had taken his hook his wrath rose, and his divine strength came upon him. He pulled the line with such tremendous force that his feet went straight through the bottom of the boat, and he stood on the bed of the ocean while he drew the snake up to the side of the boat. The monster, convulsed with pain, reared its terrible head out of the water, its glittering eyes flashing, its whole vast body writhing and churning the ocean into a whirlpool of eddying foam. Thor's eyes blazed with wrath, and he held the serpent in a grasp like a vise. The uproar was like a terrible storm, and the boat, the fishers, and the snake were hidden by columns of foam that rose in the air. No one can tell what the end would have been if Hymer, trembling with fright and seeing the boat about to sink, had not sprung forward and cut the line just as Thor was raising his hammer to crush the serpent's head. The snake sank at once to the bottom of the sea, and Thor, turning upon the giant, struck him such a blow under the ear that he fell headlong into the water. The giant got back to the boat, however and they rowed to land, taking the

two whales with them.

When they reached shore Thor was still filled with rage at the meddlesome giant, because he had lost him the serpent, but he quietly picked up the boat and carried it home, Hymer taking the whales. Once more under his own roof, the giant's courage returned, and he challenged Thor to show his strength by breaking his drinking-cup. Thor sat down and, taking the cup, hurled it against a pillar. It flew through the air, crashed against the stone, bounded back, and was picked up as whole and perfect as when it came into Thor's hands. He was puzzled, but Tyr's beautiful fair-haired mother whispered to him, "Throw it at Hymer's forehead; it is harder than any drinking-cup."

Thor drew in all his godlike strength and dashed the cup with a terrific effort at Hymer. The forehead was unharmed, but the cup was scattered in a thousand pieces over the floor. Hymer had lost a great treasure by the experiment, but he only said, "That drink was too hot. Perhaps you will take the kettle off now," he added with a sneer.

Tyr immediately laid hands on the kettle, but he could not move it an inch. Then Thor took the great pot in his hands and drew it up with such a mighty effort that his feet went through the stone floor of the hall, but he lifted it and, placing it on his head like a mighty helmet, walked off, the rings of the kettle clanging about his feet. The two gods walked swiftly away from the hall where so many troubles and labours had awaited them, and it was a long time before Thor turned to look back. When he did, it was not a moment too soon, for Hymer was close behind, with a multitude of many-headed giants, in hot pursuit.

In one minute Thor had lifted the kettle off his head and put it on the ground, in another he was swinging the hammer among the giants, and in another, when the lightnings had gone out and the thunder had died in awful echoes among the hills, Tyr and Thor were alone on the field.

They went on to Egil, mounted the chariot and drove the goats swiftly on to Niger's, where the gods were impatiently waiting for the kettle. There was straightway a mighty brewing of ale, Thor told the story of his adventures in search of the kettle, and the feast went merrily on.

CHAPTER X
How Thor Found His Hammer

The frost-giants were always trying to get into Asgard. For more than half the year they held the world in their grasp, locking up the streams in their rocky beds, hushing their music and the music of the birds as well, and leaving nothing but a wild waste of desolation under the cold sky. They hated the warm sunshine which stirred the wild flowers out of their sleep, and clothed the steep mountains with verdure, and set all the birds a-singing in the swaying tree-tops. They hated the beautiful god Balder, with whose presence summer came back to the ice-bound earth, and, above all, they hated Thor, whose flashing hammer drove them back into Jotunheim, and guarded the summer sky with its sudden gleamings of power. So long as Thor had his hammer Asgard was safe against the giants.

One morning Thor started up out of a long, deep sleep, and put out his hand for the hammer; but no hammer was there. Not a sign of it could be found anywhere, although Thor anxiously searched for it. Then a thought of the giants came suddenly in his mind; and his anger rose till his eyes flashed like great fires, and his red beard trembled with wrath.

"Look, now, Loke," he shouted, "they have stolen Mjolner by enchantment, and no one on earth or in heaven knows where they have hidden it."

"We will get Freyja's falcon-guise and search for it," answered Loke, who was always quick to get into trouble or to get out of it again. So they went quickly to Folkvang and found Freyja surrounded by her maidens and weeping tears of pure gold, as she had always done since her husband went on his long journey.

"The hammer has been stolen by enchantment," said Thor. "Will you lend me the falcon-guise that I may search for it?"

"If it were silver, or even gold, you should have it and welcome," answered Freyja, glad to help Thor find the wonderful hammer that kept them all safe from the hands of the frost-giants.

So the falcon-guise was brought, and Loke put it on and flew swiftly out of Asgard to the home of the giants. His great wings made broad shadows over the ripe fields as he swept along, and the reapers, looking up from their work, wondered what mighty bird was flying seaward. At last he reached Jotunheim, and no sooner had he touched ground and taken off the falcon-guise than he came upon the giant Thrym, sitting on a hill twisting golden collars for his dogs and strok-ing the long manes of his horses.

"Welcome, Loke," said the giant. "How fares it with the gods and the elves, and what has brought you to Jotunheim?"

"It fares ill with both gods and elves since you stole Thor's hammer," replied Loke, guessing quickly that Thrym was the thief; "and I have come to find where you have hidden it."

Thrym laughed as only a giant can when he knows he has made trouble for somebody.

"You won't find it," he said at last. "I have buried it eight miles under ground, and no one shall take it away unless he gets Freyja for me as my wife."

The giant looked as if he meant what he said, and Loke, seeing, no other way of finding the hammer, put on his falcon-guise and flew back to Asgard. Thor was waiting to hear what news he brought, and both were soon at the great doors of Folkvang.

"Put on your bridal dress, Freyja," said Thor bluntly, after his fashion, "and we will ride swiftly to Jotunheim."

But Freyja had no idea of marrying a giant just to please Thor; and, in fact, that Thor should ask her to do such a thing

threw her into such a rage that the floor shook under her angry tread, and her necklace snapped in pieces.

"Do you think I am a weak love-sick girl, to follow you to Jotunheim and marry Thrym?" she cried indignantly.

Finding they could do nothing with Freyja, Thor and Loke called all the gods together to talk over the matter and decide what should be done to get back the hammer. The gods were very much alarmed, because they knew the frost-giants would come upon Asgard as soon as they knew the hammer was gone. They said little, for they did not waste time with idle words, but they thought long and earnestly, and still they could find no way of getting hold of Mjolner once more. At last Heimdal, who had once been a Van, and could therefore look into the future, said: "We must have the hammer at once or Asgard will be in danger. If Freyja will not go, let Thor be dressed up and go in her place. Let keys jingle from his waist and a woman's dress fall about his feet. Put precious stones upon his breast, braid his hair like a woman's, hang the necklace around his neck, and bind the bridal veil around his head."

Thor frowned angrily. "If I dress like a woman," he said, "you will jeer at me."

"Don't talk of jeers," retorted Loke; "unless that hammer is brought back quickly the giants will rule in our places."

Thor said no more, but allowed himself to be dressed like a bride, and soon drove off to Jotunheim with Loke beside him disguised as a servant-maid. There was never such a wedding journey before. They rode in Thor's chariot and the goats drew them, plunging swiftly along the way, thunder pealing through the mountains and the frightened earth blazing and smoking as they passed. When Thrym saw the bridal party coming he was filled with delight.

"Stand up, you giants," he shouted to his companions; "spread cushions upon the benches and bring in Freyja, my bride. My yards are full of golden-horned cows, black oxen

please my gaze whichever way I look, great wealth and many treasures are mine, and Freyja is all I lack."

It was evening when the bride came driving into the giant's court in her blazing chariot. The feast was already spread against her coming, and with her veil modestly covering her face she was seated at the great table, Thrym fairly beside himself with delight. It wasn't every giant who could marry a goddess!

If the bridal journey had been so strange that anyone but a foolish giant would have hesitated to marry a wife who came in such a turmoil of fire and storm, her conduct at the table ought certainly to have put Thrym on his guard; for never had bride such an appetite before. The great tables groaned under the load of good things, but they were quickly relieved of their burden by the voracious bride. She ate a whole ox before the astonished giant had fairly begun to enjoy his meal. Then she devoured eight large salmon, one after the other, without stopping to take breath; and having eaten up the part of the feast specially prepared for the hungry men, she turned upon the delicacies which had been made for the women, and especially for her own fastidious appetite.

Thrym looked on with wondering eyes, and at last, when she had added to these solid foods three whole barrels of mead, his amazement was so great that, his astonishment getting the better of his politeness, he called out, "Did anyone ever see such an appetite in a bride before, or know a maid who could drink so much mead?"

Then Loke, who was playing the part of a serving-maid, thinking that the giant might have some suspicions, whispered to him, "Freyja was so happy in the thought of coming here that she has eaten nothing for eight whole days."

Thrym was so pleased at this evidence of affection that he leaned forward and raised the veil as gently as a giant could, but he instantly dropped it and sprang back the whole length of the hall before the bride's terrible eyes.

"Why are Freyja's eyes so sharp?" he called to Loke. "They burn me like fire."

"Oh," said the cunning serving-maid, "she has not slept for a week, so anxious has she been to come here, and that is why her eyes are so fiery."

Everybody looked at the bride and nobody envied Thrym. They thought it was too much like marrying a thunder-storm.

The giant's sister came into the hall just then, and seeing the veiled form of the bride sitting there went up to her and asked for a bridal gift. "If you would have my love and friendship give me those rings of gold upon your fingers."

But the bride sat perfectly silent. No one had yet seen her face or heard her voice.

Thrym became very impatient. "Bring in the hammer," he shouted, "that the bride may be consecrated, and wed us in the name of Var."

If the giant could have seen the bride's eyes when she heard these words he would have sent her home as quickly as possible, and looked somewhere else for a wife.

The hammer was brought and placed in the bride's lap, and everybody looked to see the marriage ceremony; but the wedding was more strange and terrible than the bridal journey had been. No sooner did the bride's fingers close round the handle of Mjolner than the veil which covered her face was torn off and there stood Thor, the giant-queller, his terrible eyes blazing with wrath. The giants shuddered and shrank away from those flaming eyes, the sight of which they dreaded more than anything else in all the worlds; but there was no chance of escape. Thor swung the hammer round his head and the great house rocked on its foundations. There was a vivid flash of lightning, an awful crash of thunder, and the burning roof and walls buried the whole company in one common ruin.

Thrym was punished for stealing the hammer, his wedding guests got crushing blows instead of bridal gifts, and Thor and

Loke went back to Asgard, where the presence of Mjolner made the gods safe once more.

CHAPTER XI
How Thor Fought the Giant Hrungner

One bright summer morning, Thor, the God of Thunder, rode out of Asgard far eastward, fighting giants as he went and slaying them with his mighty hammer, Mjolner; but Odin, his beautiful blue mantle shining with stars and his helmet of gold glittering in the clear air, mounted his swift horse Sleipner, and went to Jotunheim, the home of the greatest giant of them all. As he swept along everyone stopped to look, for such a horse and such a rider were rarely seen on earth. Sometimes the swift hoofs clattered along the rocky roads across the open country, sometimes they struck quick echoes out of the mountain sides in the deep dells, sometimes they rang along the very summits of the hills; and again, in an instant, horse and rider swept noiseless through the air like a strange phantom in the clear mid-day.

When Odin reached Jotunheim he came upon Hrungner, the strongest of the giants.

"Who are you, riding through air with golden helmet and flowing mantle?" asked the giant. "You have a splendid horse."

"None half so good in Jotunheim!" was Odin's answer.

Odin's boast made the giant angry. "None half so good?" he repeated. "I'll show you a better myself."

Whereupon he sprang on Goldfax and off they both went like a rushing wind. Neither gods nor men ever saw such a race before as these ran over earth and through air, Sleipner dashing with foaming flanks ahead and Goldfax close behind with flaming eye and mane outspread. So eager was the chase and so full of rage and desire the mind of Hrungner that before he knew it he was carried within the gates of Asgard,

where the welcome of the gods, as they gathered round the foaming chargers, almost made him forget that he was among his enemies.

They led him into the great hall where the feasts were held, and after their usual manner set out the great tankards brimming with wine, and filled for him the hollow horns from which Thor often drank deep and long. As they were set before him the giant drained them one by one at a single draught; and after a time, as horn after horn of sparkling wine was poured down Hrungner's capacious throat, he forgot his peril, and after the manner of drunken men began to boast of his mighty deeds and of the terrible things he meant to do against the gods.

"Oho," he shouted, "I'll pick up this little Valhal in one hand and carry it off to Jotunheim; I'll pull this high-walled Asgard down stone after stone, and knock the heads of all these puny gods together until none are left save Freyja and Sif, and they shall boil my pot and keep my house for me." And so this drunken giant disturbed the peace of heaven, and the gods were sorry enough that he had ever ridden within their gates; but he was their guest, and the rites of hospitality must be respected even with a drunken braggart. So Freyja filled his horn again and again, until he roared out in a drunken fury, "I'll drink every drop of wine in Asgard before I leave."

This boast made the gods, already weary of his boasting, indignant, and they called on Thor to rid them of the braggart. The God of Thunder came striding into the hall swinging his mighty hammer, with anger on his brow and in his eye, to hear the gods insulted under the very roof of Asgard.

"Why does this stupid giant sit here in Asgard drinking our wine as if he were a god?" shouted Thor, glaring at Hrungner as if he would smite him on the spot; but Hrungner, full of drunken courage, glared back at Thor.

"I came here with Odin," he growled, "and the hospitality

of the gods will suffer more than I if a hand is laid on me."

"You may rue that hospitality before you are out of Asgard," was the angry reply of Thor.

"Small honour to you if you slay me here unarmed and solitary; if you want to prove your boasted valour meet me face to face at Grjottungard. Foolish it was in me to leave my shield and flint-stone at home; had I those weapons I would challenge you to fight me here and now, but if you kill me unarmed I proclaim you a coward in the face of all Asgard."

"I will meet you, braggart, when and where you will," hotly retorted Thor, whom no giant had ever before challenged to a holmgang, or single combat. And Hrungner got himself safely out of Asgard and journeyed as fast as he could to Jotunheim to make ready for the fight.

When the news of these things spread there was nothing heard of among the giants but Hrungner's journey and the holmgang he was to fight with Thor. Nobody thought or talked of anything else, for if Hrungner, the most powerful of them all, should be beaten, Thor would never cease to make war upon them. Long and earnest was the talk among the giants, for Thor's terrible hammer had often rung among the hills, and they dreaded the flash of it through the air and the crash of it as it fell smiting and crushing whatsoever opposed it. To give Hrungner courage they built an immense giant of clay at Grjottungard, but they could find no heart big enough for such a huge body, and so they were obliged at last to use a mare's heart, which fluttered and throbbed terribly when Thor came; for it is the heart and not the size of the body which makes one strong and great. The clay giant, when finished, was so vast that the shadow of him was like a cloud upon the landscape. When all was ready Hrungner stood beside the false giant ready for the fight, and a terrible foe he was, too; for his heart was as hard as rock, his head was of stone, and so was the great broad shield he held before him. And swung on his shoulder was the huge flint-stone which he

meant to hurl at Thor.

Thor meanwhile was on his way to Grjottungard with his servant Thjalfe, and Thjalfe ran ahead, and when he saw Hrungner, called out, "You stand unguarded, giant; you hold your shield before you, and Thor has seen you, and will come violently upon you from beneath the earth."

Then Hrungner threw his shield on the ground and stood upon it, grasping the flint-stone in both hands.

In a moment the sky began to darken with rushing clouds, broad flashes of lightning blazed across the heavens, and deafening peals of thunder rolled crashing over the terror-stricken earth. Striding from cloud to cloud, swinging his terrible hammer in an awful uproar of lightning and storm, Thor came rushing on in all his godlike might. The heavens were on fire, the mountains shook on their foundations, and the earth rocked to and fro as the god of strength moved on to battle.

Poor Mokkerkalfe, the clay giant, was so frightened that the perspiration poured in streams from his great body, and his cowardly heart fluttered like an imprisoned bird. Then Thor, swinging the flashing hammer with all his might, hurled it at Hrungner, and on the very instant the giant flung the flint-stone. The two rushed like meteors and met with a tremendous crash in mid-air. The flint-stone broke in pieces, one falling to the ground and making a mountain where it lay, and the other striking Thor with such force that he fell full-length on the ground; but the terrible hammer struck Hrungner in the very centre of his forehead, crushed his head into small pieces, and threw him with his foot across Thor's neck. Thjalfe meanwhile had thrown himself on Mokkerkalfe, and the clay giant, like a great many other sham giants, fell into pieces at the very first blow; and so Thor was victor of the holmgang.

But how was Thor to get up? The dead giant's foot lay across his neck, and, try as he might with all his strength, he

could not lift it off. Then Thjalfe came and tried in vain to set Thor free; and when the gods heard of the trouble Thor was in they all came, and one by one tried to lift Hrungner's foot, and not one of them could do it; so although Thor had killed the giant it looked as if the giant had beaten him too. After a time Thor's little son Magne, or strength, came that way. He was only three days old, but he walked quickly up to his father, quietly lifted the immense foot and threw it on the ground as if it were the easiest thing in the world, saying as he did so, "It was a great mishap that I came so late, father; for I believe I could have slain this giant with my fist."

Thor rose up quickly and greeted his son as if he were prouder of him than of the slaying of the giant, and declared that he should have the giant's beautiful horse Goldfax for a reward; but Odin would not listen to it, and so Magne had to content himself with his father's praise and the glory of his wonderful deed.

Even now Thor's troubles were not ended, for the piece of flint-stone which struck his head so violently that it threw him to the ground remained imbedded in it, and made the strong god so much trouble that when he had reached Thrudvang, or thunder-world, he sent for the sorceress Groa, the wife of the wise Orvandd, that she might remove the unwieldy stone. Groa came with all her wisdom and began weaving magic spells about Thor, and singing strange incantations to the most weird and mysterious airs in the world, until the flint-stone became entirely loose. When he felt the stone gradually loosened, and knew that Groa could take it out in a moment, Thor was so glad that he tried to think how he might reward her in some way for the good service she had done him; and as even a god cannot give anything greater than happiness, he bethought himself of something which would make her very happy. So he began to speak of Orvandel, who had long been absent from her, and whom she greatly loved. He told her that he had entered

Jotunheim from the north, wading the deep rivers, and had secreted Orvandel in a basket, and so borne him out of the giant's country, and that as they journeyed along in the bitter weather one of Orvandel's toes protruded from the basket and was frozen, and he, Thor, broke it off and threw it into the shining sky, where it had become the star called "Orvandel's Toe"; and then he added that Orvandel would shortly come to his home again.

When Groa heard this news of her husband she was filled with such joy that all her magical songs and wonderful incantations went straight out of her head and she could not get them back again, and the stone remains in Thor's head to this day. And this is the reason why no one must ever throw a flint-stone across the floor, because when this happens the stone in Thor's head moves, and the strong god is very uncomfortable.

CHAPTER XII
The Binding of the Wolf

Loke looked like a god and had many of the wonderful gifts which the gods possessed, but at heart he was one of those giants who were always trying to cross Bifrost, the shining rainbow-bridge, at the heavenly end of which Heimdal kept guard day and night, with eyes so keen that in the darkness as easily as in the light he could see a hundred miles distant, and with ears so sharp that he could hear the noiseless blossoming of the grass in the deepest valley, and the growing of the wool upon the backs of sheep browsing along the hilltops. Loke had the mind of the gods, who were always working to bring order and beauty into the world, but he had the heart of the giants, who were striving to undo the good and cover the earth with howling storms and icy desolation. After he had been in Asgard for a time he wanted to get back to Jotunheim, where his true home was. There he married a terrible giantess, and three children were born to him more repulsive than their mother, Hel, the Midgard-serpent, and the Fenris-wolf. These monsters grew to be very strong and horrible to look upon before the gods thought of destroying them; but one day, as Odin looked over the worlds from his throne, a shadow fell upon his face, for he saw how powerful the children of Loke were becoming, and he knew they would work endless mischief and misery for gods and men; so he sent some of the gods to bring the monsters to Asgard. It was a strange sight when Loke's children were brought into heaven, Hel's terrible face turning into stone everyone who looked, unless he were a god; the Midgard-serpent coiling its immense length into great circles over which the glittering eyes wandered restlessly; and the Fenris-wolf growling with a deep,

cruel voice. Odin looked sternly at Loke, the evil god who had brought such savage beings among men, and then with a dark brow he cast Hel down into the dusky kingdoms of the dead, and hurled the snake into the deep sea, where he grew until he coiled around the whole earth; but Fenrer, the wolf, was permitted to grow up in Asgard. He was so fierce that only Tyr, the sword-god, could feed him. He roamed about Asgard, his huge body daily growing stronger, and his hungry eyes flashing more and more fiercely.

After a time another shadow fell upon Odin's face, for Fenrer was fast becoming the most terrible enemy of the gods, and the oracles who could look into the future, said that at the last great battle he would destroy Odin himself. So Odin called all the gods together, and as they came into the great hall the wolf crouched at the door, with a look that made even their strong hearts shudder.

"Our most dangerous enemy is growing stronger every day under our roof and by our hands," said Odin, "and we shall cease to be gods if we are so blind as to nourish our own destroyer."

"Kill him!" muttered someone.

"No," said Odin; "although he is to devour me, no blood shall stain the sacred seats of the gods."

"Chain him!" said Thor.

That was a good plan, they all agreed, but how was it to be done?

"Leave that to me," answered Thor, full of courage, for he had done many wonderful things, and there was nothing of which he was afraid.

That night the fires in the great smithy blazed and roared so fiercely that the heavens far around were lighted with the glow, and in the dusky light the strong forms of the gods moved to and fro as they worked on the chain with which they meant to bind the Fenris-wolf. All night Thor's mighty strokes rang on the hard iron, and when the morning came

the chain was done, and they called it Leding. Then the gods called Fenrer, spread out the chain, and asked him to show his wonderful strength by breaking it.

The wolf knew better than the gods how strong he had grown, and that the breaking of Leding would be a very small matter for him; so he permitted them to bind the great links around his shaggy body and about his feet, and to rivet the ends so fast that it seemed as if nothing on earth could ever break them apart again. When it was all done, and Thor's eyes were beginning to smile at his success, the wolf got quietly upon his feet, stretched himself as easily as if a web of silk were cast over him, snapped the massive chain in a dozen places, and walked off, leaving the gods to gather up the broken links.

"He has grown terribly strong," said Odin, looking at the great pieces of iron.

"Yes," answered sturdy Thor, "stronger than I thought; but I will forge another chain, which even he cannot break."

Again the red glow shone in the sky over Asgard, the fires flashed and blazed, and the great hammers rang far into the night, and the next day the mighty chain Drome, twice as strong as Leding, was finished.

"Come, Fenrer," said Thor, "you are already famous for your strength; but if you can break this chain no one will ever be able to deny your strength, and you will win great honour among gods and men."

The wolf growled as he looked at the great chain, for he knew that the gods feared him and wanted to make him harmless. He knew also that he could break the chain which they had forged with so much toil to bind him with, and so he let them fasten him as before. When all was done, the gods began to smile again, for they had made the strongest chain that ever was or could be made, and now surely the wolf was forever harmless.

But Fenrer knew better than they. He rose slowly, with the massive links bound closely about him, shook himself

fiercely, stretched himself, and then with a mighty effort dashed himself on the ground; the earth shook, the chain burst, and its links flew through the air and buried themselves in the ground, so tremendous was the effort with which the wolf freed himself.

A fierce joy gleamed in his eyes as he walked away with deep growls, leaving the gods to console themselves as best they might, for there were no more chains to be made.

Long and anxiously they talked together, but no one could think of anything which could hold Fenrer until Odin called to Skirner, Frey's swiftest messenger: "Go to Svartalfheim as fast as the flash of Thor's hammer, and the dwarfs shall make us an enchanted chain which even he cannot break."

Skirner was off almost before Odin had done speaking. Travelling over land and sea he soon came to the dark entrance of the under-world where the dwarfs lived, and in a very short time he was in the dusky home of the wonderful little workers in iron. They were rushing about with black faces and dirty hair when Skirner called them together and said, "You must make for the gods an enchanted chain so slight that Fenrer will be willing to be bound by it, and so strong that when he has allowed himself to be tied he cannot break loose again." The dwarfs whispered together for a few moments, and then scattered in every direction; for they were going to make the most wonderful chain that was ever put together, and there were many things to be looked after before it could be done. Skirner sat in the darkness until the busy little workers had finished the band, and then he carried it quickly to Asgard, where all the gods were waiting anxiously for his coming and Fenrer was stealthily stealing from place to place through the city. Skirner spread the string out for the gods to look at, and they could hardly believe it was strong enough. It was very long, but so small and soft that it seemed no more than silken twine; it was made out of such things as

the sound of a cat's footsteps, the roots of the mountains, the breath of a fish, and the sinews of a bear, and nothing could break it.

The gods were so happy in the hope of being relieved of their enemy that they could not thank Skirner enough. They all went to a rocky island in a lake called Amsvartner, taking the wolf with them. Thor showed the silken twine to Fenrer. "You have broken Leding and Drome," he said, "and now you will break this also, although it is somewhat stronger than one would think, to look at it."

Then he handed the magic cord from one god to another and each tried to break it, but no one succeeded.

"We cannot do it," they all said after it had been handed around the circle, "but Fenrer can."

The wolf looked at it suspiciously.

"It is such a slender thread," he answered, "that I shall get no credit if I break it; and if it is made with magic, slight as it looks I shall never get loose from it again."

The gods looked at one another and smiled.

"Oh, you will easily break so slim a band as that," they replied, "since you have already broken the heaviest chains in the world; and if you cannot break it we will loosen you again."

"If you bind me so fast that I am not able to get myself free, I shall get little help from you," said the wolf truthfully enough. "I am very unwilling to have this twine bound about me; but that you may not be able to call me cowardly, I will do it if someone of you will lay his hand in my mouth as a pledge that there is no deceit about this thing."

The gods looked at each other when they heard these words. Fenrer had spoken the truth, there was no denying that. He must be chained now, however, or they would all be destroyed; but who would lose a hand to save the rest? Thor's hands were needed to swing the hammer against the giants, and everybody could think of some very good reason why his

hand should not be lost. There was an awful pause, and then Tyr, the god of honour and courage, who had never stood still when he ought to go forward, stretched out his right hand and laid it in the wolf's hungry mouth. Then the gods bound the slender cord tightly around Fenrer, fold on fold, winding its whole length about him and tying the ends tightly together. It was so slight that it seemed as if it must break in fifty places as soon as the wolf began to stretch himself. So perhaps thought Fenrer himself; but the harder he strove to break loose, the closer the cord drew about him. He sprang from side to side, he threw himself on the ground, he stretched his mighty limbs with all his strength, but the twine only cut the deeper. Then a mighty rage filled the wolf because he had suffered himself to be deceived, his eyes flamed with fury, and the foam ran out of his mouth.

The gods were so delighted when they found the wolf really fast at last that they began to laugh, all except brave Tyr, who lost his right hand.

They took the wonderful silken chain and drew it through the middle of a rock and sunk the rock so deep in the earth that nothing but an earthquake could stir it. Fenrer, wild with pain and rage, rushed from side to side so violently that the earth rocked beneath him, and opening his tremendous jaws sprang upon the gods; whereupon they thrust a sword into his cruel jaws so that the hilt stood on his lower jaw and the point pierced the roof of the mouth.

So the Fenris-wolf was bound and made fast to the rocky island, his jaws spread far apart, foaming and growling until the last great day.

CHAPTER XIII
Thor's Wonderful Journey

Thor made many journeys and had many strange adventures; but there was one journey which was more wonderful than all the others, and which proves, moreover, that the strongest and truest are sometimes deceived by those who are weaker than themselves. The giants in old Norse times were not easy to conquer; but generally it was when they hid themselves behind lies and appeared to be what they were not that they succeeded for a time. Thor's strength was a noble thing because he used it to help men; but his truthfulness and honesty were nobler still.

One morning, just as the sun was beginning to shine through the mists that overhung the world, the gates of Asgard opened and Thor's chariot, drawn by the goats, rattled along the road. Thor and Loke were evidently off for a journey; but Thor was always going off somewhere, and nobody who saw him now thought that he was starting out to try his strength with the most powerful things in the whole earth. Nor did he know it. All day long the chariot rolled across the level stretches of meadow and through the valleys, leaving the echoes shouting to each other from the overhanging mountains as it passed by. At night it stopped at the house of a poor peasant, and Thor stepped down and stood in the doorway.

"Can you lodge two travellers over night?" he asked.

"Certainly," said the peasant, "but we can give you nothing to eat, for we have nothing for ourselves."

"Give yourselves no trouble about that," answered Thor cheerfully; "I can provide for all."

He went back to Loke, who got out of the chariot; and

then, to the great astonishment of the people in the house, Thor killed both his goats, and in a minute they were ready for cooking. The great pot was soon sending savory odours through the house, and the whole family with their strange guests sat down shortly to a bountiful supper.

"The more you eat the better I shall like it," said Thor, as they took their places at the table, "but do not on any account break the bones; when you have done with them throw them into the skins which I have spread out on the hearth."

The peasant and his wife and Thjalfe and Roskva, their two children, ate bountifully; but Thjalfe broke one of the bones to get the marrow. The next morning Thor was up with the sun, and when he dressed himself he took the hammer and held it over the goat-skins: and immediately the bones flew into place, and the skins covered them, and there were the two goats as full of life as when they started out the day before. But one of the goats limped; and when Thor saw it he was so angry that he looked like a thunder-cloud, and his fingers closed so tightly round Mjolner that his knuckles were white. Thjalfe, who had been looking with the rest of the family in speechless wonder, was frightened half out of his wits when he saw Thor's rage, and would have run away if he could. The poor peasant and his wife were equally terrified, and besought Thor that he would not destroy them. Seeing them in such misery Thor's anger died out, and he said he would forgive them, but Thjalfe and Roskva must henceforth be his servants. So taking the two children, and leaving the goats with their parents for safe keeping, Thor and Loke set out again.

Thor had decided to go to Jotunheim, and all the morning they travelled eastward until they reached the shore of the sea. They crossed the wide waters quickly and climbed up on the further shore of Jotunheim. Mists floated over the land, and great rocks rose along the coast so stern and black from the wash of the sea and the fury of storms that they seemed

like strong giants guarding their country against the giant-queller. Thor led the way, and they soon entered a deep forest through which they travelled until nightfall, Thjalfe, who was very fleet of foot, carrying the sack of provisions. As night came on they looked about for shelter, and came upon an immense building with a whole side opening into a great room off which they found five smaller rooms. This was just what he wanted, although they could not imagine why anyone had built such a house in that lonely place. After supper, weary with the long journey, they were soon in a deep sleep.

Three or four hours went by quietly enough, but about midnight they were suddenly awakened by an awful uproar, which shook the building to its foundations and made the whole earth tremble. Thor called the others and told them to go into the further rooms. Half dead with fright they did so, but Thor stretched himself, hammer in hand, at the wide entrance. As soon as there was light enough to see about him Thor went into the woods, and had gone but a little way when he came upon an enormous giant, fast asleep, and snoring so loudly that the very trees shook around him. Thor quickly buckled on his belt of strength, and had no sooner done so than the giant awoke and sprang to his feet. The whole earth shook under him, and he towered as far over Thor, as a great oak does over the fern that grows at its foot. Thor was never frightened, but he had never heard of such a giant before and he looked at him with honest surprise.

"Who are you?" he said, after looking up to the great face a minute.

"I am Skrymer," answered the giant, "but I don't need to ask your name. You are Thor. But what have you done with my glove?"

And stretching out his great hand the giant picked up his glove, which was nothing less than the building Thor and the others had spent the night in.

"Would you like to have me travel with you?" continued

the giant.

"Certainly," said Thor, although it was plainly to be seen that neither Thjalfe nor Roskva wanted such a companion. Skrymer thereupon untied his sack and took out his breakfast, and the others followed his example, taking care, however, to put a comfortable distance between themselves and their dangerous fellow-traveller. After breakfast Skrymer proposed that they should put all their provisions into one bag, to which Thor consented, and they started off, the giant tramping on ahead, and carrying the sack on his broad back.

All day long he walked steadily on, taking such tremendous strides that the others could hardly keep up with him. When night came he stopped under a great oak.

"There," said he, throwing down the sack; "take that and get some supper; I am going to sleep."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before he began to snore as loudly as the night before. Thor took the sack, but the harder he tried to loosen the string the tighter it drew, and with all his strength he could not untie a single knot. Finding he could not get into the sack, and hearing the giant snore so peacefully at his side, Thor's anger blazed out, and grasping the hammer he struck the giant full on the head. Skrymer opened his eyes drowsily.

"Did a leaf fall on my head?" he called out sleepily, without getting up. "Have you had your supper yet, and are you going to bed?"

In a minute he was snoring again. Thor went and lay down under another oak; but at midnight the giant began to snore so heavily that the forest resounded with the noise. Thor was fairly beside himself with rage, and swinging his hammer struck Skrymer such a tremendous blow that the hammer sank to the handle in his head. The giant opened his eyes and sat up.

"What is the matter now?" he called out; "did an acorn fall on my head? How are you getting on, Thor?"

"Oh, I am just awake," said Thor, stepping back quickly. "It is only midnight, and we may sleep awhile longer."

Thor watched until the giant had fallen asleep again, and just at daybreak dealt him the most terrible blow that he had ever given with the hammer. It flashed through and buried itself out of sight in Skrymer's forehead. The giant sprang on his feet and began to stroke his beard.

"Are there any birds up there?" he asked, looking into the oak. "I thought a feather dropped on my head. Are you awake, Thor? It is full time to dress, and you are near the end of your journey. The city of Utgard is not far off. I heard you whispering together that I was a man of great stature, but you will find much larger men in Utgard. Take my advice, and when you get there don't boast very much, for they will not take boasting from such little fellows as you are. You would do well to turn back and go home while you have a chance; but if you will go on, take the road to the eastward, my way takes me to the north." And, swinging the sack of provisions over his shoulder, Skrymer plunged into the forest and was soon out of sight.

Thor and his companions pushed on as fast as they could until noon, when suddenly a great city rose before them, on a vast plain, the walls of which were so high that they had to lean back as far as they could to see the top. A great gate, heavily barred, stopped them at the entrance; but they crept between the bars. After going a little distance they came upon a palace, and the doors being open went in, and found themselves in a great hall with long seats on either side, and on these seats rows of gigantic men larger than Skrymer. When they saw Utgard-Loke, who was the king of that country, they saluted him; but he sat for a long time without taking any notice of them. At last smiling contemptuously he said: "It is tiresome for travellers to be asked about a long journey; but if I am not mistaken this little fellow is Thor. Perhaps, however, you are really larger than you seem to be. What feats of

strength can you show us? No one is permitted to stay here unless he excels in some difficult thing."

Hearing these words, in a very insulting tone, Loke answered loudly, "There is one feat in which no one can equal me, and I am ready to perform it at once. I can devour food faster than anyone here."

"Truly, that would be a feat if you could do it," said the scornful king; and he called to a man named Loge to contend with Loke.

A great trough full of meat was placed in the centre of the hall, and commencing at either end the contestants began to eat voraciously, and so fast that it is disagreeable even to think of it. They reached the middle of the trough at exactly the same moment; but Loke had eaten only the meat, while Loge had devoured meat, bones, trough and all. There was nothing left on his side, and Loke had to confess himself beaten.

Then the king, looking at Thjalfe, asked, "What can you do, young man?"

"I will run a race with anyone you will select," answered Thjalfe promptly.

"If you can outrun anyone I can select, it will certainly be a splendid feat," said Utgard-Loke; "but you must be very swift-footed to do it."

There was a noble race-ground just outside the palace, and everyone hurried out to see the race. The king called a slender young fellow named Huge, and told him to run with Thjalfe.

There was never such running since the world began. Thjalfe ran like the wind; but Huge reached the goal first, and turned about to meet Thjalfe as he came breathless to the post.

"You must use your legs better than that if you intend to win," said the king, as Thjalfe walked back; "although you are the fastest runner that ever came here."

They ran a second time, but when Huge reached the goal and turned around, Thjalfe was a full bow-shot behind.

"Well run!" shouted Utgard-Loke; "well run! a third race shall decide it."

A third time they were at the starting-place and again they were speeding down the course, while everybody strained his eyes to look at them; and a third time Huge reached the goal and turned to find Thjalfe not half-way.

"We have had racing enough!" cried the giants, and they all went back into the palace again.

And now it was Thor's turn to show his wonderful strength, but he did not dream that he was going to measure strength with the most tremendous forces in the whole earth.

"Your fame fills all the worlds, Thor," called out Utgard-Loke, when they had seated themselves on the benches along the great hall; "give us some proof of your wonderful power."

Thor never waited to be asked a second time.

"I will contend in drinking with anyone you may select," was his prompt acceptance of the challenge.

"Well answered," said the king. "Bring out the great horn."

A giant went out, and speedily came back bearing a very deep horn, which the king said his men were compelled to empty as a punishment.

"A good drinker will empty that horn at a single draught," said Utgard-Loke, as it was filled and handed to Thor; "a few men need to drink twice, but only a milksop needs a third pull at it."

Thor thought the horn not over large, although very long, and as he was very thirsty he put it to his lips without further ado, and drank so long and deep that he thought it certainly must be empty, but when he set the horn down and looked into it he was astonished to find that the liquor rose almost as high as when he set his lips to it.

"That was fairly well drunk," said the king, "but not

unusually so; if anybody had told me Thor could do no better than that I would not have believed him. But of course you will finish it at a second draught."

Thor said nothing, although he was very angry, but setting the horn to his lips a second time he drank longer and deeper than before. When he had stopped to take breath, and looked at it again, he had drunk less than the first time.

"How now, Thor," cried Utgard-Loke, "you have left more for the third draught than you can manage. If there are no other feats which you can perform better than this you must not expect to be considered as great here as among the gods."

Thor became very angry when he heard these words, and seizing the horn he drank deep, fast, and furiously until he thought it certainly must be empty; but when he looked into it the liquor had fallen so little that he could hardly see the difference; and he handed it to the cup-bearer, and would drink no more.

"It is plain," spoke up the king in a very insulting tone, "that you are not so strong as we thought you were; you cannot succeed in this strife, certainly; will you try something else?"

"I will certainly try something else," said Thor, who could not understand why he had failed to drain the horn; "but I am sure that even among the gods such draughts would not be counted small. What game do you propose now?"

"Oh, a very easy one," replied the king, "which my youngsters here make nothing of; simply to lift a cat from the floor. I should not think of asking you to try it if I did not see that you are much less of a man than I have always supposed."

He had no sooner said this than a large grey cat ran out into the hall. Thor put his hand under it and tried to lift it, but the cat arched its back as high as Thor stretched his hands, and, do his best, he could only get one foot off the floor.

"It is just as I expected," cried Utgard-Loke in a loud voice; "the cat is very large, and Thor is a very little fellow compared with the rest of us."

Thor's eyes flashed fire. "Little as I am," he shouted, "I challenge any of you to wrestle with me."

Utgard-Loke looked up and down the benches as if he would call out someone from the two rows of giants. Then he shook his head, saying; "There is no one here who would not think it child's play to wrestle with you; but let someone call in Ellie, my old nurse; she shall try her strength with you. She has brought many a stronger man than you to earth."

An old woman came creeping into the hall, bent, wrinkled, and toothless. Thor seized her, but the tighter his grasp became the firmer she stood. Her thin arms gripped him like a vise, her strength seemed to grow as she put it forth, and at last after a hard struggle, in which Thor strained every muscle to the breaking point, he sank on one knee.

"That is enough," said Utgard-Loke, and the old woman crept feebly out of the hall, leaving Thor stunned and bewildered in the midst of the silent giants. There were no more trials of strength, and Thor and his companions were generously feasted after their defeats.

The next morning, after they had partaken of a bountiful breakfast of meat and drink, they started on their journey homeward. Utgard-Loke went with them as far as the gate of the city, where he stopped.

"How do you think your journey has turned out?" he asked Thor; "and have you met any men stronger than yourself?"

"I have brought shame upon myself," answered Thor frankly and honestly, after his nature, "and it vexes me to think that you will hereafter speak of me as a weak fellow."

"Now that you are out of the city I will tell you the truth about these things," said Utgard-Loke. "If I had known how mighty you are I would never have allowed you to enter the

gates, and you may be very sure you will never get in a second time. I have beaten you by deception, not by strength. I have been deluding you from the start. In the forest I tied the sack with a tough iron wire in such a way you could not discern the secret of the knot. Thrice you struck at me with your hammer, and the first blow, though the lightest, would have killed me had it fallen on me; but each time I slipped a mountain between myself and the hammer, and the blows made three deep clefts in its stony sides. I have deluded you, too, in all the trials of strength and skill. Loke was very hungry, and ate voraciously, but he contended against fire itself, which goes like the wind and devours everything in its path; Thjalfe ran as man never ran before, but Huge, who raced with him, was no other than my thought, and what man is so swift as thought? The horn which you strove in vain to empty had its further end in the sea, and so mighty were your draughts that over the wide sea the waters have sunk to the ebb. Your strength was no less wonderful when you lifted the cat; when we saw one foot raised from the floor our hearts sank in terror, for it was the Midgard-serpent, encircling the whole earth, which you really contended against, and you held it aloft so near heaven that the world was hardly enclosed by its folds. Most marvellous of all was the wrestling with Ellie, who was none other than old age itself, who sooner or later must bring all things to the ground. We must part, I hope never to meet again; for I can only defend myself against you by spells of magic such as these."

Thor was so enraged when he heard these words that he swung his hammer high in air to crush the lying Utgard-Loke, but he had vanished, and when Thor turned to look for the city he saw only a beautiful plain spreading its blossoming meadows to the far mountains; and he went thoughtfully back to Asgard.

CHAPTER XIV
The Death of Balder

There was one shadow which always fell over Asgard. Sometimes in the long years the gods almost forgot it, it lay so far off, like a dim cloud in a clear sky; but Odin saw it deepen and widen as he looked out into the universe, and he knew that the last great battle would surely come, when the gods themselves would be destroyed and a long twilight would rest on all the worlds; and now the day was close at hand. Misfortunes never come singly to men, and they did not to the gods. Idun, the beautiful goddess of youth, whose apples were the joy of all Asgard, made a resting place for herself among the massive branches of Ygdrasil, and there every evening came Brage, and sang so sweetly that the birds stopped to listen, and even the Norns, those implacable sisters at the foot of the tree, were softened by the melody. But poetry cannot change the purposes of fate, and one evening no song was heard of Brage or birds, the leaves of the world-tree hung withered and lifeless on the branches, and the fountain from which they had daily been sprinkled was dry at last. Idun had fallen into the dark valley of death, and when Brage, Heimdal, and Loke went to question her about the future she could answer them only with tears. Brage would not leave his beautiful wife alone amid the dim shades that crowded the dreary valley, and so youth and genius vanished out of Asgard forever.

Balder was the most god-like of all the gods, because he was the purest and the best. Wherever he went his coming was like the coming of sunshine, and all the beauty of summer was but the shining of his face. When men's hearts were white like the light, and their lives clear as the day, it was because

Balder was looking down upon them with those soft, clear eyes that were open windows to the soul of God. He had always lived in such a glow of brightness that no darkness had ever touched him; but one morning, after Idun and Brage had gone, Balder's face was sad and troubled. He walked slowly from room to room in his palace Breidablik, stainless as the sky when April showers have swept across it because no impure thing had ever crossed the threshold, and his eyes were heavy with sorrow. In the night terrible dreams had broken his sleep, and made it a long torture. The air seemed to be full of awful changes for him, and for all the gods. He knew in his soul that the shadow of the last great day was sweeping on; as he looked out and saw the worlds lying in light and beauty, the fields yellow with waving grain, the deep fiords flashing back the sunbeams from their clear depths, the verdure clothing the loftiest mountains, and knew that over all this darkness and desolation would come, with silence of reapers and birds, with fading of leaf and flower, a great sorrow fell on his heart.

Balder could bear the burden no longer. He went out, called all the gods together, and told them the terrible dreams of the night. Every face was heavy with care. The death of Balder would be like the going out of the sun, and after a long, sad council the gods resolved to protect him from harm by pledging all things to stand between him and any hurt. So Frigg, his mother, went forth and made everything promise, on a solemn oath, not to injure her son. Fire, iron, all kinds of metal, every sort of stone, trees, earth, diseases, birds, beasts, snakes, as the anxious mother went to them, solemnly pledged themselves that no harm should come near Balder. Everything promised, and Frigg thought she had driven away the cloud; but fate was stronger than her love, and one little shrub had not sworn.

Odin was not satisfied even with these precautions, for whichever way he looked the shadow of a great sorrow spread

over the worlds. He began to feel as if he were no longer the greatest of the gods, and he could almost hear the rough shouts of the frost-giants crowding the rainbow bridge on their way into Asgard. When trouble comes to men it is hard to bear, but to a god who had so many worlds to guide and rule it was a new and terrible thing. Odin thought and thought until he was weary, but no gleam of light could he find anywhere; it was thick darkness everywhere.

At last he could bear the suspense no longer, and saddling his horse he rode sadly out of Asgard to Niflheim, the home of Hel, whose face was as the face of death itself. As he drew near the gates, a monstrous dog came out and barked furiously, but Odin rode a little eastward of the shadowy gates to the grave of a wonderful prophetess. It was a cold, gloomy place, and the soul of the great god was pierced with a feeling of hopeless sorrow as he dismounted from Sleipner, and bending over the grave began to chant weird songs, and weave magical charms over it. When he had spoken those wonderful words which could waken the dead from their sleep, there was an awful silence for a moment, and then a faint ghost-like voice came from the grave.

"Who art thou?" it said. "Who breaketh the silence of death, and calleth the sleeper out of her long slumbers? Ages ago I was laid at rest here, snow and rain have fallen upon me through myriad years; why dost thou disturb me?"

"I am Vegtam," answered Odin, "and I come to ask why the couches of Hel are hung with gold and the benches strewn with shining rings?"

"It is done for Balder," answered the awful voice; "ask me no more."

Odin's heart sank when he heard these words; but he was determined to know the worst.

"I will ask thee until I know all. Who shall strike the fatal blow?"

"If I must, I must," moaned the prophetess. "Hoder shall

smite his brother Balder and send him down to the dark home of Hel. The mead is already brewed for Balder, and the despair draweth near."

Then Odin, looking into the future across the open grave, saw all the days to come.

"Who is this," he said, seeing that which no mortal could have seen, "who is this that will not weep for Balder?"

Then the prophetess knew that it was none other than the greatest of the gods who had called her up.

"Thou art not Vegtam," she exclaimed, "thou art Odin himself, the king of men."

"And thou," answered Odin angrily, "art no prophetess, but the mother of three giants."

"Ride home, then, and exult in what thou hast discovered," said the dead woman. "Never shall my slumbers be broken again until Loke shall burst his chains and the great battle come."

And Odin rode sadly homeward knowing that already Nifiheim was making itself beautiful against the coming of Balder.

The other gods meanwhile had become merry again; for had not everything promised to protect their beloved Balder? They even made sport of that which troubled them, for when they found that nothing could hurt Balder, and that all things glanced aside from his shining form, they persuaded him to stand as a target for their weapons; hurling darts, spears, swords, and battle-axes at him, all of which went singing through the air and fell harmless at his feet. But Loke, when he saw these sports, was jealous of Balder, and went about thinking how he could destroy him.

It happened that as Frigg sat spinning in her house Fensal, the soft wind blowing in at the windows and bringing the merry shouts of the gods at play, an old woman entered and approached her.

"Do you know," asked the newcomer, "what they are

doing in Asgard? They are throwing all manner of dangerous weapons at Balder. He stands there like the sun for brightness, and against his glory, spears and battle-axes fall powerless to the ground. Nothing can harm him."

"No," answered Frigg joyfully; "nothing can bring him any hurt, for I have made everything in heaven and earth swear to protect him."

"What!" said the old woman, "has everything sworn to guard Balder?"

"Yes," said Frigg, "everything has sworn except one little shrub which is called Mistletoe, and grows on the eastern side of Valhal. I did not take an oath from that because I thought it too young and weak."

When the old woman heard this a strange light came into her eyes; she walked off much faster than she had come in, and no sooner had she passed beyond Frigg's sight than this same feeble old woman grew suddenly erect, shook off her woman's garments, and there stood Loke himself. In a moment he had reached the slope east of Valhal, had plucked a twig of the unsworn Mistletoe, and was back in the circle of the gods, who were still at their favourite pastime with Balder, Hoder was standing silent and alone outside the noisy throng, for he was blind. Loke touched him.

"Why do you not throw something at Balder?"

"Because I cannot see where Balder stands, and have nothing to throw if I could," replied Hoder.

"If that is all," said Loke, "come with me. I will give you something to throw, and direct your aim."

Hoder, thinking no evil, went with Loke and did as he was told.

The little sprig of Mistletoe shot through the air, pierced the heart of Balder, and in a moment the beautiful god lay dead upon the field. A shadow rose out of the deep beyond the worlds and spread itself over heaven and earth, for the light of the universe had gone out.

The gods could not speak for horror. They stood like statues for a moment, and then a hopeless wail burst from their lips. Tears fell like rain from eyes that had never wept before, for Balder, the joy of Asgard, had gone to Niflheim and left them desolate. But Odin was saddest of all, because he knew the future, and he knew that peace and light had fled from Asgard forever, and that the last day and the long night were hurrying on.

Frigg could not give up her beautiful son, and when her grief had spent itself a little, she asked who would go to Hel and offer her a rich ransom if she would permit Balder to return to Asgard.

"I will go," said Hermod; swift at the word of Odin Sleipner was led forth, and in an instant Hermod was galloping furiously away.

Then the gods began with sorrowful hearts to make ready for Balder's funeral. When the once beautiful form had been arrayed in grave-clothes they carried it reverently down to the deep sea, which lay, calm as a summer afternoon, waiting for its precious burden. Close to the water's edge lay Balder's Ringhorn, the greatest of all the ships that sailed the seas, but when the gods tried to launch it they could not move it an inch. The great vessel creaked and groaned, but no one could push it down to the water. Odin walked about it with a sad face, and the gentle ripple of the little waves chasing each other over the rocks seemed a mocking laugh to him.

"Send to Jotunheim for Hyrroken," he said at last; and a messenger was soon flying for that mighty giantess.

In a little time, Hyrroken came riding swiftly on a wolf so large and fierce that he made the gods think of Fenrer. When the giantess had alighted, Odin ordered four Berserkers of mighty strength to hold the wolf, but he struggled so angrily that they had to throw him on the ground before they could control him. Then Hyrroken went to the prow of the ship and with one mighty effort sent it far into the sea, the rollers

underneath bursting into flame, and the whole earth trembling with the shock. Thor was so angry at the uproar that he would have killed the giantess on the spot if he had not been held back by the other gods. The great ship floated on the sea as she had often done before, when Balder, full of life and beauty, set all her sails and was borne joyfully across the tossing seas. Slowly and solemnly the dead god was carried on board, and as Nanna, his faithful wife, saw her husband borne for the last time from the earth which he had made dear to her and beautiful to all men, her heart broke with sorrow, and they laid her beside Balder on the funeral pyre.

Since the world began no one had seen such a funeral. No bells tolled, no long procession of mourners moved across the hills, but all the worlds lay under a deep shadow, and from every quarter came those who had loved or feared Balder. There at the very water's edge stood Odin himself, the ravens flying about his head, and on his majestic face a gloom that no sun would ever lighten again; and there was Frigg, the desolate mother, whose son had already gone so far that he would never come back to her; there was Frey standing sad and stern in his chariot; there was Freyja, the goddess of love, from whose eyes fell a shining rain of tears; there, too, was Heimdal on his horse Goldtop; and around all these glorious ones from Asgard crowded the children of Jotunheim, grim mountain-giants seamed with scars from Thor's hammer, and frost-giants who saw in the death of Balder the coming of that long winter in which they should reign through all the worlds.

A deep hush fell on all created things, and every eye was fixed on the great ship riding near the shore, and on the funeral pyre rising from the deck crowned with the forms of Balder and Nanna. Suddenly a gleam of light flashed over the water; the pile had been kindled, and the flames, creeping slowly at first, climbed faster and faster until they met over the dead and rose skyward. A lurid light filled the heavens and shone on the sea, and in the brightness of it the gods

looked pale and sad, and the circle of giants grew darker and more portentous. Thor struck the fast burning pyre with his consecrating hammer, and Odin cast into it the wonderful ring Draupner. Higher and higher leaped the flames, more and more desolate grew the scene; at last they began to sink, the funeral pyre was consumed. Balder had vanished forever, the summer was ended, and winter waited at the doors. Meanwhile Hermod was riding hard and fast on his gloomy errand. Nine days and nights he rode through valleys so deep and dark that he could not see his horse. Stillness and blackness and solitude were his only companions until he came to the golden bridge which crosses the river Gjol. The good horse Sleipner, who had carried Odin on so many strange journeys, had never travelled such a road before, and his hoofs rang drearily as he stopped short at the bridge, for in front of him stood its porter, the gigantic Modgud.

"Who are you?" she asked, fixing her piercing eyes on Hermod. "What is your name and parentage? Yesterday five bands of dead men rode across the bridge, and beneath them all it did not shake as under your single tread. There is no colour of death in your face. Why ride you hither, the living among the dead?"

"I come," said Hermod, "to seek for Balder. Have you seen him pass this way?"

"He has already crossed the bridge and taken his journey northward to Hel."

Then Hermod rode slowly across the bridge that spans the abyss between life and death, and found his way at last to the barred gates of Hel's dreadful home. There he sprang to the ground, tightened the girths, remounted, drove the spurs deep into the horse, and Sleipner, with a mighty leap, cleared the wall. Hermod rode straight to the gloomy palace, dismounted, entered, and in a moment was face to face with the terrible queen of the kingdom of the dead. Beside her, on a beautiful throne, sat Balder, pale and wan, crowned with a

withered wreath of flowers, and close at hand was Nanna, pallid as her husband, for whom she had died. And all night long, while ghostly forms wandered restless and sleepless through Helheim, Hermod talked with Balder and Nanna. There is no record of what they said, but the talk was sad enough, doubtless, and ran like a still stream among the happy days in Asgard when Raider's smile was morning over the earth and the sight of his face the summer of the world.

When the morning came, faint and dim, through the dusky palace, Hermod sought Hel, who received him as cold and stern as fate.

"Your kingdom is full, O Hel!" he said, "and without Balder, Asgard is empty. Send him back to us once more, for there is sadness in every heart and tears are in every eye. Through heaven and earth all things weep for him."

"If that is true," was the slow, icy answer, "if every created thing weeps for Balder, he shall return to Asgard; but if one eye is dry he remains henceforth in Helheim."

Then Hermod rode swiftly away, and the decree of Hel was soon told in Asgard. Through all the worlds the gods sent messengers to say that all who loved Balder should weep for his return, and everywhere tears fell like rain. There was weeping in Asgard, and in all the earth there was nothing that did not weep. Men and women and little children, missing the light that had once fallen into their hearts and homes, sobbed with bitter grief; the birds of the air, who had sung carols of joy at the gates of the morning since time began, were full of sorrow; the beasts of the fields crouched and moaned in their desolation; the great trees, that had put on their robes of green at Balder's command, sighed as the wind wailed through them; and the sweet flowers, that waited for Balder's footstep and sprang up in all the fields to greet him, hung their frail blossoms, and wept bitterly for the love and the warmth and the light that had gone out. Throughout the whole earth there was nothing but weeping, and the sound of it was like

the wailing of those storms in autumn that weep for the dead summer as its withered leaves drop one by one from the trees.

The messengers of the gods went gladly back to Asgard, for everything had wept for Balder; but as they journeyed they came upon a giantess, called Thok, and her eyes were dry.

"Weep for Balder," they said.

"With dry eyes only will I weep for Balder," she answered. "Dead or alive, he never gave me gladness. Let him stay in Helheim."

When she had spoken these words a terrible laugh broke from her lips, and the messengers looked at each other with pallid faces, for they knew it was the voice of Loke.

Balder never came back to Asgard, and the shadows deepened over all things, for the night of death was fast coming on.

CHAPTER XV
How Loke Was Punished

In the beginning Loke had been the brother of Odin, and one of the foremost of the gods, but the lawlessness and passion that were in him had won the mastery, and in earth and heaven he was fast bringing ruin and sorrow. What the hard-hearted frost-giants had always tried to do and failed, Loke did; for in the end the evil in him destroyed Asgard, and brought in the long winter of storm and darkness. It was he who stole Sif's hair and Freyja's necklace, who persuaded Idun to go into the woods that the giant Thjasse might carry off her apples, who stung the dwarf so that the handle of Thor's hammer was shortened, who induced Thor to go on his dangerous journey to Geirrod; but worst of all his crimes was the killing of Balder, and the refusal to weep for him when all the world was in tears.

After bringing so much sorrow upon others, suffering at last came to him. Not long after Raider's death the sea-god Æger gave a great feast, and brewed ale for the gods in the great kettle which Thor had taken from the giant Hymer. All the gods were there save Thor, and they tried to be merry, although they were sad enough at heart. In the midst of them sat Loke, gloomy and silent, as if his terrible crime had drawn a black line around him. The feast went on merrily; but he seemed to have no part in it, for no one spoke to him. Great horns of ale passed from hand to hand, and as they talked and feasted the gods forgot for a moment the sorrow that lay upon all the world.

"Æger," said one, "these are good servants of yours. They are quick of eye and foot, and one lacks nothing under their care."

Loke was so full of rage that he could not endure that even the servants of the other gods should be praised, and with flashing eyes and a face black with hate he sprang from his place and struck the servant nearest him so violently that he fell dead on the floor. A silence of horror fell on all the gods at this new sin, and then with fierce indignation they drove him out, and shut the doors against him forever. Loke strode off furiously for a little distance, and then turned and came back. The gods meantime had become merry again.

"What are they talking about?" he asked another servant who was standing without.

"They are telling their great deeds," answered the servant; "but no one has anything good to say of you."

Maddened by these words, Loke forgot his fear in a terrible rage, strode back into the hall and stood there like a thunder-cloud; when the gods saw him they became suddenly silent.

"I have travelled hither from a long distance," said he hoarsely, "and I am thirsty; who will give me to drink of the mead?"

No one spoke or stirred. Loke's face grew blacker.

"Why are you all silent?" he cried; "have you lost your tongues? Will you find place for me here, or do you turn me away?"

Brage looked at him steadily and fearlessly. "The gods will never more make room for you," he said.

When he heard these words, Loke ceased to look like a god, for the fury and hate of a devil were in his face. He cursed the gods until every face was pale with horror. Like an accusing conscience he told them all their faults and sins; he made them feel their weaknesses so keenly that Vidar, the silent god, rose to give him his seat and silence him, but now that his fury was let loose nothing could stop him. One by one he called each god by his name, and dragged his weaknesses into the view of all, and last of all he came to Sif, Thor's wife, and

cursed her; and now a low muttering was heard afar off, and then a distant roll of thunder deepening into awful peals that echoed and re-echoed among the hills. The gods sat silent in their places, and even Loke grew dumb. Great flashes of lightning flamed through the hall, and made his dark face more terrible to look at. Crash followed close upon crash until the mountains quaked, and the great hall trembled; then came a blinding flash, and Thor stood in the midst swinging Mjolner, and looking as if he would smite the world into fragments. He looked at Loke, and Loke, cowering before Thor's terrible eyes of fire, walked out of the hall cursing Æger as he went, and wishing that flames might break upon his realm and devour it and him. And now Loke, no longer a god in nature or in rank, became an outcast and a fugitive flying from the wrath of the gods whom he had insulted and wronged. He went from place to place until he came upon a deep valley among the mountains, so entirely shut in that he thought no one from Asgard could ever look into it. There he built a house in the hollows of the rocks, with four doors through which he could look in every direction, so that no one could come near his hiding-place without his knowing it. He took on many disguises; often in the daytime he took the shape of a salmon and hid in the deep waters, where he floated solitary and motionless while the gods were searching for him far and wide.

Days and weeks passed away, and Loke began to think he was safe from the pursuit of his enemies.

He began to busy and amuse himself as he used to do before he was shut out of Asgard. He had always been a skilful fisherman, and now, as he sat alone in his house before the fire, he took flax and yarn and began to knit the meshes of the first net that was made since the world began. His eyes burnt at the thought of the new sport which he was going to have, and his cunning hand wove thread after thread into the growing web. Odin, looking down from his lofty throne, saw

the busy weaver, and quickly calling Thor, the strongest, and Kvaser, the keenest of the gods, was soon on the journey to Loke's home among the mountains. Loke was so busy with his net that he did not see them until they were close at hand; then he sprang up, threw the net into the fire, and running to the river changed himself into a salmon, and dove deep into the still waters. When the gods entered the house Loke was nowhere to be found, but the sharp-eyed Kvaser found the half-burnt net among the glowing embers. He pulled it out and held it before Odin and Thor.

"I know what it is," he said in a moment; "it is a net for fishing; Loke was always a fisherman." Then, as if the thought had suddenly come to him, he added, "He has changed himself into a fish and is hiding in that river."

Odin and Thor were rejoiced to find their enemy so close at hand, and they all began to work on the half-burnt net and quickly finished it. Then they went softly down to the water, threw it in, and drew it slowly up the stream from shore to shore. But Loke swam between two large stones in the bed of the stream and the net only grazed him as it passed over. The gods finding the net empty hung a great stone on it, and, going back to the starting place, drew it slowly up stream again. Never, since the beginning of things, had there been such fishing before! The noisy river rolled swiftly down to the sea, the steep mountains rose on either side and shut out the sun so that even at mid-day it was like twilight. When Loke saw the net coming a second time and found that he could not escape, he waited until it was close at hand, and then with a mighty leap shot over it and plunged into a waterfall just where the river rushed into the sea.

The gods saw the great fish leap into the air and fall into the water, and they instantly turned around and dragged the net toward the sea, Thor wading after it in the middle of the stream. As the net came nearer and nearer Loke saw that he must either swim out into the sea or leap back again over the

net. He waited until the shadow of the net was over him, and then with a mighty leap shot into the air and over the net; but Thor was watching, and his strong hand closed round the shining fish. Loke managed to slip through Thor's fingers, but Thor held him by the tail, and that, as the story goes, is the reason why the salmon's tail is so thin and pointed.

Then the gods, glad at heart that they had caught the slayer of Balder, changed Loke into his natural shape and dragged him to a cavern in the mountains near at hand, where they fastened three great rocks, having pierced them first with holes. Loke's two fierce sons, Vale and Nare, they also seized, and changed Vale into a wolf, and immediately he sprang upon his brother and devoured him. Then the gods bound Loke, hand and foot, to the great stones, with iron fetters, and, to make his punishment the more terrible, they hung a serpent over him, which moment by moment through ages and ages dropped poison on his face. Loke's wife, Sigyn, when she saw his agony, stood beside him and caught the venom in a cup, as it fell drop by drop; but when the cup was full and she turned to empty it the poison fell on Loke, and he writhed so terribly that the whole earth trembled and quaked. So Loke was punished, and so he lay, chained and suffering, until the last great battle set him free.

CHAPTER XVI
The Twilight of the Gods

Although Loke was bound, and could do no more harm, Balder could not come back; and so Asgard was no longer the heaven it used to be. The gods were there, but the sunshine and the summer had somehow lost their glory, and were thenceforth pale and faint. At last there came a winter such as neither man nor god had ever seen before. The days were short and dark, blinding storms followed fast upon each other and left mountains of snow behind, fierce winds swept the sky and troubled the sea, and the bitter air froze the very hearts of men into sullen despair. The deepest rivers were fast bound, the fiercest animals died in their lairs, there was no warmth in the sun, and even the icy brightness of the stars was dimmed by drifting snow. The whole earth was buried in a winter so bitter that the gods shivered in Asgard.

The long nights and the short, dark days followed fast upon each other, and as the time drew near when summer would come again men's hearts grew light with hope once more. Each day they looked into the sullen skies, through which clouds of snow were whirling, and said to each other, "Tomorrow the summer will come;" but when the morrow came no summer came with it. And all through the months that in other days had been beautiful with flowers the snow fell steadily, and the cold winds blew fiercely, while eyes grew sad and hearts heavy with waiting for a summer that did not come. And it never came again; for this was the terrible Fimbul-winter, long foretold, from which even the gods could not escape. In Jotunheim there was joy among the frost-giants as they shouted to each other through the howling storms, "The Fimbul-winter has come at last." At first men shuddered

as they whispered, "Can it be the Fimbul-winter?" But when they knew it beyond all doubting a blind despair filled them, and they were reckless alike of good or evil. Over the whole earth war followed fast upon war, and everywhere there were wrangling and fighting and murder. It hardly snowed fast enough to cover the blood-stains. Mothers forgot to love their little children, and brothers struck each other down as if they were the bitterest enemies.

Three years passed without one breath of the warm south wind or the blossoming of a single flower, and three other years darker and colder succeeded them. A savage joy filled the hearts of the frost-giants, and they shook their clenched hands at Asgard as if they had mastered the gods at last. On the earth there was nothing but silence and despair, and among the gods only patient waiting for the end. One day, as the sun rose dim and cold, a deep howl echoed through the sky, and a great wolf sprang up from the underworld and leaped vainly after it. All day long, through the frosty air, that terrible cry was heard, and all day the giant wolf ran close behind, slowly gaining in the chase. At last, as the sun went down over the snow-covered mountains, the wolf, with a mighty spring, reached and devoured it. The glow upon the hills went out in blackness; it was the last sunset. Faint and colourless the moon rose, and another howl filled the heavens as a second wolf sprang upon her track, ran swiftly behind, and devoured her also. Then came an awful darkness over all as, one by one, the stars fell from heaven, and blackness and whirling snow wrapped all things in their folds. The end had come; the last great battle was to be fought; "Ragnarok, the Twilight" of the Gods, was at hand.

Suddenly a strange sound broke in upon the darkness and was heard throughout all the worlds; on a lofty height the eagle Egder struck his prophetic harp. The earth shook, mountains crumbled, rocks were rent, and all fetters were broken. Loke shook off his chains and rushed out of his cavern,

his heart hot with hate and burning with revenge, the terrible Fenris-wolf broke loose, and out of the deep sea the Midgard-serpent drew his long folds toward the land, lashing the water into foam as he passed. From every quarter the enemies of the gods gathered for the last great battle on the plain of Vigrid, which was a hundred miles wide on each side. Thither came the Fenris-wolf, his hungry jaws stretched so far apart that they reached from earth to heaven; the Midgard-serpent, with fiery eyes and pouring out floods of venom; the awful host of Hel with Loke at their head; the grim ranks of the frost-giants marching behind Hrym; and, last of all, the glittering fire-giants of Muspelheim, the fire-world, with Surt at the front.

The long line of enemies already stretched across the plain when Heimdal, standing on the rainbow bridge, blew the Gjallar-horn to call the gods. No sooner had Odin heard the terrible call to arms than he mounted and rode swiftly to Mimer's fountain, that he might know how to lead the gods into battle. When he came, the Norns sat veiled beneath the tree, silent and idle, for their work was done, and Ygdrasil began to quiver as if its very roots had been loosened. What Odin said to Mimer no one will ever know. He had no sooner finished speaking than Heimdal blew a second blast, and out of Asgard the gods rode forth to the last great battle, the golden helmet and shining armour of Odin leading the way. There was a momentary hush as the two armies confronted each other, and then the awful fight began. Shouts of rage rose from the frost-giants, and the armour of the fire-giants fairly broke into blaze as they rushed forward. The Fenris-wolf howled wildly, the hosts of Hel grew dark and horrible with rage, and the Midgard-serpent coiled its scaly length to strike. But before a blow had been struck the shining forms of the gods were seen advancing, and their battle-cry rang strong and clear across the field. Odin and Thor started side by side, but were soon separated. Odin sprang upon the wolf, and after

a terrible struggle was devoured. Thor singled out his old enemy, the Midgard-serpent, and in a furious combat slew him; but as the monster died it drew its folds together with a mighty effort and poured upon Thor such a deadly flood of venom that he fell back nine paces, sank down and died. Frey encountered Surt, and because he had not the sword he had given long before to Skirner, could not defend himself, and he too was slain. The dog Garm rushed upon Tyr, the sword-god, and both were killed, Tyr missing the arm which he lost when the Fenris-wolf was bound.

And now the battle was at its height, and over the whole field gods, monsters, and giants were fighting with the energy of despair. Heimdal and Loke met, struggled, and fell together, and Vidar rushed upon the wolf which had devoured Odin, and tore him limb from limb. Then Surt strode into the middle of the armies, and in an awful pause flung a flaming firebrand among the worlds. There was a breathless hush, a sudden rush of air, a deadly heat, and the whole universe burst into blaze. A roaring flame filled all space and devoured all worlds, Ygdrasil fell in ashes, the earth sank beneath the sea. No sun, no moon, no stars, no earth, no Asgard, no Hel, no Jotunheim; gods, giants, monsters, and men all dead! Nothing remained but a vast abyss filled with the moaning seas, and brooded over by a pale, colourless light. Ragnarok, the end of all things, the Twilight of the Gods, had come.

CHAPTER XVII
The New Earth

Ages came and went, and there was no one to count their years as they passed; starless and sunless, the sea rolled and moaned in the great abyss of space. How long that dim twilight lasted no one will ever know, for who, save the All-father, numbered the ages or kept reckoning of their flight! Invisible, unmoved, the eternal Spirit who had ruled over all things from the beginning, and whose servants the mightiest of the gods had been, kept watch over the starless spaces of the universe, sowing in the measureless furrows the seeds of a new world and a new race.

At last the hour was ripe, and a faint glow stole through the dusky space and spread itself over the sea. It was so dim at first that the waves were hardly coloured by it, but it deepened and deepened until it lay rose-red across the waters, and made all the upper air rich and beautiful. Moment by moment the sky kindled and sent its new glory deep into the heart of the sea, until at last, though there was no song to welcome it, no grateful eyes of men and women to watch its coming, a new sun stood at the threshold of a new day and filled the hollow heavens and the great deep with light and warmth. All day the splendour of the new time bathed air and water in its glow, and when the sun sank at last in the west, and the old darkness began to steal back again, one by one the stars found their places and set their silver lamps swinging in the restless waves.

Day followed day, and night followed night, and yet sun and stars looked down on a wide waste of waters. But there came a day at last when the waters were parted by a point of

land, and hour by hour it widened as a new earth rose fresh and beautiful out of the depths of the sea. Over it the sun poured such a glow of warmth that life stirred under every sod; trees shot from the rich soil and made new forests for the wind to play upon; the grass spread itself softly over the barren places, and with deft fingers wove a garment for the whole earth, flowers bloomed along the hillsides and opened their fragrant leaves deep in the forests; birds broke the stillness of the woods and made circles of song in the upper air; the rivers flowed on silently to the sea; the fjords caught once more the shadows of the mountains; and the waterfalls were white with foam of rushing streams.

And when all was ready, and the blue sky once more overarched a world of peace and joy and fruitful fields, Balder came back more fair and beautiful than in the old days at Asgard. With him came his brother Hoder, who had killed him, and they were not long alone; for one by one Hoener, Vidar, and Vale rejoined them. The flame had not touched so much as the hem of their garments, nor had the floods destroyed them. Thor's work was done, but his sons, Magne and Mode, brought back to earth the wonderful hammer which had so often flashed over frost-giants and rung in their ears. More wonderful than all, out of Mimer's forest, where the fountain of memory once stood, and through which the feet of Odin had so often gone in search of knowledge, came Lifthraser and Lif, the one man and woman who had escaped the ruin of the world. And they drank the dew of the morning and grew strong and beautiful. They plucked the sweet new flowers and turned the furrows of the fresh earth, and the harvests waved for them abundantly in all the future years until their children and their children's children filled the whole earth.

The beautiful plain of Ida lay green and bright all the year and bordered with perennial flowers as the suns circled around it; and the gods were at peace at last. No frost-giants

invaded the new heaven or darkened the new earth. Through the long bright days Balder and Hoder often sat together and talked of the olden time, of the Midgard-serpent, and the wolf Fenrer, and of Loke's misdoings. Through earth and heaven there was unbroken rest; for often when the gods met to take counsel together the voice of the unseen All-father spoke to them with infinite wisdom, appeasing quarrels, pronouncing judgment, and establishing peace for ever and ever. And so through all the ages the new world will move to the end. Trees will wave, flowers bloom, stars shine, rivers flow, men toil and reap in the fruitful fields, the gods look lovingly down from the plain of Ida upon their labours; for the hand of the great All-father will lift men through obedience and industry to himself.

Norse Mythology

We all know something about the gods of Greece. English poets have dreamed and sung of them for six hundred years. I am sure that Chaucer used to tell his "lyte sone" Lewis, in the London twilights, stories of the sleepy god Morpheus; probably Milton could recite the names of all the Olympian twelve while he was still a pale-faced child, heavy-eyed from midnight study; and even the good, grave Wordsworth almost wished the pagan times would come again, so that he might

> "Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
> Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn."

The gods of the North, on the other hand, are all but strangers to English literature. It is less than one hundred and fifty years ago that the scholar-poet, Gray, wrote his two Norse odes; and what he knew about Odin and the Choosers of the Slain he had learned, in all likelihood, not from the Eddas themselves, but from Latin translations. Gray and the few men of his time who cared about the subject thought of the Norse myths as stern and dreadful. The first voice in England to speak out, thunder-loud, as its manner was, in a true praise of the Scandinavian faith, was the voice of Thomas Carlyle.

In 1840, Carlyle, lecturing on *The Hero as Divinity,* chose Odin for his example. In this lecture Carlyle said, so forcibly that no man has bettered his saying since, that the Norse mythology still has an especial value for northern peoples; that it depicts northern weather a constant strife between the powers that make for heat and light and those that make for cold and dark; that it has beauty, fun, and tenderness as well

as rugged strength; and that, in its sincerity and earnestness, through its sturdy, brave, hard-working gods and heroes, it still interprets to northerners their deepest moral life. "In fact," said Carlyle, "these old Norse songs have a *truth* in them, an inward perennial truth and greatness; a rude greatness of soul."

Since then, from time to time, a few English and American poets, Kingsley and Gerald Massey, Longfellow and Lowell, have touched upon Norse themes. Matthew Arnold rendered in blank verse, toned to solemn harmonies, the myth of *Balder Dead.* William Morris told in thousands of long, elastic lines, singing like pine forests, the tale of "the golden Sigurd,"

> "how the foes of God he slew,
> How forth from the darksome desert the Gold of the Waters he drew;
> How he wakened Love on the Mountain, and wakened Brynhild the Bright,
> And dwelt upon Earth for a season, and shone in all men's sight."

These poems, together with Wagner's operas and the recent labors of Icelandic students and translators, have at last gained the Norse myths a hearing in England and America. They are not woven, like the Greek, into the very warp and woof of our literature, but they blow, with the freshness of a Baltic breeze, through the air of our own time. We see new pictures now in heaven and earth. Within the red sunset is that strange grove Glaser, its leaves of shimmering gold, where Odin sits earnestly hearkening to his ravens, who come back to him at evening from their flight over all the world, bringing to his ears the tidings of another day. The snow-white robes of Frigg, his queen, show in the silent summer sky, where she is spinning sunbeams, like the good

housewife that she is, and weaving tinted clouds. When the thunder rumbles above a golden harvest-field, Thor in his brazen chariot is greeting his bright-haired Sif. By the sea-shore one may catch glimpses of the green-clad, shell-crowned Njord, watching his wheeling gulls, while his light-foot daughter, Freyja, chases her flocks of dainty hens, the butterflies, and her brother Frey folds his magic ship Skidbladner and takes, in the sunny noon, a ride upon his golden-bristled boar. The drawn sword of Heimdal flashes from the rainbow bridge, the frost giants roar in wintry storms, all the circle of the air is full of wings and spears and wonders.

This out-of-door picture book, as we think it over by the fireside, nerves to nobler living. Something in us, deeper than memory, responds to the appeal of these plain, frank, lovable gods. Odin is All-father, grieved with the griefs of the wide world. He is, too, the eternal truth-seeker, unresting, unflinching, wandering to the farthest bounds of space and probing the darkest deeps in his quest for wisdom. We know dimly of his sufferings and sacrifice. Nine nights he hung upon Ygdrasil; eight days he was tortured between Geirrod's fires; he yielded up an eye to Mimer for one draught from the holy well. Tyr stands for generosity and courage. He lost his right arm in Fenrer's jaws that Asgard might be safe a little longer. Thor, perhaps the most ancient and most genuinely Scandinavian of all these stalwart gods, is, in his blunt way, the friendliest. The brave old Norsemen felt most at home with the Thunderer. They blessed their yellow-headed babies with the sign of the hammer long before they had learned to bless them with the sign of the cross. Thor is the hard worker, the strong wrestler, the homely, hearty, honest god, who asks no better reward for one task well done than to begin another.

If life were an easy thing, if human beings were always beautiful, happy, and successful, men might be slow to reverence these trouble-worn Norse gods. For the chief of them is one-eyed, another is one-armed, another is blind. The dearest

must die in his youth, and the loving weep for him in vain. Terrible enemies are all about the, god-realm flame giants and frost giants, a wild wolf straining at his bonds, a hideous serpent whose struggles heave up the sea. And the day is steadily drawing on when all the universe holds of hate and horror and evil shall be let loose upon the plain of Vigrid, where as Odin never forgets the gods are to fight a losing fight and perish in the ruins of the world.

It is for their very labors and losses, for the defeat awaiting them, and the cheery courage with which they face defeat, that the northern heart clings to the gray-weather gods. It is easy to understand how a Scandinavian warrior would dread "the straw death" at home, and long to die by steel, not so much that he might be found worthy to feast, through the waiting ages, with Odin's chosen heroes in the gold-roofed Hall of the Slain, but worthy in that last great battle to fall by Odin's side. The Norse mythology teaches us this rune that there is something better than victory.

The Odin faith did not lead men to regard the gods as unfailing sources of pleasant gifts. Children first look upon their parents so, but when the son realizes, by some swift and sudden forecast, that those who have been so strong for him must meet their time of weakness and call upon his strength, a deeper, purer love springs in his soul. In such a spirit the old Norsemen looked forward to "the Dusk of the Gods," to "Odin's Need," more loyal than selfish worshipers could comprehend to the lost cause of Asgard, and to "the Sorrow of Odin the Goth."

KATHARINE LEE BATES.

Notes

I. *Edda.* "The word 'Edda' is never found at all in any of the dialects of the Old Northern tongue, nor indeed in any other tongue known to us. The first time it is met with is in the *Lay of Righ* [Elder Edda], where it is used as a title for great-grandmother. * * * How or why Snorri's book on the Poetic Art came to be called 'Edda' we have no actual testimony. * * * It seems to have kept up indeed the very remembrance of court-poetry, the memory of which, but for it, would otherwise have perished. But though the medieval poets do not copy 'Edda' [*i.e.*, Snorri's rules], they constantly allude to it, and we have an unbroken series of phrases from 1340 to 1640 in which 'Edda' is used as a synonym for the technical laws of the court-metre."

—*Introduction to*
"Corpus Poeticum Bore ale."

It seems, then, that the word Edda, as used in Iceland during the centuries from Chaucer to Milton, had reference to that part of Snorre Sturleson's book which treats of the rules of metre rather than to its stories of the Norse gods. This Younger Edda, or Prose Edda, consists of several sections, and was probably written by several hands. The contribution of that famous Icelander, Snorre Sturleson, eminent as politician, magistrate, poet, and historian, was made before 1241, when he was murdered by a conspiracy of rival chiefs. The Younger Edda, as we now have it, is written mainly in prose and principally consists of —

1. A preface, later than the rest, giving the history of the world from Adam down to the kings of Norway and Sweden.

2. *The Fooling of Gylfe.* (Norse mythology)

3. *Brage's Talk.* (Norse mythology.)

4 and 5 *Poetical Diction and Verse Technique.* (Including illustrative extracts from the poets and a few more stories of the gods in prose.)

In 1642 turned up an old vellum manuscript, the book now

known as the Elder or Poetic Edda, containing a series of songs about Norse gods and heroes. The most ancient of these lays cannot date before the ninth century, although their substance of myth and legend may reach back to the earliest Teuton times. On the other hand, some leading scholars of today contend that the myths of the Eddas stand only in part for a primitive Norse religion, but are largely the distorted reflection of such classical and Christian stories as came to the ears of the far-roving Norsemen.

II. *Galley.* A Viking ship was known by its striped sails, raven banner, and gilded dragon-beak. Such a ship was "The Long Serpent," described in Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (The Saga of King Olaf, Sections XIII. and XIV.). In Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung* (Book III.) is an account of Viking ships going forth on a summer raid:

"Now again in the latter summer do those Kings of the Niblungs ride
To chase the sons of the plunder that curse the ocean-side:
So over the oaken rollers they run the cutters down
Till fair in the first of the deep are the glittering bows upthrown;
But shining, wet and steel-clad, men leap from the surfy shore,
And hang their shields on the gunwale, and cast abroad the oar;
Then full to the outer ocean swing round the golden beaks,
And Sigurd sits by the tiller and the host of the spoilers seeks.
But lo, by the rim of the out-sea where the masts of the Vikings sway,
And their bows plunge down to the sea-floor as they ride the ridgy way,
And show the slant decks covered with swords from stem to stern;
Hark now, how the horns of battle for the clash of warriors yearn,
And the mighty song of mocking goes up from the thousands of throats,
As down the wind and landward the raven banner floats."

In the same poet's *The Fostering of Aslaug (The Earthly Paradise,* Vol. III.) we read of such another

> "long ship, with shield-hung rail,
> And fair-stained flapping raven-sail,
> And golden dragon-stem."

III. *Thor's hammer.*

"Thunder was not then mere Electricity, vitreous or resinous; it was the God Donner (Thunder), or Thor—God also of beneficent Summer-heat. The thunder was his wrath; the gathering of the black clouds is the drawing down of Thor's angry brows; the fire-bolt bursting out of heaven is the all-rending Hammer flung from the hand of Thor: he urges his loud chariot over the mountain-tops, that is the peal: wrathful he 'blows in his red beard'; that is the rustling storm-blast before the thunder begins."

—THOMAS CARLYLE:
Heroes and Hero Worship.

See also Longfellow's *The Challenge of Thor.*

IV. *to build the worlds.* This account is mainly derived from the fourth chapter of *The Fooling of Gylfe* in the Younger Edda. This Younger Edda, in its mythological portions, is in some sort a commentary upon the text of the Elder, as, in this instance, upon certain stanzas of the first three songs, *The Vala's Prophecy, The Lay of Vafthrudner, The Lay of Grimner.*

V. *Ygdrasil.* Carlyle says of the Norsemen, in *Heroes and Hero Worship:*

"All Life is figured by them as a Tree. Igdrasil, the Ash-tree of Existence, has its roots deep down in the kingdoms of Hela or Death; its trunk reaches up heaven-high, spreads its boughs over the whole Universe: it is the Tree of Existence. At the foot of it, in the Death-kingdom, sit Three *Nornas,* Fates — the Past, Present, Future; watering its roots from the Sacred Well. Its 'boughs' with their buddings and disleafings — events, things suffered, things

done, catastrophes — stretch through all lands and times. Is not every leaf of it a biography, every fibre there an act or word? Its boughs are Histories of Nations. The rustle of it is the noise of Human Existence, onwards from of old. It grows there, the breath of Human passion rustling through it; — or storm-tossed, the storm-wind howling through it like the voice of all the gods. It is Igdrasil, the Tree of Existence. It is the past, the present, and the future; what was done, what is doing, what will be done; it is 'the infinite conjugation of the verb *To do.*'"

The Christmas-tree is believed to be a survival from pagan times, in honor of Ygdrasil. Germans still hang the Christmas-tree with symbols of the life of the universe, and with reminders of the old Norse deities.

"The fir stands for the tree itself. The lights represent the lightnings flashing overhead, and the golden apples, the nuts, and the balls symbolize the sun, moon, and stars, or the gods they represented. It is owing to the quiet influence of old traditions that the confectioners and toy manufacturers make their little sugar and papier-maché figures of stags, horses, goats, swans, squirrels, and eagles, and that the animals consecrated to the gods, or offered to them in sacrifice, are still hung upon the tree. Thus we still find there the ravens and wolves of Odin, the bucks of Thor, Freya's cats, and Freyer's golden-bristled boar, with oxen, lambs, goats, fish, etc. On a true Christmas-tree all these creatures appear, peeping out here and there among the green branches of the fir, while Nidhoggr, the dragon, is represented by strings of raisins or popcorn coiled about the trunk."

CARLA WENCKEBACH: *A Christmas Book.*

As to the origin of this myth, Scandinavian scholars differ strongly. Some hold it to be a confused echo of the story of the cross and find a confirmation of their view in the strange opening of Odin's rune-song in the Elder Edda:

"I know that I hung
on a windy tree
nine whole nights

with a spear wounded
offered to Odin,
myself to myself;
on that tree
of whose deep root
no one knoweth.
No bread they gave me
nor horn of drink;
down I gazed
and I read the runes;
wisdom I won
with a cry, and fell."

Others see in Ygdrasil a testimony to the ancient origin of Norse mythology in some Teutonic country where forests were thicker than in Iceland, and where a house was sometimes built about the trunk of a tree, as in the woodland palace of the Volsungs:

"Thus was the dwelling of Volsung, the King of the Midworld's Mark,
As a rose in the winter season, a candle in the dark;
And as in all other matters 'twas all earthly houses' crown
And the least of its wall-hung shields was a battle-world's renown,
So therein withal was a marvel and a glorious thing to see,
For amidst of its midmost hall-floor sprang up a mighty tree,
That reared its blessings roof ward, and wreathed the roof-tree dear
With the glory of the summer and the garland of the year.
I know not how they called it ere Volsung changed his life,
But his dawning of fair promise, and his noon-tide of the strife,
His eve of the battle-reaping and the garnering of his fame
Have bred us many a story and named us many a name;
And when men tell of Volsung they call that war-duke's tree,
That crowned stem, the Branstock; and so was it told unto me.
So there was the throne of Volsung beneath its blossoming bower,

But high o'er the roof-crest red it rose 'twixt tower and tower,
And therein were the wild hawks dwelling, abiding the dole of their lord;
And they wailed high over the wine, and laughed to the waking sword."

WILLIAM MORRIS:
The Story of Sigurd the Volsung. (Book I.)

From the fact of such a home-tree to the dream of a great world-tree is no long step, nor from the world-tree to the spirit-tree of human life, as hinted in the Elder Edda. Stags gnaw Ygdrasil above, dragons tear it below, it has its secret rottenness, yet it grows green in spite of all, for the Norns sprinkle it with living water.

VI. *Odin, Hœner, and Loder.* In *Sigurd the Volsung* (Book II.) Morris tells how these three gods were wont to walk the earth together—

"Now as the years won over, three folk of the heavenly halls
Grew a-weary of sleepless sloth, and the day that nought befalls;
And they fain would look on the earth, and their latest handiwork,
And turn the fine gold over, lest a flaw therein should lurk.
And the three were the heart-wise Odin, the Father of the Slain,
And Loki, the World's Begrudger, who maketh all labour vain,
And Hoenir, the Utter-Blameless, who wrought the hope of man,
And his heart and inmost yearnings, when first the work began;
—The God that was aforetime, and hereafter yet shall be
When the new light yet undreamed of shall shine o'er earth and sea"

In creating man and woman from blocks of wood, Odin in-breathed the soul, Hœner gave senses and motion, while Loke, who, as fire, works both good and evil, filled their veins with ruddy blood. The first chant of the Elder Edda tells how these three gods

"found on earth,

nearly powerless,
Ask and Embla,
empty of fate.
Spirit they had not,
senses possessed not,
blood nor motion,
nor color fair.
Spirit gave Odin,
sense gave Hoenir,
blood gave Lodur,
and color fair."

VII. *Gods and Men.* This chapter derives from *The Fooling of Gylfe* in the Younger Edda, although, as before, there enter into the prose account various fragments of quotation from the Poetic Edda.

VIII. The quotation is ascribed in the Younger Edda to the skald Thjodolf.

IX. The quotation is from the Elder Edda, *Hávamál.*

X. *Odin's Search for Wisdom.* The main material of this third chapter is taken from the second song of the Elder Edda, *The Lay of Vafthrudner*, but Odin's bargain with Mimer is recounted in the first song, *The Vala's Prophecy,* and repeated in the Younger Edda *(The Fooling of Gylfe,* Chap. VII.). The name Odin, or Woden, is thought by some scholars to be of the same origin as the word god. Odin had no less than two hundred names, as, Father of the Ages, Father of Hosts, Father of Victory, the High One, the Swift One, the Wanderer, Long-beard, Burning-eye, Slouchy-hat. Odin is a one-eyed god, because the sky has but one sun. His raiment is sometimes blue and sometimes gray, as the weather is fair or cloudy. The following passage from *Sigurd the Volsung* shows how Norsemen imagined their god of the heavens to look:

"So round about the Branstock they feast in the gleam of the gold;
And though the deeds of man-folk were not yet waxen old,

Yet had they tales for songcraft, and the blossomed garth of rhyme;
Tales of the framing of all things, and the entering in of time
From the halls of the outer heaven; so near they knew the door.
Wherefore uprose a sea-king, and his hands that loved the oar
Now dealt with the rippling harp gold, and he sang of the shaping of earth,
And how the stars were lighted, and where the winds had birth,
And the gleam of the first of summers on the yet untrodden grass.
But e'en as men's hearts were hearkening some heard the thunder pass
O'er the cloudless noontide heaven; and some men turned about
And deemed that in the doorway they heard a man laugh out.
Then into the Volsung dwelling a mighty man there strode,
One-eyed and seeming ancient, yet bright his visage glowed;
Cloud-blue was the hood upon him, and his kirtle gleaming-gray
As the latter morning sundog when the storm is on the way;
A bill he bore on his shoulder, whose mighty ashen beam
Burnt bright with the flame of the sea and the blended silver's gleam,
And such was the guise of his raiment as the Volsung elders had told
Was borne by their fathers' fathers, and the first that warred in the wold."

XI. *Mead.* This story of the poetic mead is mainly derived from the Younger Edda *(Brages Talk,* Chap. IV.). The myth is told in brief in the Elder Edda *(Hávamál).* Njord the vanagod, who, after the great war, dwelt in Asgard as a hostage, while Odin's brother, Keener, went as hostage to the Vans, is thus described by Matthew Arnold in his poem *Balder Dead:*

"Niord, the god of storms, whom fishers know;
Not born in Heaven he was in Vanheim rear'd,
With men, but lives a hostage with the gods;

He knows each frith, and every rocky creek
Fringed with dark pines, and sands where seafowl scream."

In this same poem we have the following account of Freyja:

"And Freya next came nigh, with golden tears;
The loveliest goddess she in Heaven, by all
Most honour'd after Frea, Odin's wife.
Her long ago the wandering Oder took
To mate, but left her to roam distant lands;
Since then she seeks him, and weeps tears of gold.
Names hath she many; Vanadis on earth
They call her, Freya is her name in Heaven."

XII. *The Wooing of Gerd.* This story is told in the Younger Edda *(The Fooling of Gylfe,* Chap. XI.) and in a dramatic lay of the Elder Edda, *The Journey of Skirnir.* This lay was translated into English couplets by William Herbert one hundred years ago (1804). Anderson, in his Norse mythology, quotes at length from Herbert's poem and gives the following interpretation of the myth:

"Gerd is the seed; Skirner is the air that comes with the sunshine. Thus the myth is easily explained: The earth, in which the seed is sown, resists the embrace of Frey; his messenger Skirner, who brings the seed out into the light, in vain promises her the golden ears of harvest and the ring, the symbol of abundance. She has her giant nature, which has not yet been touched by the divine spirit; she realizes not the glory which she can attain to by Frey's love. Skirner must conjure her, he must use incantations, he must show her how she, if not embraced by Frey, must forever be the bride of the cold frost, and never experience the joys of wedded life. She finally surrenders herself to Frey, and they embrace each other, when the buds burst forth in the grove. This myth corresponds to Persephone."

XIII. *Draupner.* In a modern Danish poem, translated by Longfellow (see note XIV.), is described the making of this wonderful ring:

"I trow 'twas a goodly sight to see

The dwarfs, with their aprons on,
A-hammering and smelting so busily
Pure gold from the rough brown stone.

• • • • • •

They took them pure gold from their secret store,
The piece 'twas but small in size,
But ere 't had been long in the furnace roar,
'Twas a jewel beyond all prize.

A broad red ring all of wroughten gold,
As a snake with its tail in its head,
And a garland of gems did the rim enfold,
Together with rare art laid.

'Twas solid and heavy, and wrought with care,
Thrice it passed through the white flame's glow;
A ring to produce, fit for Odin to wear,
No labor they spared, I trow.

They worked it and turned it with wondrous skill,
Till they gave it the virtue rare,
That each thrice third night from its rim there fell
Eight rings, as their parent fair.

'Twas the same with which Odin sanctified
God Balder's and Nanna's faith;
On his gentle bosom was Draupner laid,
When their eyes were closed in death."

XIV. *Sif.* This myth is found in the Younger Edda, in the section which treats of *Poetical Diction* . The story is related in answer to the question "Why is gold called Sif's hair?" In Longfellow's *Poets and Poetry of Europe* and, again, in Anderson's *Norse Mythology,* may be found Longfellow's translation of Oelenschlaeger's poem, *The Dwarfs,* on this myth. The stanzas given in note XIII. are quoted from it.

XV. *Odin in Geirrod's Palace.* This chapter derives from the third song of the Elder Edda, *The Lay of Grimnir.*

XVI. *Idun.* This story is found in the Younger Edda *(Brage's Talk,* Chap. II., and *The Poetical Diction).* As a nature-myth it tells of the vivifying power of spring, the strife between wind (Thjasse) and fire (Loke), the theft of the Blossom Bride by wintry storm, the drooping and pining of all life in her absence, and the reawakening of joy and youth and melody at her return.

XVII. *Thor goes a-fishing.* This story is found in the Elder Edda, *The Lay of Hymir,* and is briefly repeated in the Younger Edda *(The Fooling of Gylfe,* Chap. XIV.). In Longfellow's *Poets and Poetry of Europe* and in Anderson's *Norse Mythology* may be found Longfellow's translation of Oelenschlaeger's poem, *Thor's Fishing.* This myth clearly shows the thunder-storm at strife with the sea, and, later, the breaking up of the polar ice. In *Harper's Monthly Magazine,* January, 1902, is a vivid illustration in color, from a painting by Howard Pyle, of Thor's struggle with the Midgard-serpent.

XVIII. *Æger.*

"Sea-tempest is the Jotun Ægir, a very dangerous Jotun; and now to this day, on our river Trent, as I learn, the Nottingham barge-men, when the river is in a certain flooded state (a kind of backwater, or eddying swirl it has, very dangerous to them), call it *Eager*. They cry out, 'Have a care, there is the *Eager* coming!' Curious; that word surviving, like the peak of a submerged world! The oldest Nottingham bargemen had believed in the God Ægir."

CARLYLE: *Heroes and Hero Worship.*

Compare Jean Ingelow's use of the word in *The High Tide on the Coast of Lincolnshire:*

"With that he cried and beat his breast;
For lo! along the river's bed
A mighty eygre reared his crest,
And uppe the Lindis raging sped.
It swept with thunderous noises loud;
Shaped like a curling snow-white cloud,

Or like a demon in a shroud.

And rearing Lindis, backward pressed,
Shook all her trembling bankes amaine;
Then madly at the eygre's breast
Flung uppe her weltering walls again.
Then bankes came downe with ruin and rout —
Then beaten foam flew round about —
Then all the mighty floods were out.

So farre, so fast the eygre drave,
The heart had hardly time to beat
Before a shallow seething wave
Sobbed in the grasses at oure feet:
The feet had hardly time to flee
Before it brake against the knee,
And all the world was in the sea."

XIX. *How Thor found his Hammer.* This myth is told in the Elder Edda *The Lay of Thrym.*

"*Frost,* the old Norse Seer discerns a monstrous hoary Jotun, the Giant *Thrym, Hrym,* or *Rime,* the old word now nearly obsolete here, but still used in Scotland to signify hoar-frost. *Rime* was not then as now a dead chemical thing, but a living Jötun or Devil; the monstrous Jötun Rime drove home his horses at night, sat 'combing their manes,' which horses were *Hail-clouds,* or fleet *Frost-winds*"

CARLYLE: *Heroes and Hero Worship.*

XX. *Hrungner.* This giant is mentioned twice in the Elder Edda, once as a friend of the hoary Hymer *(The Lay of Hymir),* and again in *The Lay of Harbard,* where Odin, disguised as Harbard the ferryman, and Thor, who wishes to cross, have a quarrel.

Harbard:
"Here will I stand
and here await thee,
thy stoutest foeman
since Hrungnir's fall."

Thor:

"Thou callest to mind
my battle with Hrungnir,
grimmest of giants,
with head of stone;
yet I made him stagger
and sink before me."

The story is fully told, both in prose and in verse, in the Younger Edda (section of *The Poetical Diction).*

XXI. *holmgang.* Of the rules governing an old Norse holmgang, Professor Anderson says:

"Each combatant was attended by a second, who had to protect him with a shield. The person challenged had the right to strike the first blow. When the opponent was wounded, so that his blood stained the ground, the seconds might interfere and put an end to the combat. He that was the first wounded had to pay the holding and fine."

—*Norse Mythology.*

XXII. *A mare's heart.* The mare's fluttering heart in the clay giant suggests the death of King Hogni the Niblung, son of Giuki. See the Volsunga Saga, or the last book of Sigurd the Volsitng.

XXIII. The Binding of the Wolf. This story derives from the Younger Edda *(The Fooling of Gylfe,* Chap. IX.).

XXIV. Leding and Drome. The Swedes still say, when anything is to be done with great exertion: "To get loose from Leding and dash out of Drome."

XXV. Thor's Wonderful Journey. The source of this story is the Younger Edda *(The Fooling of Gylfe,* Chap. XIV.). In Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship* (Lecture I., *The Hero as Divinity)* there is a vigorous summary of this myth. Carlyle and Mr. Mabie are not agreed about the giant's glove, which Carlyle understands to be a

mitten — "a most ancient, rustic glove."

XXVI. *Death of Balder.* The Elder Edda tells this beautiful myth in *The Lay of Vegtam* and in stanzas from *The Vala's Prophecy.* It is also found in the Younger Edda *(The Fooling of Gylfe,* Chap. XV.). The poet Gray has a stern and noble rendering of *The Lay of Vegtam* under the title *The Descent of Odin. Balder Dead* is the subject of a stately blank verse poem, very precious to lovers of old Norse lore, by Matthew Arnold. In Morris's *The Lovers of Gudrun (The Earthly Paradise,* Vol. II.), the funeral of Balder is described as the chief fresco in an Icelandic hall:

"For over the high-seat, in his ship there lay
The gold-haired Baldur, god of the dead day,
The spring-flowers round his high pile, waiting there
Until the Gods thereto the torch should bear;
And they were wrought on this side and on that,
Drawing on towards him. There was Frey, and sat
On the gold-bristled boar, who first they say
Ploughed the brown earth, and made it green for Frey.
Then comes dark-bearded Niord; and after him
Freyia, thin-robed, about her ankles slim
The grey cats playing. In another place
Thor's hammer gleamed o'er Thor's red-bearded face;
And Heimdall, with the gold horn slung behind,
That in the God's-dusk he shall surely wind,
Sickening all hearts with fear; and last of all
Was Odin's sorrow wrought upon the wall,
As slow-paced, weary-faced, he went along,
Anxious with all the tales of woe and wrong
His ravens, Thought and Memory, bring to him."

The mistletoe element in the Balder myth is somewhat puzzling. Professor Bugge says *(Home of the Eddic Poems):*

"Neither in Iceland nor in Norway can the mythical motive have arisen that it is from the mistletoe that Balder gets his death-wound. This plant does not grow in Iceland. In Norway it grows but in a few places. * * * In England, on the other hand, the mistletoe

is well known and very widespread. It occupies, moreover, a prominent place in popular superstition. * * * In the west of England the superstition is current even now that the cross was made of mistletoe, which at the time of Christ was a fair tree in the forest, but which was cursed because of the evil use to which it had been put, and condemned to live ever afterwards as an insignificant plant."

But while Professor Bugge regards the legend that the cross was made of mistletoe as an indication of Christian influence on the Norse myth, others claim that the contrary is true and that the medieval idea of a mistletoe cross arose out of the Norse memory of that fair, young, gentle god of their forefathers, done to death by mistletoe. However this may be, the nature interpretation of the myth is clear.

XXVII. *Loke.* The account of Loke's outrageous conduct at Æger's feast is given in the Elder Edda, in the lay very awkwardly entitled by Thorpe *Œgir's Compotation or Lokes Altercation.* His capture and punishment are recounted in the Younger Edda *(The Fooling of Gylfe,* Chap. XV.). Anderson says in his *Norse Mythology:*

"That Loke represents fire in its various forms becomes clearer with every new fact, every new event in his life. * * * That Loke symbolizes fire is also illustrated by the fact that the common people in Norway, when they hear the fire crackling, say that Loke is whipping his children. * * * When the sun draws water, they say that Loke is drinking water."

XXVIII. *The Twilight of the Gods.* Ragnarok is foretold in the first lay, *The Vala's Prophecy,* of the Elder Edda:

> "an axe age, a sword age,
> shields shall be cloven,
> a wind age, a wolf age,
> ere the world sinks."

This prophecy is repeated in the Younger Edda *(The Fooling of Gylfe,* Chap. XVI.).

XXIX. *The New Earth.* This is also foretold in the Elder Edda, in the closing stanzas of *The Vala's Prophecy*, and in *The Lay of Vafthrudnir.* The Younger Edda *(The Fooling of Gylfe,* Chap. XVII.) echoes this hope, which may, and may not, have come to the Norse through Christian suggestion.

XXX. *Balder came back.* Morris, in addressing Iceland *(Iceland First Seen)*, writes:

> "Ah! when thy Balder comes back,
> and bears from the heart of the Sun
> Peace and the healing of pain,
> and the wisdom that waiteth no more;
> And the lilies are laid on thy brow
> 'mid the crown of the deeds thou hast done;
> And the roses spring up by thy feet
> that the rocks of the wilderness wore,
> Ah! when thy Balder comes back
> and we gather the gains he hath won,
> Shall we not linger a little
> to talk of thy sweetness of old?"

WONDERFUL STORIES FROM NORTHERN LANDS

By Julia Goddard

CHAPTER I
King Olaf the Saint

Hundreds of years ago lived Olaf, a brave king, and his brother Harald Haardrade.

One day, when these brothers were talking together, they began to speak of old Norroway, the land of their birth.

'It is a land full of high hills,' said one.

'It is a land full of fertile valleys,' said the other, 'where there is no lack of waving corn, fair pastures, and summer flowers.'

'It is a land over which anyone might be content to reign,' said Olaf; 'a monarch might be justly proud of such a kingdom.'

'Truly,' replied Harald Haardrade; 'better fortune could no man wish.'

'Then,' answered Olaf, 'let us make a bargain. Our ships are in the harbour; they are well matched. Let us sail forth, and he who reaches first our native land, shall be king of old Norroway.'

'I am quite willing,' said Harald Haardrade; 'yet there is one condition I should like to make. Thou hast said that our ships are equally matched; nevertheless, I take thine to be the fastest sailer. Art thou willing to change vessels with me? So will we run the race.'

'I am willing,' said Olaf. 'If thou thinkest my vessel to be the fleeter, take her, and welcome, and I will take thine. Is this a fair bargain?'

'Perfectly fair,' answered Harald Haardrade, well satisfied that he should have his brother's ship.

Now the vessel belonging to Olaf was called the Dragon.

Lightly she danced over the waves, and a child could have turned her north, south, east, or west, by just one touch to the rudder. Harald Haardrade's ship, the Ox, was heavier built, and not so easy to manage; nevertheless, there was no fault to be found with her.

However, Olaf thought one vessel as good as the other, and, therefore, said nought against his brother's proposal; perhaps, too, he felt himself to be the better seaman. However, this may have been, the story does not say; but there is reason to think that something in his heart told Olaf that the change of ships would make no difference to their captains.

So the brothers parted, and Olaf, having made all things ready, went to the church to pray for a blessing upon his work, 'For,' said he, 'how can I expect to prosper unless I have the blessing of heaven?'

And as he passed along the aisle of the stately building, with his beautiful hair flowing over his shoulders, the people wished him success, and prayed that good King Olaf might win the race.

As he moved along in solemn mood, a messenger came in hot haste, and stopped him, saying, 'Why dost thou waste the time, King Olaf? thy brother is sailing away in the Dragon. Far ahead of thee will he be, if thou dost not turn thy steps aside from the altar, and follow him without delay.'

But King Olaf answered the messenger, 'Let those sail who choose to sail; I will not depart without the blessing of heaven.'

And so he waited quietly until the mass was over, and then went calmly down to the seashore.

The great white-crested waves were dashing on the strand, and the Ox rocked heavily at her moorings, and over the wide sweep of blue sea there was no sign of the Dragon. Away, far away, had the Dragon sped; the wind was in her favour, and she had weighed anchor, and set her sails, and danced gallantly away till there were now many miles between

her and the shore. Olaf strained his eyes, and saw a speck of white that fluttered for a moment and then vanished. Perchance it might be the Dragon.

However, Olaf did not despair. He had asked the blessing of heaven upon his undertaking, and although the beginning seemed bad, yet he said in his heart, 'Who can see so far as the end? I will not be dismayed.'

Strong in the might of his faith, he bade the sailors get ready, and when all was done he stepped on board his vessel. The anchor was raised; a gentle breeze stirred the sails; the helmsman guided the ship seaward; and as King Olaf stood at the prow, he said reverently, 'O Ox, Ox, speed thee on in the Name of the Lord.'

Then he leaned forward, and taking hold of one of the white horns of the Ox, as though it had been a living creature, he said, 'Now speed thee, O thou patient Ox, even as though thou wert going to pasture in fragrant clover fields.'

And as if in answer to his words, the heavy vessel gave a leap, and gallantly ploughed the wild waves. And the white spray rose even until it frosted over the king's beautiful locks, and he shouted to the watcher on the topmost mast, 'Ho, lad! Ho! Can'st thou see aught of the fleet-sailing Dragon?'

And the lad answered, 'I see naught upon the sea. There is not even a fishing-boat out upon the broad waters.'

And on they sailed in silence. After awhile, King Olaf called to the lad again, 'Ho, lad! Ho! Can'st thou see aught of the good ship Dragon?'

Then the lad answered, 'Nigh the land of Norroway I espy the silken sails of a vessel. The sun shines upon them, and they glitter as though they were bordered with gold.'

And King Olaf knew that it was his own brave ship, and again they sailed on in silence.

After awhile he called yet again to the lad, 'Ho, lad! Ho! Can'st thou see aught of the Dragon?'

And the lad made answer, 'Nigh the shores of old

Norroway, under the shade of the purple mountains, I see a vessel riding full sail before the wind, and I know that it is the good ship Dragon.'

Then King Olaf struck the Ox upon the ribs, and cried, 'Faster, faster, thou Ox, faster. There is no time to lose.'

And again he struck the Ox upon the eye, and shouted, 'Faster, faster, faster, if thou would'st have me win the haven.'

And suddenly it seemed as though the Ox had started into life, and was putting forth all its new-gained powers, for forward bounded the vessel with a sudden leap. Swiftly, swiftly, swiftly, no one had ever known such sailing. Swifter than a bird on the wing, swifter than an arrow through the air. So sped the Ox through the foaming sea. The sailors could not climb the rigging; indeed, it was more than they could do to stand firmly upon the deck; so King Olaf lashed them firmly to the masts, though the steersman asked him who was going to guide the ship. 'I will see to that myself,' answered King Olaf; 'not one of you shall be lost through me. I will guide the ship straight on like a line of light.'

And King Olaf stood by the helm, and he steered neither to the right nor to the left, but on, straight on, and his eye was fixed upon the goal.

'So must I run,' he said, 'if I would win the race.'

What mattered it to King Olaf though rocks and mountains stood in the way? His faith was stronger than the rocks. Right onward he went, and the valleys filled with water, and the mountains disappeared, the blue waves rolled over them, and the Ox went triumphantly on its way.

Out came running the little elves, for the sudden rising of the floods had disturbed them.

'Who art thou, bold mariner, who sailest over our homes? Behold the mountains shake with fury. Tell us what is thy name?'

'Quiet ye, quiet ye, little people,' answered King Olaf. 'I am Saint Olaf; turn ye into stones until I come this way again.'

So the little elves turned into stones, and rolled down the mountain sides, and the good ship went on her way.

She had not gone far before out came an old Carline, and said, 'Saint Olaf, I know you, with your beard shining like red gold. Wherefore do you bring with you the waters to mock us in our dwellings? Your ship has burst through the wall of my chamber. Evil luck be with you.'

Then Saint Olaf, for he was a saint as well as a king, fixed his glance witheringly upon the old Carline.

'Be thou turned into a flint rock,' said he, 'and so remain for ever and ever.'

And the Carline was turned into a rock, and Saint Olaf and his crew sailed on and on.

So fleetly flew the good ship Ox, that anyone must have had good eyes to see her as she flashed past, for so she sped on that if Saint Olaf drew his bow and shot an arrow forward, it fell far behind in the wake of the vessel.

This was fast sailing indeed, and with such speed it is not wonderful that though Harald Haardrade had had the start of his brother, yet Saint Olaf reached home three days before him.

Harald Haardrade was wild with rage when he came those three days later and found Saint Olaf king of Norroway.

And he raged and raged until at length he became a dragon. And this is the last that we hear of Harald Haardrade.

Now, as Saint Olaf had prayed for the blessing of heaven before he set out on his voyage, it was natural that his first act upon landing should be to go to the nearest church to return thanks for having so mightily prospered.

And as he walked up the crowded nave, a golden glory beamed from his fair hair, and the people of Norroway learned a great lesson from the faith of King Olaf the Saint.

CHAPTER II
The Story of Frithiof

I.

In a cottage overshadowed by wide spreading oaks, and surrounded by a garden in which bloomed the sweetest flowers of summer, lived an aged peasant named Hilding.

Two children might be seen playing about the garden from sunrise to sunset, but they were not old Hilding's children. The handsome boy was the son of the Thane, Thorsten Vikingsson; the little girl, with dovelike eyes and silken tresses, was the daughter of good King Bele.

Together the little ones played through the long pleasant days in their foster-father's garden, or wandered through the woods, or climbed the hills that sheltered them from the northern winds. The boy would seek treasures from the birds' nests for his fair companion, not even fearing to rob the mountain eagle, so that he might bring the spoil to Ingebjorg. He would also take her far out on the blue sea in his little boat, and Ingebjorg never felt afraid as long as Frithiof was with her.

As Frithiof grew older, he became a great hunter, and once he slew without weapons a fierce bear, which he brought home in triumph and laid at Ingebjorg's feet.

During the winter evenings, they sat by the blazing logs on the hearth, and Hilding told them wonderful stories of Asgard and all its glories, of Odin the king of the gods, and of the beautiful Friga.

But Frithiof thought she could not be half so beautiful as Ingebjorg. And once he said so to her, and it pleased her exceedingly. And he said, moreover, that when he was a man,

Ingebjorg should be his wife. This also she was glad to hear, for she loved Frithiof better than anyone in the world.

But old Hilding told them not to talk nonsense, for Ingebjorg was a king's daughter, and Frithiof but the son of a Thane.

II.

In a room of his palace stood King Bele. He was leaning on his sword, musing over all that was past, and thinking of the future. He was an old man, and he felt that his strength was failing him.

With him was his faithful friend Thorsten Vikingsson. They had grown up to manhood together, they had fought in many a battle side by side. They had been companions at many a feast and revel, and now, when old age had fallen upon them, they drew closer to one another, feeling that the hand of death was raised to summon them into another world.

'The end of life is near,' said the king, 'the shadow of death is cast upon me. No longer do I care for all that men call pleasure. The chase hath lost its charm, the helmet sits heavy upon my brow, and the mead hath lost its flavour. I would that my sons were here so that I might give them my blessing.'

Then the servants summoned to King Bele's presence his two sons Helgi and Halfdan. Dark was the countenance of Helgi, and there was blood upon his hands, for he had just been assisting at the mid-day sacrifice. But the face of Halfdan was bright as the early morning, and he was as light and joyous as his brother was dark and gloomy.

Frithiof also came, for the Thane Thorsten Vikingsson desired to see him, that he too might bless his son when King Bele blessed the royal princes.

And the two old friends spoke words of wisdom to their children, and prayed that the gods might be with them in peace and war, in joy and sorrow, and grant them a long life

and a glorious death.

And when their counsels and prayers were ended, King Bele said, 'And now, O sons, I bid you remember, in that day when death shall claim me and my faithful friend, that ye lay our bones side by side near the shore of the great ocean.'

III.

In due time, King Bele died, and Helgi and Halfdan shared his kingdom between them.

Thorsten Vikingsson died also, and Frithiof became lord of his ancestral home of Framnas.

Rich treasures did that home contain, three of them of magic power.

The first was the sword of Angurvadel. Blood-red it shone in time of war, and woe to him who contended with its owner on the battle-field.

Next was an arm-ring of pure gold, made by the god Volund, and given by him to one of Thorsten Vikingsson's forefathers. Once it was stolen and carried to England by the Viking Sote, but Thorsten and his friend King Bele pursued the robber. Over the sea they sailed after the Viking, and landed at a lonely place where the rocks reared up their sharp points and made the coast dangerous.

There were, deep caverns which the waters filled when the tide was up, so lone and dark that men were almost afraid to go into them.

But Thorsten Vikingsson and the king his master were not daunted. Hither had they come after the pirate, and here it was that he had last been heard of, and they searched along the shore and in the caves, and peered into every hole and cranny until their eyes grew strained and heavy, but no Viking Sote was to be seen.

They had almost given up hope of finding him, when, looking through a chink that had hitherto escaped their notice, a fearful sight was seen by the valiant Thane.

Within a mighty vault, forming a still cold tomb, there lay a vessel all complete, with masts and spars and anchor; and on the deck there sat a grim skeleton clad in a robe of flame, and on his skinless arm glittered the golden arm-ring wrought by Volund. The figure held in his left hand a blood-stained sword, from which he was trying to scour away the stains.

'It is my arm-ring,' said Thorsten Vikingsson; 'it is the spirit of the Viking Sote.'

And forthwith he forced his way into the tomb, and, after a deadly conflict with the spectre, regained his treasure.

And the two friends sailed home in triumph.

The third great thing that Frithiof inherited was the dragon-ship Ellide, which his forefathers had won in the following manner:—

One of them, a rough rude Viking, with a tender heart, was out at sea, and on a wreck that was fast sinking saw an old man with green locks sitting disconsolately.

The good-natured Viking picked him up, took him home, gave him of the best of food and of sparkling mead, and would have lodged him in his house; but the green-haired man said he could not tarry, for he had many miles to sail that night.

'But when the sun comes up in the east,' added the stranger, 'look for a thank-gift on the wild sea-shore.'

And behold, as morning dawned, the Viking saw a goodly vessel making gallant headway. As she drew near the land with streamer flying and broad sails flapping in the wind, the Viking saw that there was no soul on board of her, and yet without steersman to guide her the vessel avoided the shoals and held her way straight to the spot where he was standing.

Her prow was a dragon's head, a dragon's tail formed her stern, and dragon's wings bore her along swifter than an eagle before the storm.

The green-haired stranger was a sea-god, and the dragon-ship Ellide was his thank-gift.

Thus Frithiof, though only the son of a Thane, had

treasures that might have been coveted by kings and princes. He sat in his father's halls, surrounded by his companions; upon his right was seated his bosom friend Bjorn, and twelve bold champions clad in steel were ranged around the board. And they drank in silence to the memory of Thorsten Vikingsson.

But suddenly the harps struck up, and the skalds poured forth their songs in honour of the dead Thane.

And Frithiof's eyes filled with tears as he listened to his father's praises.

IV.

In spite of Frithiofs wealth, Helgi and Halfdan looked with disdain upon the son of their father's friend, and when Frithiof asked to have Ingebjorg for his wife, Helgi scornfully answered, 'My sister shall not wed the son of a Thane. If you like to be our serf, we will make room for you among our servants.'

Then went Frithiof away in wrath.

There was another suitor for the hand of Ingebjorg, good old King Ring, who, having lost his wife, thought that the Lily of the North would make a tender mother to his little son.

And he sent to Helgi and Halfdan to ask for Ingebjorg in marriage, but the brothers treated him as they had treated Frithiof; and the old king was roused, and he swore he would revenge himself.

Helgi and Halfdan were afraid when they found that Ring was really making ready for war. They began to get their army into order, and placed Ingebjorg for safety in the temple of Balder, and in their distress they even sent to Frithiof to ask him to come and help them.

They chose wisely in the messenger they sent to plead for them, for it was none other than old Hilding, who had been so kind to Frithiof in his childhood.

Frithiof was playing at chess with Bjorn when Hilding

arrived. He pretended not to hear the message, and went on with his game.

'Shall the pawn save the king?' he asked of Bjorn.

And after a time he added,

'There is no other way to save the queen.' Which showed that he had been all the time occupied with Hilding's errand.

Therefore he returned with the old peasant, and contrived to see Ingebjorg in the temple of Balder and found that she still loved him as much as he loved her, and did not wish to marry anyone else.

And again he asked Helgi and Halfdan if they were willing that Ingebjorg should be his wife.

And again the brothers said Nay with scorn, and told him that he had profaned the temple of Balder by speaking to Ingebjorg within its walls.

'For such a misdeed,' said Helgi, 'death or banishment is the doom, and thou art in our power. Nevertheless, we are willing, as we wish to make thee useful to us, to forego the penalty. Thou shalt therefore sail forth to the distant Orkney Isles, and compel Jarl Angantyr to pay the tribute that he owes us.'

Frithiof would have refused to go, but Ingebjorg persuaded him to undertake the mission, for she was afraid of her brothers, and knew that Frithiof would be safer on the wild seas than in their hands.

At last Frithiof consented, and he took leave of Ingebjorg, and placed the golden bracelet that Volund had made upon her arm, praying her to keep it for his sake.

And then he sailed away over the heaving waters, and Ingebjorg mourned that her lover was gone.

V.

Over the sea. It was calm enough when Frithiof started; the storm-winds were asleep, and the waters heaved gently as though they would fain help speed the dragon-ship peacefully

on her way.

But King Helgi standing on a rock repented that he had suffered the noble Frithiof to escape his malice, and as he watched the good ship Ellide riding over the sea, he prayed loudly to the ocean fiends that they would trouble the waters and raise a fierce tempest to swallow up Frithiof and the dragon-ship.

All at once, the sparkling sea turned leaden grey, and the billows began to roll, the skies grew dark, and the howl of the driving wind was answered by a sullen roar from the depths beneath. Suddenly, a blinding flash of lightning played around the vessel, and as it vanished the pealing thunder burst from the clouds. The raging sea foamed, and seethed, and tossed the vessel like a feather upon its angry waves, and deeper sounded the thunder, and more fiercely flashed the lightning round the masts.

Wilder, wilder, wilder, grew the storm. Alas, for Frithiof!

'Ho! take the tiller in hand,' shouted Frithiof to Bjorn, 'and I will mount to the topmost mast and look out for danger.'

And when he looked out, he saw the storm-fiends riding on a whale. One was in form like to a great white bear, the other like unto a terrible eagle.

'Now help me, O gift of the sea-god! Help me, my gallant Ellide!' cried Frithiof.

And the dragon-ship heard her master's voice, and with her keel she smote the whale; so he died, and sank to the bottom of the sea, leaving the storm-fiends tossing upon the waves.

'Ho, spears and lances, help me in my need!' shouted Frithiof, as he took aim at the monsters.

And he transfixed the shrieking storm-fiends, and left them entangled in the huge coils of sea-weed which the storm had uprooted.

'Ho, ho!' laughed rugged Bjorn, 'they are trapped in their

own nets.'

And so they were; and they were so much taken up with trying to free themselves from the seaweed and from Frithiof's long darts, that they were unable to give any heed to the storm, which therefore went down, and Frithiof and his crew sailed on, and reached the Orkney Isles in safety.

'Here comes Frithiof,' said the Viking Atle. 'I know him by his dragon-ship.'

And forthwith the Viking rose and went forth; he had heard of the strength of Frithiof, and wished to match himself against him.

He did not wait to see whether Frithiof came in enmity or friendship. Fighting was the first thing he thought of, and what he most cared for.

However, the Viking had the worst of it in the battle.

'There is witchcraft in thy sword,' said he to Frithiof.

So Frithiof threw his sword aside, and they wrestled together, unarmed, until Atle was brought to the ground.

Then spake Frithiof: 'And if I had my sword thou wouldst not long be a living man.'

'Fetch it, then,' replied Atle. 'I swear by the gods that I will not move until thou dost return.'

So Frithiof fetched his sword, but when he saw the conquered Viking still upon the ground, he could not bring himself to slay so honourable a man.

'Thou art too true and brave to die,' said Frithiof; 'rise, let us be friends.'

And the two combatants went hand in hand to the banquet hall of Angantyr, Jarl of the Orkney Islands.

A splendid hall it was, and a rare company of heroes was there, and all listened eagerly as Fnthiof told his story, and wherefore he had come.

'I never paid tribute to King Bele, though he was an old friend of mine,' said the Jarl, as Frithiof ended his speech, 'nor will I to his sons. If they want aught of me let them come and

take it.'

'It was by no choice of my own that I came upon such an errand,' returned Frithiof, 'and I shall be well content to carry back your answer.'

'Take also this purse of gold in token of friendship,' continued the Jarl, 'and remain with us, for I knew thy father.'

Thus Frithiof and the Jarl became good friends, and Frithiof consented to stay for awhile in the Orkney Islands; but after a time he ordered out his good ship Ellide, and set sail for his native land.

VI.

But fearful things had come to pass since he had left his home! Framnas, the dwelling of his fathers, was a heap of ruins, and the land was waste and desolate.

And as he stood upon the well-loved spot, striving to find some traces of the past, his faithful hound bounded forth to greet him, and licked his master's hand. And then his favourite steed drew near, and thrust his nose into Frithiof's hand, hoping to find therein a piece of bread, as in the days of old. His favourite falcon perched upon his shoulder, and this was Frithiof's welcome to the home of his ancestors.

There had been a fierce battle, for King Ring with his army had come against Helgi and Halfdan, and the country had been laid waste, and many warriors slain.

And when all chance of withstanding him was at an end, the brothers, rather than lose their kingdom, had consented that Ingebjorg should be the wife of Ring.

Ingebjorg was married! Frithiof's heart was full of deep sorrow, and he turned his steps towards the temple of Balder, hoping that at the altar of the god he might meet with consolation.

In the temple he found King Helgi, and the sorrow that was weighing down Frithiof's heart gave place to hatred and revenge.

Caring nothing for the sacred place, he rushed madly forward. 'Here, take thy tribute,' said he, and he threw the purse that Jarl Angantyr had given him with such force against the face of the king that Helgi fell down senseless on the steps of the altar.

Next, seeing his arm-ring on the arm of the statue, for Helgi had taken it from Ingebjorg and placed it there, he tried to tear it off, and, lo! the image tottered and fell upon the fire that was burning with sweet perfumes before it.

Scarcely had it touched the fire when it was ablaze, and the flames spreading rapidly on every side, the whole temple was soon a smouldering heap of ruins.

Then Frithiof sought his ship. He vowed that he would lead a Viking's life, and leave forever a land where he had suffered so much sorrow. And he put out to sea.

But no sooner were his sails spread than he saw ten vessels in chase of him, and on the deck of one stood Helgi, who had been rescued from the burning temple, and had come in chase of him.

Yet Frithiof was rescued from the danger as if by miracle, for one by one the ships sank down as though some water giant had stretched out his strong arm, and dragged them below, and Helgi only saved himself by swimming ashore.

Loud laughed Bjorn.

'I bored holes in them last night,' said he, 'it is a rare ending to Helgi's fleet'

'And now,' said Frithiof, 'I will forever lead a Viking's life. I care not for aught upon the land. The sea shall be my home. And I will seek climes far away from here.'

So he steered the good ship Ellide southward, and among the isles of Greece strove to forget the memories of bygone days.

VII.

In and out of the sunny islands that lay like bosses of

emerald on a silver shield sailed Frithiof, and on the deck of the dragon-ship he rested through the summer nights, looking up at the moon, and wondering what she could tell him of his northern land.

Sometimes he dreamed of his home as it was before the war-time. Sometimes he dreamed of the days when he and Ingebjorg roamed through the fields and woods together, or listened to old Hilding's stories by the blazing hearth, and then he would wake up with a start and stroke his faithful hound, who was ever near him, saying, 'Thou alone knowest no change; to thee all is alike, so long as thy master is with thee.'

One night, however, as Frithiof was musing on the deck of his vessel, gazing into the cloudless sky, a vision of the past rose up before him; old familiar faces crowded round him, and in their midst he marked one, best beloved of all, pale, sad with sorrowful eyes, and her lips moved, and he seemed to hear her say, 'I am very sad without thee, Frithiof.'

Then a great longing came upon Frithiof to see Ingebjorg once more. He would go northward, even to the country of King Ring; he must see Ingebjorg. What did he care for danger? He must, go.

To the cold dark north.

Yet he dared not go openly, for King Ring looked upon him as an enemy, and would seize him at once, and if he did not kill him would shut him up in prison, so that either way he would not see the beautiful queen.

Frithiof therefore disguised himself as an old man, and, wrapped in bearskins, presented himself at the palace.

The old king sat upon his throne, and at his side was Ingebjorg the Fair, looking like spring by the side of fading autumn.

As the strangely dressed figure passed along, the courtiers jeered, and Frithiof, thrown off his guard, angrily seized one of them, and twirled him round with but little effort.

'Ho!' said the king, 'thou art a strong old man, O stranger! Whence art thou?'

'I was reared in anguish and want,' returned Frithiof; 'sorrow has filled a bitter cup for me, and I have almost drunk it to the dregs. Once I rode upon a dragon, but now it lies dead upon the sea-shore, and I am left in my old age to burn salt upon the strand.'

'Thou art not old,' answered the wise king; 'thy voice is clear, and thy grasp strong. Throw off thy rude disguise, that we may know our guest.'

Then Frithiof threw aside his bearskin, and appeared clad in a mantle of blue embroidered velvet, and his hair fell like a golden wave upon his shoulder.

Ring did not know him, but Ingebjorg did; and when she handed the goblet for him to drink, her colour went and came 'like to the northern light on a field of snow.'

And Frithiof stayed at the court until the year came round again, and spring once more put forth its early blossoms.

One day a gay hunting train went forth, but old King Ring, not being strong, as in former years, lay down to rest upon the mossy turf beneath some arching pines, whilst the hunters rode on.

Then Frithiof drew near, and in his heart wild thoughts arose. One blow of his sword, and Ingebjorg was free to be his wife.

But as he looked upon the sleeping king, there came a whisper from a better voice, 'It is cowardly to strike a sleeping foe.'

And Frithiof shuddered, for he was too brave a man to commit murder.

'Sleep on, old man,' he muttered gently to himself.

But Ring's sleep was over. He started up. 'O Frithiof, why hast thou come hither to steal an old man's bride?'

'I came not hither for so dark a purpose,' answered Frithiof; 'I came, but to look on the face of my loved Ingebjorg

once more.'

'I know it,' replied the King, 'I have tried thee, I have proved thee, and true as tried steel hast thou passed through the furnace. Stay with us yet a little longer, the old man soon will be gathered to his fathers, then shall his kingdom and his wife be thine.'

But Frithiof replied that he had already remained too long, and that on the morrow he must depart.

Yet he went not, for death had visited the palace, and old King Ring was stretched upon his bier, whilst the bards around sang of his wisdom.

Then arose a cry among the people, 'We must choose a king!'

And Frithiof raised aloft upon his shield the little son of Ring.

'Here is your king,' he said, 'the son of wise old Ring.'

The blue-eyed child laughed and clapped his hands as he beheld the glittering helmets and glancing spears of the warriors. Then tired of his high place, he sprang down into the midst of them.

Loud uprose the shout, 'The child shall be our king, and the Jarl Frithiof regent. Hail to the young king of the Northmen!'

But Frithiof in the hour of his good fortune did not forget that he had offended the gods. He must make atonement to Balder for having caused the ruin of his temple. He must turn his steps once more homeward.

Home! Home! And on his father's grave he sank down with a softened heart, and grieved over the passion and revenge that had swayed his deeds. And as he mourned, the voices of unseen spirits answered him, and whispered that he was forgiven.

And to his wondering eyes a vision was vouch-safed, and the temple of Balder appeared before him, rebuilt in more than its ancient splendour, and deep peace sank into the soul

of Frithiof.

'Rise up, rise up, Frithiof, and journey onward.'

The words came clear as a command to Frithiof, and he obeyed them. He rose up, and journeyed to the place where he had left the temple a heap of blackened ruins.

And, lo! the vision that had appeared to him was accomplished, for there stood the beautiful building, stately and fair to look upon. So beautiful, that, as he gazed, his thoughts were of Valhalla.

He entered, and the white-robed silver-bearded priest welcomed the long absent Viking, and told him that Helgi was dead, and Halfdan reigned alone.

'And know, O Frithiof,' said the aged man, 'that Balder is better pleased when the heart grows soft and injuries are forgiven, than with the most costly sacrifices. Lay aside for ever all thoughts of hatred and revenge, and stretch out to Halfdan the hand of friendship.'

Joy had softened all Frithiof's feelings of anger, and, advancing to Halfdan, who was standing near the altar, he spoke out manfully.

'Halfdan,' he said, 'let us forget the years that have gone by. Let all past evil and injury be buried in the grave. Henceforth let us be as brothers, and once more I ask thee, give me Ingebjorg to be my wife.'

And Halfdan made answer, 'Thou shalt be my brother.'

And as he spoke, an inner door flew open, and a sweet chorus of youthful voices was heard. A band of maidens issued forth, and at their head walked Ingebjorg fairer than ever.

Then Halfdan, leading her to Frithiof, placed her hand within that of the Viking.

'Behold thy wife,' said Halfdan. 'Well hast thou won her. May the gods attend upon your bridal.'

So Ingebjorg became the wife of Frithiof at last.

Thus steps of sorrow had but led them to a height of happiness that poets love to sing. Paths thick with thorns had

blossomed into roses, and wreaths of everlasting flowers had crowned the winter snows. And midst the lights and shadows of the old North land, their lives flowed on like to two united streams that roll through quiet pastures to the ocean of eternity.