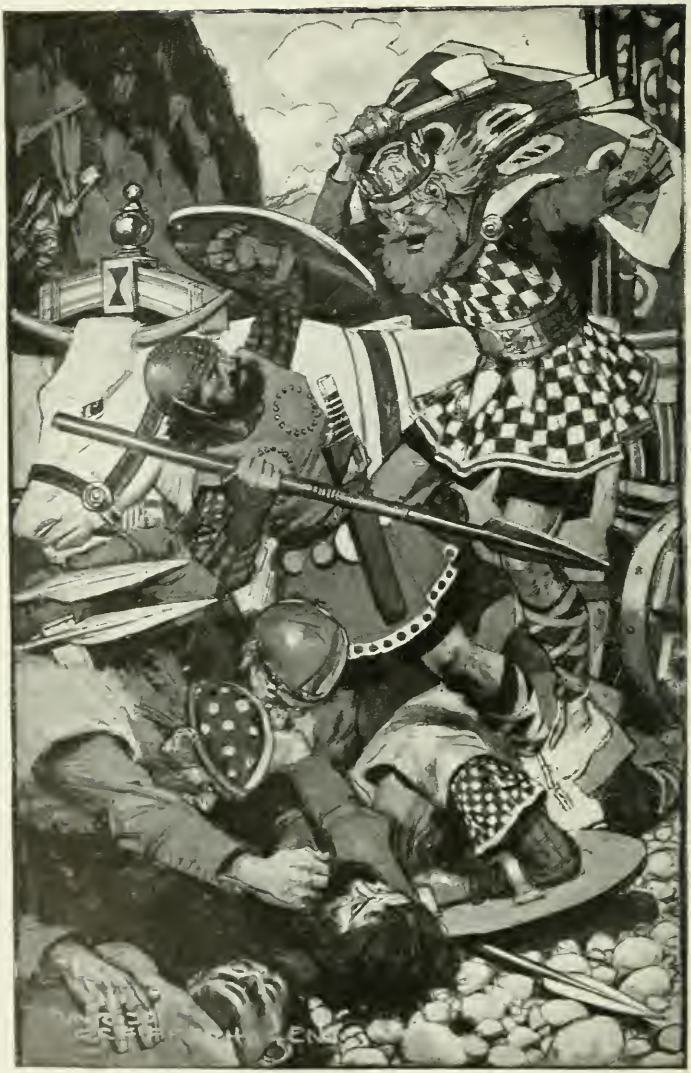
FREY AND HIS WIFE

BY

MAURICE HEWLETT

FREY AND HIS WIFE



"Of a sudden Frey roared aloud, making a terrible booming noise, and leaped into the midst of the fight."

FREY AND HIS WIFE

BY
MAURICE HEWLETT
Author of "The Forest Lovers," "Richard Yea-and-Nay," etc.

ILLUSTRATION BY
MAURICE GREIFFENHAGEN

NEW YORK
ROBERT M. McBRIDE & COMPANY
1916

Published March, 1916

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

FREY AND HIS WIFE

I

Who and What Was Ogmund Ravensson, and Why Called Ogmund Dint

IT'S hard to say why men could not get along with Ogmund Ravensson; but so it was, and something must be said about it. He was of thrall-origin, it is true, for Raven, his father, who became very rich and lived in the North, in Skaga Firth, had been a thrall. Glum, of Thwartwater, who was better known as Battle-Glum, had owned him, and had given him his freedom. More than that, he had taken in fostership his son, Ogmund, and brought him up with his own son, Wigfus, and made much of him, putting him

in a fair way to gain money and renown on his own account. When Wigfus went out to Norway and took service with Earl Haakon things stood better than ever for Ogmund; for Glum was aging and had no other young man so much in favor about him. A thrall for your father was not thought well of; but it had not so far stood in Ogmund's way with Glum, and there must have been more against him than that. Indeed, the tale says that his mother was related by blood to Battle-Glum, and that would have been more than enough to cover the taint on his father.

He grew up to be a fine, broad-shouldered, portly, upstanding man, with a black beard; he had a large, flexible nose, strong eyebrows, white hands. His eyes were somewhat small and near together; gray eyes, and a cast in one of them. But what of that? Plenty of men have it, and no harm done. At any rate, he was a great talker, full of his reasons for or against a thing. Other men don't like that, I

fancy. They don't follow the reasoning; and the better it is the less they want it. Here are some of the causes of Ogmund's lack of friends.

But Battle-Glum, who, as I say, was getting old, was averse to change. He watched Ogmund from under bushy white brows, he watched him with quick eye-blinks, and shut his lips the firmer, men used to think, for fear he might let fly a volley at the man he had bred up from a child. When the time came, and Ogmund desired to see the world, Glum furnished a ship for him and found everything. So it was that Ogmund became a shipman and began to get on. He made money, and spent money. He had a fine person, and knew it very well. He was fond of adorning it. He liked furs, and goldwork; he wore a chain round his neck, and a good ring on his forefinger. He had as yet no wife in Iceland, but his fancy ran upon a young woman of good family, of Glum's kindred and, since

that was so, of the kindred of Earl Haakon, of Norway. In the meantime, he had a bondwoman in Norway, and a steading in very good land not far from the firth. She was a pretty and good girl who did her duty by him and his household there, and by her children, also, who were dependent upon Ogmund and what Ogmund's whim might be. Her name was Gerda; but she has little to do with the tale, which begins here with a voyage made by Ogmund some three years before the coming of King Olaf Trygvasson into Norway.

For this voyage Ogmund bought a new ship from some men in the North, and embarked a great store of merchantable goods which he had from his father Raven, as well as what his own money could furnish him forth. All this he told his foster-father Glum; and he said, "I hope that you will take it well in me, Glum, that I ask nothing of you for this venture."

To that, Glum, blinking hard, replied that there were things which any man might ask of another without reproach.

"But," said Ogmund, "I would venture what I have of my own, so that what I win may be my own without cavil."

"That's very fair," said Glum; "and what is it you expect to get out of the voyage?"

Ogmund laughed a little, and spoke lightly. "Why," he said, "I expect to get rather more than I give for everything. That is the trader's way, the chapman's way. If he has a piece of goods that breeds no profit, overboard with it. It has not earned its stowage."

Now Glum had his lips shut like a trap, and blinked fearfully. "Ah," he said, "and fame, and great report, and the lifted hands of men —what of those?"

"They are good," said Ogmund. "Of them, too, you may trust me to render account."

"Such accounts," said Glum, "are not to be made in money."

"Well," said Ogmund. And that was all he did say.

Then Glum looked at him with earnest eyes; and this time he did not blink at all. "Many a man goes abroad," he said, "who is of no greater promise than you are, so far as can be seen. Now I have it close at heart that in the voyage you make you should rather get honor than store of money. But you may have both, I believe, if you go rightly to work."

"To be sure I can," said Ogmund; and soon after this—rather late in midsummer it was—he set out from Thwartwater.

They started in fair weather, with a westerly wind which blew steady and strong. It held them all through the voyage, and when they sighted the islands which lie close to-

gether in the channel of the Hardanger Firth, it was still blowing steadily.

But it was dusk when they saw the islands, and close upon nightfall when they were threading the course between them; and the pilot whom they had aboard was strong for bringing up for the night in good anchorage, such as they could have where they were, rather than to push on and try to make the haven in the dark.

Ogmund, who was in a hurry, said that there was a moon, and they had a fair wind. Who knew how long it would hold? And suppose that in the morning it should come off the land, and keep them beating about for a week or more? He was vehemently for going, and he was master of the ship; so they went on in the dark.

That which happened might have been foreseen, and very likely was so by the pilot. In one of the narrow sounds between the islands

there were long ships moored in the fairway. Before they knew it they drove into one of them amidships, cut her in half and held on their course. Whether Ogmund knew it or not—and I suppose he did—that was the way of it. The crew of the rammed ship were all in the water and most of them were saved. But none of them were saved by Ogmund's vessel. She ran on her way before the wind, and made the haven and was drawn up on to the mainland. The pilot had something to say when he had his ship laid up; the crew had something to say. There were not two opinions among them. But Ogmund took a strong line of his own at the time. He said:

"The ship lay in the fairway where no ship has business to be. Every man must take care of himself first, but no man has a right to risk his life if, in so doing, he risks the lives of other men. You may take my word for it, those were no seamen on board that vessel. Why, what are we to think of men who berth

themselves in the fairway, regardless of traffickers who come and go out of Bergen, so great a town? What of good Icelanders faring on the sea? Are their lives, is their property of no account at all? No, no. We were right and they were wrong; and that is all there is to say."

He went ashore in the morning and made himself busy, disposing of his merchandise.

Now the long ship which he had sunk was one of a fleet of them which sailed under the ensign of Earl Haakon himself. The master of it was a man of Iceland called Halward, who had been in Norway for many years, in the service of the earl, and was close friend of his. This Halward was a great man and a strong man; everybody spoke well of him and desired his good opinion.

In the morning, when he had heard the news, he went to Earl Haakon and told him about it. His men were saved; but his ship and all his gear and merchandise were at the

bottom. The earl was greatly put out, and his anger grew as he spoke.

"Who and what sort of land-lice are these men? Are they thralls of Iceland upon a first adventure? Are men of worth and substance to be tossed into the water like frog-spawn? Now, Halward, you have my leave to take your due and pleasure of them. It will be a light matter for you, for you see what sort of cravens they are. Use your wit, exercise your hands upon them; I give you a free way with them."

Halward thanked the earl and was for going out then and there to have the law of his assailants; but Wigfus, Battle-Glum's own son, was standing by, and had a word to say. It is very possible that he had an inkling whose ship it was that had been sailed so foully; but if he had he kept it to himself, and was content to plead with the earl that things should go by the law of the land rather than by the power of Halward's arm. He urged

that Halward should take amends from them, if so be that they were willing, as he had no doubt, to submit themselves to the judgment of the earl.

"At least," he said, "let Halward agree to this, that I go myself and find out what men they are, and what sort of terms may be made with them, supposing that terms may be made at all."

Halward said nothing in reply to this; but the earl considered the saying, thought it fair and reasonable, and bade Wigfus see what he could do. But he said also, "Let these men make no mistake. My plane makes thick shavings." By that he meant it to be understood that the fines he should lay would be heavy.

Wigfus betook himself to the ship where men were busy unloading the merchandise. He soon saw his foster-brother Ogmund, and greeted him fairly, asking what news of Iceland and his father. Ogmund reported all

well there, and they talked a little about the Thwartwater people. Then Wigfus opened upon his matter, saying it was going to be awkward, and that Ogmund would have a difficult cause to plead.

Ogmund frowned. "How is it to be difficult?" he said. "To my mind it's as plain as daylight."

"If you had waited for daylight it had been very much better," said Wigfus, and told him what had been said that morning at the earl's council. Then he spoke strongly about the necessity of laying it all to that lord's judgment; but, "I will do what I can for you, since you are my foster-brother; and we may not come off so badly after all."

But Ogmund was rather hot, and would not listen to reason. That is the way of men not too sure of their footing; they spur their eloquence and take fire from it. He stated his case as he viewed it, and stated it

at length, and several times over. And then he said:

"I know this earl of yours so well by common report that I shall be careful to have nothing to do with his dooms and judgments. Why!" and he spread his hands wide, palms upwards. "Why! Look at this, Wigfus, that he says beforehand what he will do to me—with his talk of planing me deep and the like. And if I will not lay a case before him where he says nothing, how shall I plead at his judgment-seat when, before a word said, he avows what he will do?" He was very indignant; but by-and-by he said: "Mind you, I do not refuse if he speaks me fair, and keeps an open mind. No, no. I am not a hard man, far from it. So much you may tell Earl Haakon—to whom, nevertheless, I owe no allegiance; for I am not of his country, but am an Icelander, and a well-friended man in those parts."

Wigfus tossed up his hands. "Well, you shall do what seems good, and be ready to meet what befalls you. If Earl Haakon is angry, you will smart for it. You have not a rat's chance with him; and in my opinion you are talking rank nonsense. But have your own way."

Now, then, Wigfus reports to the earl that Ogmund will abide his judgment, which was not true, and was even notoriously untrue. So said one of the earl's men who was there at the time, and Wigfus could not deny him.

Then up and spoke Halward, that mighty man, and spoke quietly as mighty men may.

"I believe that Wigfus speaks untruly, and shall take my own way, by your leave, my lord. I did not need a mediator, and can do much better without him what I have to do."

Earl Haakon said, "Go on, Halward. Do what becomes thee."

Then said Wigfus: "Give me leave, my lord, to say this. I will be the death of that

man who kills Ogmund, my foster-brother, and kinsman—for so he is by the mother-side."

Said Halward: "You talk over big, Wigfus."

And Wigfus said, "I come of a strong stock."

"I know that you do," said Halward; "I know that the Icelanders are good men. But I know this, too, that the custom of my country will not suffer a man to be injured without amends offered or taken. Neither Battle-Glum, nor you either, shall stay me from avenging a shame done me."

And Earl Haakon said that they should not.

Then Halward went down to the shore to board the Iceland ship; but he found that she had been run down into the water since the morning, and was now moored a bowshot out. So he took boat and was rowed out to the ship. There on the poop he saw Ogmund standing with his arms folded.

"Are you the master of this ship?" says Halward. Ogmund said that he was.

"I have a case against you, as you know very well, and have come to see what sort of amends you think of offering me."

Ogmund said, "We will make amends if you don't ask too much."

Halward's neck grew red. "It would not be easy to ask too much for insolence and knavery like yours."

"On those terms," said Ogmund, "we cannot deal with you."

"That suits me better," Halward said, and made a jump for the bulwark of the ship. He swung himself up as easily as a boy into a swing; and the moment he was on deck, he aimed at Ogmund with the hammer-end of his ax, and felled him like a bullock. Down he went, and never stirred. Some of the shipmen who were in the forepart of the ship saw it all done; but not one of them cared to move. Halward was a very big man.

At leisure he went over the side into his boat, and was pulled ashore. Then he went to Earl Haakon and told him what he had done.

"You have done well," said the earl.

II

How Ogmund Dint Did Nothing, and Presently Sailed Home to Thwartwater; and What Battle-Glum Thought About It All

THAT was why Ogmund Ravensson was called Ogmund Dint, or Dint-head. Halward's hammer had knocked a great hollow in his skull. Men said you could have boiled an egg in it; but that is nonsense. At any rate, he was senseless for a long time, and not his own man all the winter; yet as soon as he was fit to be moved he was carried up into the country, to his house-stead, and given over to his bondwoman to nurse.

Gerda, who, although she looked as sleek as a stroked kitten, had a shrewd tongue and

a clear understanding, employed both to his discomfort—but not until she felt that she was justified. So long as he lay bemused and muttering thickly she was all devotion; but when he picked up a bit, and presently would get out of bed and sit by the fire huddled in a bearskin, she did not scruple.

"You look like a shagged rock," she said, "and with a cave in the crown of it, too. Pity is that you had so little in your head. If there had been some sense or some manliness there you might have driven against the hatchet. Halward would have split it open, it's likely, and who knows what he might have eased you of? A lot of wind."

"Such talk as that maddens me," said Ogmund. "I wish you would have done with it. It becomes you not at all, and puts me out."

"That's a service I can do you," said Gerda. "You need something of the kind."

"Woman," said Ogmund, "I am meditating my revenge."

"Yes," said she, "and I have a hen sitting on a chalk egg. She's meditating also."

However, she did her duty by him, and as he got stronger she did more. As she said: "It pleases him, and is nothing to me."

Wigfus came to see him now and then, and told him what had happened. He said that Earl Haakon held Halward to have been justified in what he had done, and that Halward himself was content for the moment. "There is plenty more smiting in my ax," Halward had said, "and if Ogmund wants any more he knows now how to get it, and where."

Ogmund, brooding over the fire, swung his foot violently as he heard, but said nothing. He complained of pains in the head, and dreams at night. Gerda scorned him.

Wigfus went on to say that he himself had taken Halward's deed very much awry. He had challenged Halward to a battle, and intended to slay him in that wise, or otherwise,

but the earl had forbidden battle, and had had a watch set over him, so that he could not get away. He did not then say what was in his mind to say, that he expected Ogmund to take vengeance on his own account, because the man was too ill to hear it.

But in the spring, when Ogmund was about again and seemingly as well as ever he had been, except for the dint in his skull, Wigfus waited for him, to see what he would do. Ogmund went about his affairs, and had everybody in the haven laughing at him, and cracking their jokes at his dunted head. Some said that a seabird had made a nest for herself there, some brought eggs from the rocks to put under her. A man wished Ogmund to keep it filled with water, and promised him goldfish from his next voyage to the South. Every one called him Ogmund Dint, even the boys who played about on the quayside. But Ogmund managed to be very busy, and pretended that they were not talking of

him. Whenever he met Halward in the course of business he looked sternly at him, but without greeting. He considered that the dignified way to deal with him, for the present. To his intimates he said that Halward had taken him unawares and dealt a foul blow. "But there's a time for all things," he would conclude; "and so he will learn for himself one fine day." Men looked at each other at such talk.

Wigfus was now at him, insisting upon his taking vengeance. He said he would help him in every way, risking outlawry in the act, for certainly the earl would resent it. But Ogmund looked very thoughtful, and one day said fairly that he did not see his way.

"What do you mean by that?" said Wigfus, taken aback.

"We may easily do wrong, I believe," Ogmund said, "and add wrong to wrong until you have a regular mixen of wrong at our house-door. But is that good sense? I

don't think so. Now, to my thinking, I was as much in the wrong as Halward was. I am a proud man, and as quick to fire as touch-wood. Everybody knows it who knows me. If I met Halward haughtily I am sure there's no wonder. We can't help our natures. We didn't make ourselves. Now that being so, what else could come of it? I ask you. The man being what he was, a common fellow, took it amiss, and struck me a foul blow in the half dusk." He rubbed his hands together, then folded his arms over his chest. "That's the way of the vile. They do vilely, and the wise man lets them be, and the proud man scorns them. But there is another thing, which settles me in my opinion, and I will tell you what it is. This man Halward is befriended by the earl; and here are you, my friend, my kinsman, my foster-brother, in the power of the same great man. Your father is my foster-father, to whom I owe duty, gratitude, faith and service. It would be a

strange way of paying Glum my scot and lot if I embroiled his son with an earl, and got him robbed of life or member in my quarrel. No, no. My fingers itch to be at him; I lay hands on myself; I tell you I have to run sometimes lest I should fly at the dog's throat. He knows it, too. You can see that by the way he looks at me—all ways at once. But I will not suffer harm to come to my fosterer's son—and there's an end of it."

At this speech Wigfus grew very red, and clenched his two fists.

"It is a strange way you have of doing service to Battle-Glum. And you will get no thanks from me for being more careful of my body than I am myself. If you are not mad, you are something which I don't care to name. Whatever I may think of your head with a hole in it I have little doubt about your heart. You have a hare's heart, my man—and there's no driving a hare to meet a hound. And I will trouble you to talk less about our

kinship than you please to do at present. You had a father as well as a mother, and he was not of our blood. Now you may do as you please; but I should not advise you to hold these speeches with my father. You shall hold no more of them with me."

With that he walked off, leaving Ogmund to explain to Gerda that it was no use reasoning with an angry man.

"That's the way of it," he said. "You try to do a man a service, and he reviles you for it."

Gerda bit her lip; and at last she said: "You make me ashamed that I am a woman. God knows what sons you may have given me."

Ogmund boxed her ears; but she said that he should give her no more sons, and she meant it.

But Ogmund, whatever else may be said about him, was a good chapman. He bustled

along with his affairs, made a great deal of money, and sailed away, toward midsummer, for Iceland. He came prosperously into Eyefirth, and when he had settled his business with the ship he rode by the dales into Thwartwaterdale, to stay with his foster-father Glum. Now Glum had had news of the coming of the ship, and was told something about the affray with Halward. He said very little, but thought very much. Ogmund had a short welcome, but took no notice of it. He was so prosperous, he had such a store of good clothes that he felt that all was well, when it was by no means so. He began to take a great part in the affairs of the country-side, gave it out that Glum was getting old and wanted to be quiet; that he had no one to look to but Ogmund; in short, that all matters hitherto referred to Glum's arbitrament were now for his handling—and so on, and so on. He had much to say about the management of the household; in fact, he strutted,

and clapped his wings, and puffed out his wattles very finely.

For a long while Glum, who certainly was old, would not speak to him; but at last he did.

He then said, "You had better know what I think of you, and maybe I had better have told you sooner. I think that all this strutting and crowing becomes you sadly. You have had my name in the dust, and proved yourself a poltroon, if not worse. A man may be a craven, but if he holds himself bravely when there is nobody in the way, then he is a fool as well. Now for the disgrace you have brought upon me I desire never to see you again."

Ogmund began at once with his excuse. "But look at this," he said. "How could I bring your own son into danger on my account? What is my revenge compared to such a life as his?"

"What the mischief had you to do with that?" said Glum. "And how the mischief

did it concern you, if he had no concern about it himself? Do you think all men are such rats as you are? Don't you know that I would have seen the pair of you dead with gladness if I knew that you had died like men? Vex me no more, but let me be rid of you."

Then Ogmund began to plead in earnest, but Glum would hardly listen to him. He cut him short by saying, "It comes to this, Ogmund. Either you are a man of long-mindedness and caution—and why you took such a high hand with Halward at first if you are not, that beats me—or you are a bag of silly vapor, a bladder of dry peasen. I believe myself that you are a cur, and am forced to remind you that you come of base blood. A thrall deals like a thrall, they say—and so I say. But you shall not stay here any longer."

And Ogmund must needs go. He went away to his father in the North, and there he was for two years or more.

III

Of King Olaf Trygvasson; and of Sigurd Helming and Gunnar, His Brother

DURING those years, while Ogmund was faring prosperously with his father and was thinking of marrying a girl of those parts, misfortune overtook Earl Haakon, who fell out with some of his sworn friends, became suspicious of others, and at last took to his bed with a troublesome complaint, and died in it, but not of the complaint. He had a servant called Kark, whom he trusted inordinately, and used to have him to sleep in his chamber at the foot of his bed. The earl had bad dreams and used to throw himself about and cry out against his enemies. One night he had a very bad dream, and sat up in bed, staring at the wall and screaming,

"They are coming, they are coming, they are here!" Kark sprang up in a fright and with a sword in his hand slashed about him. He slashed the earl in the neck; and that was his death-blow. The deed was done, and by misadventure, but being done, Kark thought he might as well make profit of it. So he cut off Earl Haakon's head and put it in a bag. Then he carried it with all speed over the mountains to King Olaf Trygvasson, who he knew would be chosen King of Norway, as his right was. That was the end of the earl, who was a great man. But his death made way for a greater.

King Olaf was still a youngish man when the *Thing* chose him. He may have been thirty years old, and the wife he had was his second, if not third. He was a great-grandson of King Harold Fairhair, and had been bred up in Russia, then in Vendland, which is the country round about the Vistula; then he went viking and did great things in

Orkney, in Iceland and in England also. He sailed to Scilly at one time, and there he was baptized and became a Christian.

The way of it was this: He heard tell of a prophet in those islands, who knew everything that was going to happen, and determined to see what the man could do. So he sent a fine man of his out to visit him, dressed in the best clothes that he had, rings, chains and I don't know what else.

"Now," he said, "go to the prophet, and say you are a king. Ask him what he has to tell you, and report it all to me."

The man went as he was bid, found the prophet and said, "Here is a king come to visit you and hear what you have to say."

The prophet, who was old, and white, and had a loose, wrinkled skin and remarkable finger-nails, like a bird's claws, plucked at the roots of his beard.

"You are not a king," he said, "but I advise you to be faithful to the man who is one,

and sent you here. I have nothing to tell you, and if I had I should not tell it. Go away."

There was little else to do! indeed, there was nothing else. When Olaf heard the story, he said, "This is certainly a prophet. I will go to see him."

Olaf was a very noticeable man, very tall and broad, with a golden beard; he was high-colored and had bright blue eyes. The prophet was sitting in the mouth of his cave, which he had swept out and put in order. When he saw Olaf he bowed until his head was level with his knees. Olaf sat down beside him, and they had a long conversation.

The prophet presently began to prophesy. He said: "You will become a notable king in a country which is yours, though you have never seen it. And you will be a Christian king and cause all your people to become so before the end. And in case you doubt what I say, as you may easily do, listen to this

token. When you take to your ships again, all of you, there will be a plot against you, and a rising by night. Then there will be a battle—but on land; and you will lose men, and be wounded. They will carry you on a shield to your ship, and in seven days you will be well. The first thing you will do will be to seek out a bishop hereabouts, and go down into the water with him and be baptized. After you all your men will go, and that will be the beginning of Christianity in Norway and Iceland."

Now the odd thing about this tale is that it all fell out as the holy man had foreseen. That very man of the king's whom he had warned against treachery was himself the beginner of a treacherous attack. There was fierce fighting, the king sorely wounded. He was carried on a shield to the boats, and laid aboard his own long ship. There he lay for seven days, and on the seventh he was

well. The first thing he did was to visit the man of God.

"You told me the truth," said Olaf; and the prophet said:

"That is why I am here, living in sanctity."

Olaf said, "The least I can do is to fulfil the prophecy which has so far fulfilled itself. I will go into the water when you please."

The man of God said, "The sooner the better. You will find the bishop very ready for you."

"I will send for him," King Olaf said, "but you shall tell me something of the religion which I suppose gives you the powers you possess."

The prophet agreed to that. "It is a very good religion for a king," he said, "because it may make him humble-minded before God, which he has no reason otherwise to be—or so he is apt to think. In any event it must make his subjects so, which is very useful to the king."

"Oh, very," said Olaf, and became attentive to what the wise man had to say.

To be short about it, King Olaf was baptized and all the men with him in the long ships; and soon afterwards he sailed for Norway where, in the time of Earl Haakon's sickness, he made a landing and gathered a company about him. When the earl was killed by Kark, his head was brought to King Olaf in a bag by the malefactor. Olaf accepted it as his due; but he hanged Kark then and there on a convenient ash-tree.

I said that the *Thing* chose Olaf for king; and one of the first of his acts was to proclaim that he chose Christianity for the religion of Norway, and willed that all his people should be baptized. He had brought back priests with him from Scilly, and a bishop as well, so everything was in order.

The common sort gave him no trouble, for they either ran down into the water in herds, or withdrew themselves to the mountains and

forests; but some of the great men were stiff about it, and did not choose to forsake their gods. They debated about it among themselves, and sent chosen champions to debate about it with the king. But in this they had mistaken their man. King Olaf listened to one or two, and then, lifting his large hand, slammed it down upon the board in front of him.

"Enough of this," he said. "It may be a good religion or a bad, but it is my own religion, and I desire it to be that of my people. See you to it, and let me have no more talk, for I am sick of it."

They went away, and a good many of them were baptized, but by no means all.

There were two brothers living in a dale of Drontheim—Sigurd was the elder, and his brother was Gunnar. Both were called Helming. They were well descended, and neither of them was thirty years old, though Sigurd was near it. He was married and

a friend of the king's. Gunnar was twenty-six years old, a cheerful high-colored man with a reddish beard, though his hair was much darker, and might have been taken for black. Sigurd was a councilor, Gunnar was not, but he had been to sea, and fought in Sicily, and as far as Micklegarth. When he was not voyaging he lived with his brother. The pair were great friends.

Sigurd Helming was one of those who followed Olaf's example, and went down into the water. When it was over and all his household had been made Christians, he said to Gunnar, "Now it's your turn."

Gunnar laughed. "Not for me," he said. "I will go into the water when my time comes, but that will be the end of me. I know too much about the water."

Sigurd said, "It's soon over."

"The sooner the better," said Gunnar, "when it is to be—and also, the later the better."

Sigurd said, "This is the king's religion."

"Why not?" said Gunnar.

"The king will be displeased. He loves his own way."

"We all do that, I believe," said Gunnar.

"What am I to tell him when he asks me of you?" Sigurd asked him.

"Tell him that I follow him because he is a man," said Gunnar. "Tell him that I will serve him all the better for following my own counsel in this business of religion You will see that he understands me."

"I am sure he will not," said Sigurd, "but I will try him."

He made the best case he could, and King Olaf heard him out. When he had done the king said, "Send Gunnar to me." So Gunnar went to the king's house.

King Olaf looked at him with his bright blue eyes like swords.

"You are a fighting man, I hear."

Gunnar said that he was.

"And now you will fight with me."

Gunnar said, "If you go fighting, King Olaf, I will go with you, if you will have me."

"My religion says that he who is not with me is against me."

Gunnar said, "That's a good saying. But I am with you."

"Not at all," said King Olaf, "since you refuse to take my religion."

"If I were to take your religion I should be a liar," said Gunnar, "and if I were a liar I should not be worth your while. Better take me as I am."

"I will take you as you are sooner than not at all," the king said. "But I do not like a stiff-necked man."

Gunnar said, "The neck of a man is part of the back of the man. If he is too supple

in the neck it is likely he will give in the back, and that at a time when stiffness may be useful."

King Olaf frowned. "Beware of talking too much. It makes me angry."

"I had much rather not talk at all," Gunnar said, "but it would be ill-mannered to be glum when a king speaks to me."

Olaf said, "Will you consult with my bishop, and hear what he has to say?"

"I will," said Gunnar, "but you must let me tell you that I am not a scholar, but a man of hands. There will be more talking. Heat will be engendered, and you will be angry again."

Olaf liked Gunnar very well, and was silent for a bit. Then he said:

"You are one of the few who gainsay me; yet I don't feel badly disposed to you. I think you are a fool; but you seem to know it yourself."

"The fact is that I do," said Gunnar. "Your bishop alarms me."

"You will find out in time that I am right and you wrong," said the king. "Be off with you, and serve me as well as you can."

"Have no fear about that," said Gunnar, and kept to his own religion, which was not, with him, a very great matter. But he did not feel at all inclined to change it because he was told to do so. King Olaf soon got over his vexation; but, as it will shortly appear, he kept it at the back of his mind.

IV

Ogmund Dint Comes Again to Norway, and Meets Gunnar on the Hard of Drontheim

IT is time to go back to Ogmund Dint, who had now been two years and more with his father in the North. He had become something of a great man, and had impressed himself as such upon the people round about. But he was not easy in his mind, and more than once or twice he asked himself, "What am I doing, purfling here in a fine coat, when my foster-father, who is as rich as he is old, is perhaps dying in his bed without sight or memory of me, and with none of his kindred at hand either? Is this sense, is this pious? Here I am, for two years at a time, a great man and a great fool."

At another time he would reflect like this: "That was a very dastardly deed done upon me by Halward, to take me unawares on my own shipboard and knock a great dint in my head!" He would feel the place of it; there it lay under a growth of hair as snug as a wren's nest in the roots of a tree. "A foul blow!" he would say; and "A man may carry his magnanimity too far, to overlook such a shameful thing for the sake of another man, only half akin, who moreover gives you no thanks." He shook his head. "Indeed, I let off Halward too lightly. I daresay he thinks himself a lucky fellow—and so he is, by God."

One train of thought led him into another, and he began to consider his affairs more narrowly. "It would be an easy thing, and very pertinent indeed, to carry this warfare on as it was begun. Two years, three years, is a goodish while. Halward will not be expecting such a long memory in a man who never did him any harm. But insults such as

he did to me stay by a man, and the prouder the man the quicker the soil in which they root themselves. I am astonished—I am fairly astonished—that I have kept myself off him so long. There are not many men in Iceland who have themselves so firmly in hand—bitted and saddled."

In the event, without saying anything of his private mind to anybody, he gave out that he must go to Norway upon his affairs. He furnished a ship with men and goods, and toward midsummer sailed from Eyefirth, and steered east-northeast.

He had a fair wind and came into Drontheim Firth in the morning light, sailed up the firth prosperously and brought his ship to under Nith's holm. There he cast his anchor, and bade them get out a boat, though the day was spent and a cool breeze was now blowing off the land.

"I must row up the river some little way and go into the town," he said. "I have

heard something of trouble in this country, and we must be sure of our footing before we go further."

He dressed himself with splendor, and put over him in particular a very fine cloak of two colors. It was green on one side and golden-brown on the other. It had trimmings of sable-tails which fluttered in the breeze, and over the back of it a dragon worked in gold thread—a very magnificent cloak. He took a sword, and had two men to row him.

They came into the hard with the last of the light.

"Stay you here for me," he said, "and don't show yourselves. This is an urgent affair."

Ogmund walked on the hard, up and down, and felt himself admired of the few persons who were about. By-and-by he saw one coming down from the town at a brisk pace; a man of his own height, but of sparer frame than his own. He wore a crimson cloak with

a hood to it, and wore the hood over his head, shadowing his face. The oncomer, when he was close at hand, was struck by the splendor of Ogmund's appearance. Ogmund saw that and saluted him. Gunnar Helming, for that was the man in the hood, returned the greeting, and stopped his quick step.

"You are the master of that boat, I take it?" said Gunnar. "A stranger in this water?"

"Not so much as that," replied Ogmund. "I come now and again to see my friends here. But I am from Iceland myself. My name is Ogmund."

Gunnar looked at him. "Are you Ogmund Dint?"

Ogmund said, "Some men call me that, and others who know me better call me Ogmund Ravensson. But that matters little to me. Now what might your name be, in fair return?"

Gunnar told him—but could not keep either

eyes or tongue from Ogmund's wonderful cloak.

"Gunnar is my name," he said, "and some call me Gunnar Helming, and some Gunnar Half-and-Half."

"What do they call you that for?"

"Because I take pleasure in wearing clothes like that fine cloak of yours," said Gunnar.

"Oh," said Ogmund, "my cloak! It is an ordinary cloak, I believe."

"I, too, like to believe that," said Gunnar.

Then Ogmund asked him for news of the country, "since it is some years now since I was here."

Gunnar told him that they had news which they thought a good deal of. "Earl Haakon is dead, and we now have a very notable king, whose name is Olaf Trygvasson. He is a Christian, and drives all men, and women, too, into the water, to make Christians also of them."

Ogmund said this was greatness. "And do the people take kindly to the water?"

Gunnar said that they did.

Then Ogmund said, "And my friend Halward, how is he?"

"Oh, he!" said Gunnar. "I saw him just now."

"What, here?" says Ogmund.

"Yes," said Gunnar, "he is here sure enough. He is as good friends with King Olaf as ever he was with Earl Haakon, and yet he is not the man he was when he gave you your name."

"How is that then?" Ogmund wanted to know.

"Why," Gunnar told him, "one of the last battles fought by Haakon was at Yomswicking; and in that battle Halward got a great whang by the ear, and rather below it. It cut the sinew of his neck, and made a bad healing. The good man now carries his head on one side, and will do it until his

death-day. And yet he is as well as ever he was otherwise, and in high favor with the king."

Ogmund thanked him for all this news; but saw how preoccupied Gunnar was, and how his eyes dwelt upon his cloak.

"You are pleased to admire my cloak," he said. "And yet I assure you it is by no means the best I have."

"I can believe it," said Gunnar, "but for my part I have never seen one so fine since I left the great city of Micklegarth. Now if I asked you to sell it to me, Ogmund, would you take it amiss?"

Ogmund thought for a while.

"I will not sell it to you," he said, "but I will ask you to accept it from me. It would be a pleasure to me to please you."

Gunnar opened his eyes. They were very bright.

"Give it to me by all means," he said, "and prosper in all your undertakings! But it is

too much for you to do—and I am rather ashamed."

"By no means," said Ogmund Dint, "by no manner of means. Yet if it will set your mind at ease, and as the wind blows shrewdly off the mountains, perhaps we may make an exchange. How would that suit you?"

"Excellently," said Gunnar, "but my old cloak is dross for your gold."

"It looks a serviceable garment," said Ogmund. "It will keep the weather away."

There and then they exchanged. Ogmund put on the crimson cloak, and pulled the hood up over his head; Gunnar put on his bargain and was as pleased as a boy with a new top.

"Now indeed we shall see something," said Gunnar.

"Yes, indeed," said Ogmund, and saluted him.

Gunnar went his ways with his brisk step, and Ogmund turned back to his boat.

"I shan't be long gone," he said. "Stand

by your oars, and be ready the moment I want you."

Then he went into the town with long strides, and walked briskly, swinging one arm, as he had observed Gunnar do coming down.

V

Ogmund Dint Satisfies Himself, and Sails Home

OGMUND walked briskly into the street, looking for Halward. At first he could not find him, but that was because he looked in the wrong places. Then, after a time, he turned into a lane or by-way which led to a creek, with a row of buildings facing it, and willow trees in front of them, between them and the water. One of these buildings was an inn, and in the court of that inn there was a company of men washing their hands before supper. The tallest of them, by far, was Halward, and if Ogmund had not remembered him very well without it, he would have known him by the twist in his neck, which made him poke his head out like a stork when

she is stretching hers forward to flap her wings. It was now dusk, and a lamp was alight in the court that men might see what they were about.

Ogmund with the hood well forward over his face stepped into the court. Before him was Halward, standing with his legs apart. He was rubbing the soapsuds into one arm with the other hand. His face and beard were wet with rinsing. He saw him who entered and hailed him with a "God save thee, Gunnar."

But Ogmund laid a finger on his lip and beckoned him to come apart with an air of having a secret to tell. Having done that, he stepped out of the court until Halward should follow him.

Halward came after him with a "What's in the wind then?" Ogmund drew into a doorway, and got his sword free of his cloak. The moment Halward came within range of him he stepped out to meet him and hewed at

his neck. It was Halward's death-blow. He shook and groaned thickly, and then fell. His head was nearly off.

Ogmund went away with all speed, and was not long coming to the quay where he had left his boat. He found his men waiting for him, and jumped into the boat.

"Pull with a will," he said; "we will be out of this. There's war in this country. Up the street I saw men fighting. There will be no trading here."

"What," said one of them, "are we to see nothing of the sport, master? That will be a poor tale to take home with us."

"We are here to trade, not to go to peep-shows," said Ogmund testily. "Do you as I bid. There is a wind coming strong off the land which will hold the night out. By morning light we shall be in the open sea. Fortunate for us that it is so."

The men did as they were bid. One of them said, "It's plain you have been in the

fray. You have changed cloaks with a foe, I see, and lost by the bargain. That is bad trading for such a keen merchant."

"Pull, man, pull, and hold your tongue," said Ogmund Dint.

They reached the ship and he swung himself aboard. Then while the crew were busy hauling on the tackle he got himself a great stone from the ballast. This he rolled into the hood of Gunnar's cloak, and then cast the thing into the water. As he saw the waves lap over the hole he had made, he took a long breath.

All went well with him; as he had thought, he was out at sea by the morning. Even then his luck held, with a quarter wind which carried him to Eyefirth. People were surprised to see him, but he made a very good tale of it, and spoke at length about the sad state of things in Norway, the risks, the frays, the bloodshed in the streets, burnings,

ravishings, cutthroats, men hanging by the thumbs and so on. He did not forget to work into it much about the killing of Earl Haakon, and King Olaf's baptizings. After a bit he rode south to Thwartwater to see his foster-father Battle-Glum.

Glum joined his shaggy brows and blinked hard when he saw him. Ogmund said he brought him news which he would be pleased to hear.

"I have avenged the insult done me by Halward the Strong, and though I have been slow about it I have done it surely. He will insult no man hereafter."

"What," said Glum, "have you slain Halward?"

"I have," said Ogmund.

"And yourself scatheless?"

"I am."

"That was a good battle then?"

"It was. They were twelve to our three; but we thought little of it at the time. In hot blood such things are not memorable."

"Well," said Glum, "you have done now as I hoped it might have been at first. Did my son Wigfus help you?"

"He did not."

Glum was thoughtful. "He will be sorry not to have been in with you."

Ogmund said that he had not seen Wigfus at all, and rather thought that he was at sea; "Or he would surely have stood in with me."

"To be sure he would," said Glum.

Now Ogmund was taken into favor again, and stayed with Battle-Glum all the winter.

VI

The Hue-and-Cry for Halward Neck

AFTER a bit somebody in the inn yard said, "Let us go in to supper;" and then another:

"Where is Halward and what is he doing?"

A man said, "He is outside talking with Gunnar Helming."

Then another: "Let us have Gunnar in to sup with us. He is the best company."

They all agreed to that.

After a time of more waiting a man went out of the yard to see where Halward and Gunnar were, and came back with a serious face.

"Come out with me," he said. "Here's a bad affair."

They all tumbled out together with the lamp, and there found Halward dead in his blood. He was stiffening already.

Then, after silence, all began to talk at once. Nobody could understand the slaying, nobody could doubt who had done it, for everybody had seen Gunnar come into the yard, or the few who had not took it from the many who had. Not a word of doubt was raised about it.

As Halward was a friend of the king's certainly the king must have the news; but all hung back from the errand because all men liked Gunnar. The end of it was that, having brought the body into the yard and covered it with a carpet, they went in to supper and ate and drank thoughtfully and in silence.

While they were sitting at their drink in came Sigurd Helming to see if Gunnar were there. He asked for him and could not but notice how his question was received. Re-

peating it, he had no answer at all. A third time he asked it, and of one man by name. He was answered that Gunnar had been there, but had spoken to nobody.

"That is not like Gunnar," Sigurd said. "What did he do when he came in?"

"He beckoned to one of us, and went out again."

"And to which of you did he beckon?"

"It was to Halward Neck."

"And where is Halward Neck?"

Then there was a silence, and after that another man, very red in the face and with gleaming eyes, spoke between his teeth.

"I will show you where Halward Neck is," he said. "Come with me." He led him out into the yard, while the rest crowded at the door.

He showed him the dead man; he held the lamp close to his face.

"Who did this?" said Sigurd. Then, beginning with a low murmur, all voices rose

and the name of Gunnar was cried in his ears. Sigurd lifted his head, and all were silent.

"I don't believe it," he said, "but somebody must tell the king of it."

They went back into the house and shut the doors. Sigurd was told what every one knew, or thought that he knew. One man had seen Gunnar go down to the hard in his cloak and hood; half-a-dozen had seen him come into the yard afterwards; three or four had heard Halward greet him; some had seen the beckoning, others had seen Halward follow him out. Then they had gone out to look for them, and there found Halward slain.

Sigurd said, "It looks very black against Gunnar, but I cannot believe it. Yet I know that the king must be told, and that he will be ready to think the worst of my brother because he has been so stiff against his religion. Now my thought at first was that I would tell him myself, since none of you seemed ready to go with the news—but see here, my

friends, you would not have me bear witness against my own brother?"

They all agreed to that.

Then he said, "I will ask one or several of you to tell the king in the morning. It is late now, and he will not expect you to disturb him at this hour of the night. Yet I tell you fairly that I myself shall go to find Gunnar and warn him of what is astir against him. If I think, when I see him, that he is the guilty man, it may be that I shall go with you to King Olaf. If I leave him still in the mind I am in now, then I shall not testify against him."

They all said, "No, no." They said that he knew nothing of the matter, and that his name need not be in the business at all.

Sigurd said, "The king will speak to me about it, I know. But I shall have time for what I want to do." Then he left them sitting at their drink, and went to find Gunnar.

Now, first, I will deal with the embassy to the king, and then with what happened when Sigurd saw his brother. Olaf was in a great taking. He grew red and thumped the table with his fist.

"This is what comes of clemency. That rascal refused my religion and I let him go. He vowed that he would serve me and I believed him, like a fool. This is how it is brought back to me, sevenfold into my bosom. Now do you go and apprehend Gunnar, and hang him up on a tree. Don't let me see him, for I am in such a rage that I should insult him in his chains. Hang him out of hand, and let us get on with our affairs."

That was what the king said, and they left him with heavy hearts. But Gunnar was not hanged because he was not at home when they went to fetch him.

The very night of the slaying, Sigurd came to him. He went directly to him from the inn where Halward lay dead.

"Gunnar," he said, "what was the grief between you and Halward that you deal him a dog's death?"

Gunnar gaped at him. "Halward? Is Halward dead? Who did that?"

Sigurd said, "They say that you did it this very evening at the inn on Markfleet."

Gunnar answered him, "That be far from me." But he had no more to say.

"Well," said Sigurd, "you say what I believe, but it looks very black against you."

Then he told him what the rumors were, how he had been seen go down the street, then come up the street, how he had shown himself in the yard, said nothing, but beckoned Halward out; how he had not been seen again, and how Halward had been found stiff in his own blood in the street.

Gunnar heard all this in silence, and remained silent so long that Sigurd had to make him speak.

"Well, what are we to answer them?" he said.

Gunnar lifted his head and looked at him. "I can only tell you," he said, "that I am innocent of this deed."

"Do you know nothing at all of it?" he was asked.

"Ah," said Gunnar, "that is where you touch me. Now I must tell you fairly that I can say nothing more to you or anybody at this hour."

Then Sigurd said, "You had better be off. The king will certainly hang you for it."

Gunnar thought. "Yes," he said, "I must go. All may be set straight some day; but not by me." Then Sigurd left him, and Gunnar made his preparations.

He took very little with him, for he knew that he must go far, and most of it afoot. The king's hand stretched to the confines of Norway, and even in Iceland his power was being felt. Gunnar thought that he must

travel east—on horseback so far as he could get, but after that, he must cross the mountains and get down into Sweden. He took a sword and a sack of provision, and those were all that he took. No, there was one thing more. He could not bring himself to relinquish the fine cloak he had had from Ogmund Dint. Besides, if it were found when men came to look for him it might be witness against the man who had done the deed. It was against Gunnar's religion to betray a man's secret. He rolled up the cloak therefore and stuffed it into the saddlebag.

Then he got out his sorrel mare and rode out in the dusk. He went east by a dale which he judged would bring him soonest out of King Olaf's holding; and he rode all night and till noon the next day.

VII

Gunnar Crosses the Mountains

IT was slow going in the dark, but the sorrel picked up her feet, and the road was well known to Gunnar. He had not much time to think, but found little to regret except Halward's death. He had liked Halward, as he was ready to like most men. Nevertheless, he had now to admit that he had little esteem for Ogmund Dint.

"That was a dirty trick to serve a man who had done him no harm. And I took his bait down like a codling, and served his turn finely. A sharp practicer is Ogmund Dint, and gets by foul means what he dare not try for fairly." So he thought of it—and then he said to himself, justifying the man:

"When all's said, a man must look after himself. Halward had many friends to avenge him; and if Ogmund had been caught red-handed he was done for. I am thinking King Olaf would have been cheated of his rope-work. Somebody or other would have hewn him down before news ever got to the Court. Yes, I don't see what else he could have done —and yet I would not have done it myself. Well, I am a fine cloak to the good, which I will keep in case I want it some day as testimony."

He chuckled over his great gain, glad that he had brought it with him, though he had had another purpose in his mind when he packed it into his bag. "Maybe the Swedes will take me for a king's son." He knew nothing of the Swedes, believed to be a dark and savage people, a people of forests and swamps; but he must venture among them if he wished to save his neck. "Oh, yes, certainly I wish to save my neck."

He found himself to be passably happy, riding under the stars up the dales which grew ever narrower, and more intricate. There was little cantering ground, and the way difficult to find. Knowing the stars well, he steered by them. Besides that, the season was still fair and it could never be called dark.

He rested not until the sun was warming the snow on the peaks above him, and then not for long. But he had to go very slowly now, up the bed of a water-course which he must cross and recross half-a-dozen times in the half-hour to get tolerable going ground. The sorrel stretched her neck and blew through her nose. She was tired and he knew it, and felt heavy at the thought that he and she must soon part. She was his dearest possession. He thought that he loved her as much as his brother. Both of them had served him well in this affair. "It was a generous thing of Sigurd, so near as he is to King Olaf, to come and warn me. He may get

into trouble over it. All depends on the king's mood. If he is in a rage he may tie Sigurd up and keep him in bondage on my account. But no! I trust that king. He was good to me about his religion." He laughed over the memory of that, and looking up into the clear sky, which the sun was burning to whiteness, watching the soaring eagles, marking up the glittering snowfields, the herds of deer stretched out in thin lines of travel like trees in file, he felt happy.

The time came when he must send the mare home. He freed her of saddle and bridle. He loaded himself with the packbag, cut himself a birch-sapling for staff, and stood ready. Then he kissed Sorrel's nose, and turned her face westward.

"Home with thee, dear one," he said, "and keep thy counsel when thou art there. We shall meet again if the luck holds. Neigh at thy stable door and Sigurd will befriend thee. Farewell." He gave her a hearty

smack on the buttock, then held his arms wide and said, "Off." She looked round at him, prick-eared and close-eyed. She whinnied to him, then turned to nibble the grass. "What, thou wilt not? But, I tell thee, go. One more kiss perhaps." He kissed her again, and whispered in her ear, "Home, my dear." She looked forward down the rocky vale she had climbed and then walked soberly down. Once or twice she stopped and looked round, and then she neighed after him. "Shoo, mare!" he said. "Shoo, girl!" and opened his arms. Sorrel went down the valley and he lost sight of her.

He turned to his way, which asked him to cross a mountain shoulder-deep in snow. That was heavy going, for it was soft in the sun. From the top he saw his work before him, fold within fold of snow; brown valley-bottoms, and over all the great ridge of white with pines like scars upon it, which was the boundary between Norway and Sweden.

Heavens! What a job had he got. But he went on, nothing doubting, and kept a stout heart. "A lonely place to be hanged in, and few trees fit for it. But I doubt I should have a fight for it here."

I need not delay over his journey, which took him two days longer, and two nights. By the time he had climbed the great ridge he had come near the end of his strength and his provisions for it. Yet he must go on; for that was no place in which to spend the night, a waste of snow and a line of torn pines driven everlastingly by a cruel wind. When he saw what was now in front of him and below, his heart might sink, though it did not. So far as eye could range all was forest. It was like looking upon a dark sea, featureless except for the lines of light and shadow which ran over it when wind and sun played together. He saw no ways, no clearings; there rose no chimney-smoke anywhere. Not a

bird sailed above, not a wolf grieved, not a fox stirred. "And is that Sweden then? And are there people dwelling in the dark beneath? There are two worlds there, and there might be dwellers in the tree-tops who know nothing of the inhabitants of the deep, and are themselves unknown. How am I to guide myself through that thicket, and who is going to feed me or give me drink?"

Looking into it, he shivered in the wind. "Outlandish country, you must do better for me than this," he said. He had to traverse a league of snow-slope before he could enter the forest. To that he addressed himself now, with a prayer to all the Gods in Valhalla.

VIII

Gunnar in the Forest Hears Tell of Frey and His Wonders

THE course of the snow-slope brought Gunnar to rocks and a precipice from a gorge in which descended a river of ice. Far below him he heard the thunderous crash of water, and judged that in following that, if it could be done, he would find his best chance of guiding his way through the forest. The river would join another; that other must in time reach the sea. So he determined to do; but it was easy talking. It took him the best part of a day to get down the cliff. He spent a miserable night crouched under a rock, and started off again in the morning almost fasting. There was coarse grass now, growing

wherever there was hold for it. In one of these he saw a white hare lying flat, and by a trick he knew he fell his length upon her and secured her. He had no fire, and made what he could of her raw and sinewy flesh. So replenished, he went on his downward course, reached the waterfall bathed in sweat, and followed it, as nearly as might be, down into the chill and silence and darkness of the forest.

Day and night were alike to him now. For a time whose duration he took no pains to guess at, he worked his way downwards, a more fearful toil, with more of peril in it than any he had spent in climbing the ridge. So far, the forest was untouched by the hand, unvisited by the foot of man so far as he could perceive. He saw no living thing, though high above him he sometimes heard the battling of wings, and once or twice hoarse cries which he judged must come from the air. He listened for wolves or foxes, but heard

none; he kept his eyes aware for the track of roe-deer or bear, but vainly. All was silent and accursed. Except on the banks of the torrent there was little vegetation to be seen, for among the pine stems the needles lay close and deep upon the ground, and nothing could live in such a soil or in such chill and dank air. Whither he went, or how far he had come, he knew not; for all his steadiness of heart, the conviction turned him sick that if he did not soon meet with men there would be one man less in the world.

"Better to have been hanging on a green tree in the warm and living air than to slowly fritter away into corruption, and become bleached bones here in the dark and cold." He looked back with wistfulness to such a genial death. "Sigurd would have piled a cairn for me. He would have grieved for me, and said prayers to his new God in the king's new temple. Well, hanging is a man's death, as battle is. But to fight the dark, to

grow weak by chill and hunger, to be so lonely that not a raven troubles about your dead eyes! This is a death for wolves—but not for men who love to lie snug among their fellows."

These were his thoughts at the worst; at the best he felt that before long he must hit upon a sign of life.

He was now on level ground, and true it was that he came at last upon a clearing. A broad green road ran on either side of a ford in the river. Here he stood and looked up at the blue sky, and saw how the sun made the tree-tops seem cut out of gold. He forgot his emptiness, his loneliness and dark forebodings. "Oh, now I see that the sun is a God who loves men!"

As if that were true, and he were to be assured of it, a shaft of sunlight struck the ford and turned his eyes that way. It clarified the water and brought the stones into sight. Presently he saw a better thing; a goodly fish

lay in the deeper part, faintly swaying his tail. Gunnar made a wide cast over the river and crawled up the bank on his belly. He lay motionless, watching his prey, and then, inch by inch, approached his hand to the belly of the fine fish. Inch by inch he went upwards to the head; then, judging his time, snapped his fingers together into the gills and jerked the fish out of the water. Here truly was a prize awarded him by the sun. The fish was good eating. He ate it all but the head and bones.

Now he must decide what to do, whether he should follow the river or the road. If he followed the road, by which hand should he be guided? He was not long in deciding the first issue. The sun and the sky were too dear to him to be lost again. For the second, he was for following the sun, which was high in the heavens. If it were noon, the road which ran into the sun would lead him to the south. On the south also was the sea. Be-

sides all that, there was to be said that the road had been cleared by men, and must lead to the dwellings of men.

Strong in this assurance, he went briskly along a good green track. Now he could tell night from day; now he saw birds flying overhead; presently a fox trotted across the way in front of him, saw him and sat up to watch. He barked shortly once or twice and then galloped into the thicket. But Gunnar felt enheartened by the sight of him. After that he heard wolves howling afar off, as their custom is at sunset. But the great event of all was on the next day, when he saw two things, one after the other, which made his heart beat. The first was a dog, which, the moment he caught sight of Gunnar, pelted away up the track with his tail clapped to his hinder parts; the second was a young woman. As he came round a curve in the road she was standing in the middle of it at a bowshot's distance. She was very pale, black-haired,

short-kirtled and barefoot. He stopped immediately to watch; but at that moment she saw him and slipped among the trees. Gunnar ran with all his might; he called; he shouted. No answer. He couldn't find her anywhere. No matter. Sweden was inhabited. He would not die lonely. His heart was high to be sure of that, and he went on rejoicing.

Next he came to an open place, a clearing in the trees where men had lately been. He saw the ashes of their fire, bones, the skin of a goat. He saw leaves and branches which had been slept upon; he saw the prints of hoofs—ponies' or donkeys' hoofs. So he journeyed on, and at last smelled the friendly smell of burning wood.

"Now to accost the Swedes," he said. "What will they make of me? Or I of them?"

Guided by the smell, he was not long on his way before he saw men about a great fire.

There may have been eight of them there. They looked black, and he knew that they were charcoal-burners—which in fact they were. Taking his life in his hands he went directly toward them, and when they saw him and scrambled to their feet in amazement, he lifted his hand in greeting and came among them. They were cooking over their fire; a great pot was bubbling. Their dogs came smelling about his calves; but they themselves stood speechless where they were. "Do these blacks intend my death?" he asked himself. He hoped not, but did not draw the sword.

Seeing that they did not move, and that their very dogs had now withdrawn themselves and were barking uneasily at a distance, Gunnar advanced with friendly gestures. Hereupon the men, with one accord, fell to their knees and stooped their bodies until their faces touched the earth. "Good souls, they take me for a god," he thought.

He was now fairly within the line of them, and stretching his hands over the fire. The smell from the pot tickled his nostrils and brought water into his mouth. How long was it since he had tasted cooked food? It was too much for him. Forgetting the dangers of manhood and the honors of godhead alike, he fished in the pot for a morsel, sat down and began to eat. He found himself ravenous, and in good case to better himself; he might have eaten the contents of the pot, but that by cautious degrees the charcoal-burners began to consider him. He found bright eyes peering at him from between sooty fingers. Finally, one bolder than the rest lifted his head, and fairly asked him if he were a man or a god. He spoke hoarsely, but could be understood.

"Friend," Gunnar said, "you may see by my procedure that I am a man and a hungry one, though not near so hungry as I was."

The man, at this, punched his neighbor of

either side, and said, "Up, for this is a man like ourselves." Presently they were all up and about him, very curious.

"You come from afar off? You are not of this country? Whence, then, do you come?"

Gunnar said that he was from Norway. They had never heard of Norway. One of them said that he had lived all his days in the forest country and had never seen a stranger before.

Gunnar pointed to the west. Norway, he said, lay over there, beyond the mountains. They replied that he must be mistaken, because on the level of the mountains was a great lake of snow and water in which the sun dropped every night and was quenched with a furious hissing. They said that you could hear it when the wind came that way, and that the mountain-tops were covered with steam thrown up by the dying sun, which sometimes stayed there for days at a time.

"And yet," Gunnar said, "every day the sun comes up again. How do you account for that?"

They said that was easy to understand; for the lake had no bottom. Therefore the sun dropped through, and when it had emerged kindled again upon its flight through the air. And this went on forever.

Gunnar said, "You tell me marvelous things. Now let me tell you some." So he spoke of Norway and Iceland, and of the great ocean beyond Orkney; and of Ireland, and the poets and holy men there. Then he went on to talk of the inland sea where there were no tides, but only rushing currents, and whirlpools and desperate storms. Lastly he spoke of Micklegarth and of a sea beyond that again, which is called the Black Sea, and of the terrible folding rocks which are on the edge of that. To all of this they listened with open mouths.

When they inquired what had brought him

into Sweden he frankly told them how it was. They said that he was safe enough here, and that nobody would do him any harm.

"Few men fight here," they said. "The worst that may happen to you is that you will go into the cage and be offered up to Frey. But that is reckoned an honorable way of death. You serve Frey, and you serve Frey's people, and you may be sure that Frey won't forget it."

"It may be true," Gunnar said, "that Frey won't forget me, but we know very little about Frey, never having seen him at any time; and for my part I should not care to risk it."

They all looked at him in wonder.

"But," said one of them, "everybody has seen Frey."

"I assure you," said Gunnar, "that I have not—for one. And I'll answer for every man in Norway."

"We know nothing of the Norwegians, of whom we hear for the first time," he was told;

"but the people of this part have good reason to know Frey, and to fear him, seeing he lives among them, and is now a day's and night's journey from here. I myself," the speaker said, "saw him but fourteen days ago, in his holy place."

"What is his holy place?"

The man said, "It is his temple where he lives when he is not upon his rounds. All the winter he lives there with his wife, and the people worship him and make feasts for him. But when the winter is over, and the rains come to wash the world clean for the sun, Frey goes off in his wagon and visits all the villages in turn, and blesses the grain and makes it fertile. That is how the world goes on, and men get food for their pains."

Gunnar was amazed. "Do you say that Frey has a wife?"

"I do say so, since it is true. But as yet she is not fruitful, which vexes Frey."

"Let Frey consider himself," said Gun-

nar. "It is not always a wife's fault if she is not fruitful."

"You may be sure that the fault is not Frey's," they said.

"I am not at all so sure," said Gunnar. "Does Frey do his duty by her?"

They said, "For certain he does. He has been married to her these two years."

"There's time yet," said Gunnar; "these are early days. Is she a young woman?"

"She is in the flower of her age. She must be sixteen years old."

"And is she of this country?"

"It is not certainly known. A woman from the South had her. She said that her husband had been slain on the seacoast; but no one here can say anything of it because no one has ever seen the sea. Well, when the girl was of marriageable age Frey chose her; so she was given him."

"And how did Frey choose her?"

"He took her."

Gunnar thought all this very remarkable, and said that he should himself go to see Frey. They answered to that, that undoubtedly he would; for if he did not they would be bound to take him, as an offering, since that was Frey's pleasure.

"Does Frey demand human sacrifice?" Gunnar asked. They said that he did.

Gunnar said, "He shall be balked of me; but I have a very handsome cloak about me, which I shall give him as a present if he pleases to be benevolent to me."

"All depends upon his wife," they told him. "She has the power of choice in these matters."

Gunnar said, "Leave me to deal with Frey's wife. I have a way with women."

IX

Gunnar Meets with Frey. Concerning Frey's Wife

DIRECTED by the charcoal-burners, Gunnar made his way to the village where he was to find Frey in his temple. He reached a fine clearing in the forest by the late afternoon, and was soon remarked and almost as soon beset by the inhabitants. Young and old, mostly women, they came about him like a cloud of gnats. They were a wild, dark-haired and pale people, well-made but not tall. They were all barefoot, and had fierce, husky voices; but they were harmless, touching him by the prompting of curiosity, and delight in a thing so rare. His beard especially moved them. They must by all means touch that. "It is like

Frey's beard. He is Frey's brother. Bring him to Frey then." So they spoke to each other. As they came into the village they formed a kind of procession. A young woman took him by either hand; children danced in front of him singing a shrill song; the older ones shuffled behind. Dogs capered and barked about.

Wooden houses, built clear of the ground on piles, formed the village. It was full of dogs and children, with one or two old men peering at the entry from the shelter of trees. Gunnar saw the roof of Frey's temple, a long building with a steep gable. The roof was of heather. They entered a forecourt and stood before the temple. In the midst was an altar of stone. There was a gallery to the house sheltered by the eaves of it and held up by trunks of trees, smoothed and painted with zigzags in red, blue and yellow. A curtain hung over the doorway. He saw neither Frey nor his wife.

The women who had conducted him sat upon their heels and began their song again. The rest of the village crowded the entry of the court. When they had sung for some time, the curtains of the doorway moved; Gunnar thought that he saw the outline of a shoulder, and then was positive that a hand was at the opening. He could not answer for it, but he fancied that he was being looked at.

In the meantime the crowd began to draw away from him and to form two companies, one on each side. He found himself standing alone, and looking presently around, saw an old bearded man coming toward him with a long bare knife in his hand. He had glittering eyes and a determined expression.

"This old man is going to shed blood," said Gunnar to himself. "He chooses for mine, but there are two parties to a bargaining of that sort."

The old man, being now beside him, pro-

duced from the bosom of his gown a coil of cord.

"He will truss me like a fowl," said Gunnar; then he greeted the man fairly, giving him the time of day.

"You are welcome," said the old man. "It is the hour of the evening sacrifice."

"Is that so?" Gunnar answered. "I hope you don't take me for your offering. I have not escaped one kind of death to fall into another."

"Frey must be contented," said the old man.

"He shall be," Gunnar said; "I will give him my cloak."

He opened his pack, and brought out the famous cloak. Shaking out the folds of it, he put it on and displayed it. The assembly murmured applause; even the old knifer was moved.

"I have brought this cloak as a gift for Frey," said Gunnar. "Set open the temple;

let him show himself and he shall have it. It will last him longer than a blood-offering, which is a beastly thing not at all suitable to a great god. In my country we serve Frey —or we did once upon a time—but not with men's blood. Oxen and sheep are pleasing to him; dogs, also, and hens. But he has other uses for men."

The old man was fingering the cloak. The gold work on the back was a delight and wonder to him.

"Frey has never had so much gold as this. You are fortunately come. He shall have the cloak and you too."

"You are mistaken," said Gunnar. "But in order to make sure, I will go and ask him."

With these words he stepped sharply forward and went up the steps to the temple before any one could stop him. The curtains opened and a young woman came out and stood before them, closing them behind her.

She was frightened, but bore herself with

great dignity. She could not check the shortness of her breath, however; nor the scare in her eyes. She was not tall, and she was very young; she was dressed in a blue dress which had red embroidery round the neck. Her black hair was plaited, and on her head she had a double band of gold wire with thin leaves of flat gold between the wires. Gunnar saw that she was a very pretty girl, and thought that he could deal with her if he had the chance.

He saluted her civilly and told her what was the matter.

"This old man wishes to cut my throat," he told her, "and I, on the other hand, am strongly against it. I have come to appeal to you or to Frey against such a breach of hospitality."

She did not answer him at first; but her eyes were upon his own, and her lips moved as if she were uncertain what to say.

Presently she said, "Who are you, and whence do you come?"

He said, "My name is Gunnar Helming, and I am from Norway over the mountains of the West. I am outlaw-faring as you see, and have no friends in these parts, unless you are inclined to be one."

She hesitated, but had already made up her mind. "I will send the people away," she said, "and then we will ask Frey."

Gunnar said, "I am sure that Frey will be guided by you"; but she had not waited to listen to that, being already down the steps and among the people.

"There can be no blood-sacrifice of this man," she said to them, but not in Gunnar's hearing. "This man is the friend of Frey, and it is lucky for you, I can tell you, that you have not shed his blood. I was just in time to prevent a dreadful thing which Frey would never have forgiven you. Now you must go

away and leave the two together. They have not met for a long time, and have a great deal to tell each other." With that they dispersed, and Frey's wife came back to Gunnar.

"Now," she said, "we must see Frey."

"I am going to offer him this cloak which I am wearing. It is very fine, as you see."

She touched the gold, and then took one of the sable tails in her hand.

"It is beautiful," she said. "Where did you get it?"

"I had it from a great rascal," Gunnar said, "who made a pretext of it to do me the wrong which brings me here. I will tell you the tale if you care to listen to it."

She had fixed and considering eyes, and still held the sabletail. Then she said shortly:

"We must go in to Frey. Come with me."

Frey stood in the middle of the temple. He was a young man of Gunnar's height and

proportions. His beard was red and his hair was brown. He had staring blue eyes, scarlet nostrils and a fixed smile. His lips also were scarlet. On his head was a crown of golden oak-leaves and acorns. In one hand he held a golden cone, like the fruit of a pine-tree, but much larger. In the other he had a staff which was tipped with a bud. He had a green tunic upon him and red hose. His legs below the knees were bound in leather, and he was shod with soft leather dyed red. He himself was made of wood and painted all over in colors brighter than life, but his clothes were as real as yours or mine.

"So this is Frey," said Gunnar to himself with great astonishment. "I would rather have the friendship of his wife."

This wife of his did not take much notice of her husband, it seemed to him. She drew a settle out a little way from the wall, and sat on it, inviting Gunnar to a seat beside her.

"Now tell me the tale," she said. So he did.

She said, "The man is not your enemy. Neither is the king. The man acted basely, but the king could not do otherwise than he did, for appearances were against you. But I see that you are an unlucky man, because Frey has no liking for you."

"How can you say that?" said Gunnar.

"I can tell by the look of him. He will not say anything. It is not his way. But he is no friend to you."

"If I give him my cloak," said Gunnar, "he may think better of me."

She shook her head. "I doubt it. But certainly he must have it. There is no other way. Besides, when the people see that he has accepted your cloak they at least will be contented."

Gunnar gave her the cloak, and she cast it over Frey's shoulder, and touched his

beard while she whispered to him what it was. In order to whisper in his ear she had to stand tiptoe.

"Well," said Gunnar, "and how does he take it?"

"Very ill," she said.

"Then do you send me away?"

She hung her head, and thought about it. "No," she said, "I can't do that just yet. You shall stay here for three days, and maybe he will like you better. I will talk to him about it to-night when we are in bed."

"Do you go to bed with Frey?" he said in astonishment; but her own was equal to his.

"Where else should I go if I am his wife?" she said. Then she grew red and turned away her face.

Gunnar said, "I will ask you what your name is, Frey's wife. I can't call you that for three days."

"Why so?" she asked him, rather fiercely.

"Because it seems to me foolishness."

"I am called Sigrid," she said.

"Then I shall call you Sigrid," said Gunnar.

X

Talk Between Gunnar and Sigrid

GUNNAR was a friendly man and made himself pleasant about the place. He used to sit out in the sun and converse with the village people. He told tales to the children and played games with them. The old man who had been wishful to sacrifice him bore him no malice; but Gunnar told him plainly that he did not approve his practices.

"In my country, and in Iceland also, there has been much devotion to Frey, who is a great god; but human sacrifice is not required by him, nor are we profaned with it. Prisoners of war may not be used that way. We think it barbarous and abominable."

"Well," the old man said, "it has always been the custom here. And you must re-

member the services Frey performs. He is resting now. His work is over. But when the spring comes there will be no man in the country busier than Frey. There is not a tilled field he must not visit; and the grass-lands and the gravid sheep, and the lambs and sucklings of all sorts; the sick draught-animals; the ewes who are to go under the rams; the bulling cows; the reindeer—well, you can see for yourself that he must be propitiated. And how else, pray, would you have it done?"

"The Christians, who are to the fore in Norway just now," replied Gunnar, "have a God Who has given them another law altogether. Their God had a Son Who said to His Father, 'Enough of these human sacrifices. I detest them and will have nothing to say to them.' 'What will you do then?' His Father asked. 'Why,' said He, 'I will be made man myself. I will be born of a woman, and put to death. That will be a

sufficient sacrifice for every one in the world.' And so it was, they say, and their God accepted it as sufficient. But the Christians have a strange power which is resident in their priests; and that is, that the priest does sacrifice every day, and makes anew the Son of God into a man of body and blood. Every day he offers it on the altar. So the prime sacrifice is every day renewed, and all goes well. That is what they say."

The old man was very much astonished. "You are speaking of marvelous things," he said. "It is the way of you travelers. But I do not believe that the Swedes would be content with such a sacrifice, and I am sure that Frey would not."

"We shall see," Gunnar replied, but said no more at the time. He was determined that while he remained in Frey's house Frey should go without human blood upon his altar-stone.

Sigrid liked him to be there. She found

him very good company. He made her laugh, which Frey, she said, had never done yet.

"He will though," Gunnar told her, but she shook her head.

At the end of three days, he asked her what he was to do about staying on. They sat together under the gallery outside the house. Frey was inside behind his curtains. It was the hour before the sacrifice, when his curtains would be opened, and himself shown in his fine new cloak. So far there had been no attempt made to sacrifice a man or child, for which Gunnar was glad, because he was not yet sure enough of his footing.

She frowned and nursed her chin. "Why," she said, "I don't know what is to be done. Frey doesn't like you at all; I can see that."

"Have you talked it over with him as you promised me?" She nodded her head.

"And what did he say?"

She looked away as she answered him.

"He said very little; but he was very stiff."

"I should think he was always rather stiff," Gunnar said, and she frowned and grew red.

"But what do you feel about it yourself?" said Gunnar. "I believe that you find me well enough."

She nodded. "Yes, I do. I like you to be here. You make me laugh. I feel younger than I did."

"That is good news," said Gunnar. "I understand that you are sixteen years old. Do you now feel that you are twelve?"

She laughed. "Sometimes I do."

"Then," said Gunnar, "keep me here a month or two longer and I shall rock you in your cradle."

She considered whether he was laughing at her, and then asked him suddenly, was he married, had he children?

"No, sweetheart," he said, "but I should

like a wife very well if I could get one to my mind."

Now she reproved him. "You must not say that. I am not to be called so."

"Why, what is the harm in that?" he said. "It's what I used to call Sorrel, my mare."

"It may be so," she replied, "but I am not your mare."

"No, indeed," he said. "But what then shall I call you? Shall I say 'Pretty one' or 'Kind lass'?"

"No. Frey would dislike it."

"But," he said, "all these names are true of you."

She said, "Frey would like them all the less."

Gunnar said that he would risk it. And certain it is that he did, and that she said nothing more about it.

She decided that he should stay on until the winter feasts began.

"And then we will see what can be done.

Maybe he will be more used to you by then."

"Oh, as for him," Gunnar said lightly, "he has had a fine cloak from me, and I suppose that is enough."

She frowned, and tossed her foot. "You don't know Frey yet."

Then came the hour of sacrifice and a leading-in of sick animals to be blessed by Frey. Gunnar was very useful here, for he was skilled in farriery, and could do much, too, with sheep and cattle. The people called him the new priest of Frey, and held him in great honor. But the more that they thought of Frey on his account the less, naturally, Gunnar thought of him on his own. He did not now believe that even a devil resided in him, or, at least, he found it difficult of belief. Frey had the appearance of frowning sometimes, and sometimes there seemed to be a red flame in his eyes. Another thing he could do with his eyes: he could cause them to follow you all over the room. Those eyes of his

were forever upon Gunnar and Sigrid so that they used to say to each other, "We can't talk here. Let us go into the gallery."

She never said, "Let us go into the chamber," and it never entered Gunnar's mind to propose it. But it had entered into hers.

Gunnar, however, began to dislike Frey. He despised him, and yet found that added to his dislike. He told himself that Sigrid's marriage was a black shame.

After he had been with her a while she told him what she knew about herself. She had never known her father, nor even what his name was. Her mother had been called Sea-child; and Sigrid remembered being carried on her back, slung in a shawl. Her mother had had black hair and yellow eyes which looked black in the dark, and as pale as the palest amber in strong light. She was rather tall, whereas Sigrid—who also had black hair and amber eyes, though of a darker tint—was a little woman. She thought that

she remembered her mother saying that they had crossed the sea; and that somebody, her mother or an old man who used to be with them sometimes, had spoken of a city called Prag. She thought that this must be true, because she had never heard anybody in Sweden speak of Prag, and doubted she could have made up the name for herself. Gunnar told her that she had not.

"There is a city called Prag, on a mighty river. I have seen the river," he said, "but not the city of Prag."

Well, then she told him that the Swedes had ill-treated the old man who used to be with them. They had put him into an osier basket, and pierced that through and through with swords; she remembered the bright blood welling out between the plaited wicker. That had been done upon the altar of a god —she believed it was Frey. As for her mother, some man had taken her to live in his house, and she herself had lain about with the

cattle, and had been sent to keep swine in the woods. Nobody had hurt her, but she had gone in terror of wolves, which in winter were dangerous, and came sometimes into the villages and carried off children from the doorways. They were so hungry that even when they were beaten off they only ran to a little distance, and then came back again to snuff about for what there might be in their way.

Then she remembered a day when her mother brought her into the house, and took off her rags, and put a new gown on her. She twisted up her hair into a long plait, and made her see if she could still sit upon it. That was easy. After that she was kept at home with the children of the house; and men used to take notice of her, kiss her and take her on their knees. She had liked that for a time, because she liked people who were kind and friendly; but there was too much of it, and she used to run away and hide herself.

There had been a lad, she said, called

Tostig, belonging to the household of her mother's husband. He had been in love with her, she supposed. At any rate, he was always in her company, and she had liked him very well. One day when they were all in the temple before Frey, with garlands of flowers, Frey's eyes had burned fiercely, and by-and-by he fell forward upon Tostig and knocked him down. They picked up Frey; and the priests said that Tostig was to be sacrificed. That was done. They put him in an osier basket and transpierced it with their swords. After that Frey's eyes were cool and steady, and nothing more occurred until the following spring when Frey was to have started on his rounds to bless the vegetation. Then, again, when they were in the temple his eyes burned, and again he fell, this time upon herself. She was thrown backwards and Frey upon her. Then she believed that her last hour was at hand; but her mother was shrill and urgent with the priests, calling them

fools. She said that Frey had been jealous of Tostig and fell upon him on that account; but he fell upon Sigrid for no reason of that sort, but to mark her for his own. Sigrid, she said, was now marriageable. Frey wanted to marry her, and to disoblige him would be at their peril. There was high debate about all this, and other priests from other villages were called in. Frey was asked, and they say that he nodded his head. She herself was not asked; but she was taken into the temple one night by her mother and told what she would have to do. On the next day was the wedding and great rejoicings all over the forest country.

Gunnar stopped her here. "They married you to that block of painted wood?"

She said, "They married me to Frey."

Gunnar said, "But—" and then he stopped short himself. "There is no more to be said."

"No," she said, "that is the end of it. We set out in the ox-wagon soon after that."

"How long ago was this?" he asked her.

She replied, "I was marriageable, my mother said. I don't know when it was." Then she thought aloud. "One, two, three —yes, it was three springs ago last spring."

"And you say you are sixteen years old?"

"I don't say so," she replied; "the people here say so. My mother died two springs ago when I was away with Frey on his rounds."

Gunnar got up from the bench where they were sitting.

"Wait here for me," he said, and went into the temple, folding the curtains behind him. There was Frey, crowned and standing, with his shining scarlet nostrils. Gunnar went up to him and took him by the nose. "God or devil," he said, "I'll get this out of joint before I've done with you, or you with Gunnar." Frey rocked under the force of his passion, but said nothing.

Gunnar came back and found Sigrid where she was. She did not look up. He stretched

out his hands toward her, then dropped them and began to whistle a tune.

That made her look up smiling. "You seem in good spirits," she said.

"I feel considerably better than I did," he told her, "but there is much to do before I am perfectly myself again."

XI

Gunnar Turns Frey About Against Frey's Will

SIGRID told Gunnar that the old priest of Frey who lived in the village, and who had been the man wishful to slay him on the altar, intended to have a sacrifice on the morrow.

"Oh, does he so?" said Gunnar. "And what is he going to sacrifice?"

She said, "It is a boy."

"We will see about that," Gunnar said. "It may be that it will be himself who gets the worst of it."

The next day, before the hour of sacrifice, Gunnar told Sigrid to go into the court and leave him to draw the curtains. She did as

she was told. The people assembled, and he heard their singing, and the stamping of their feet as they danced about the victim. Then they all called on Frey, and Gunnar peeped through the curtains and saw the old man in a crown of leaves, with his knife in his hand, and the victim, naked except for a loin-cloth, bound up tightly with cords. There, also, was the basket of osier. Having done what he wished to do in the temple, he drew the curtains. To their great consternation the people saw that Frey had his back to them instead of his face. Gunnar, who had come out by a side door, joined Sigrid in the gallery of the temple. They sat close together looking at the amazed people.

The old man gave a shrill cry. "Frey abandons us! He is angry." Then he turned to his flock and spoke vehemently, but Gunnar could not hear his words. Sigrid watched them with keen and bitter eyes.

Presently the old man turned again and

beckoned to Gunnar. He, however, sat where he was. Then he was hailed by his enemy.

"You, stranger, come down."

Gunnar said, "I am a servant of the temple, and will not come down. Do you come up rather and say what you have to say."

The old man then came shuffling up, with his gown dragging at his ankles. When he stood before Gunnar, he was out of breath, and that added to his rage.

Gunnar asked him what the matter was, and Whitebeard gnashed his gums together.

"The matter is that Frey is angry—not because of sacrifice, but because there has been none since you came here. There must be much more blood shed—and the sooner the better."

"I assure you," Gunnar replied, "that there will be blood shed if you persist, and that blood will be your own."

Whitebeard looked fiercely at him. "You

are talking foolishly. Who would shed my blood? And how would that be pleasing to my master Frey?"

Gunnar replied, "I will tell you the answer to your questions. To your first: I would very willingly shed your blood, and your blood is the only blood that I would willingly shed. And I believe that all these people would dip their hands in it and show it to Frey, who would then turn his face to them again. As for your second, it is plain that Frey is displeased with your present sacrifice."

Whitebeard was in a great rage. He put his face close to Gunnar's and said, whispering (but Sigrid heard him), "It was you who turned Frey about."

"It was," said Gunnar.

"You own to your blasphemy. For blasphemy it is, though you said nothing."

"Take it so," said Gunnar.

The old man looked about him, not knowing what to do next. His eyes fell upon

Sigrid, who stood stiffly by with fixed looks.

"Mistress," he said then, "Frey's wife, what say you?" She shivered.

"There must be no sacrifice," she said. "Frey will not have it."

"But you heard this man tell me that he turned Frey about?"

"I did," she said. "He did so at my desire."

"You own yourself party to his wicked mind?"

"His mind is the mind of Frey in this," she said.

The old man frowned deeply. "You avow that?"

"I do."

"Did Frey confide it to you?"

"He did."

"When this man Gunnar was not there?"

"He was not there."

The old man tossed his arms up. "There is no more to say."

Then Gunnar, even while his enemy stood by him, addressed the people. He said, "I come from a distant country, where Frey has been had in honor, but not in your way. Your way is beastliness and great shame to you because you read into the mind of the god what is the secret pleasure of the vilest of you, such as this old toothless man here. He, loving to see men's blood flow, believes that Frey takes joy in it also. But Frey knows very well that a man is better than a beast, and if he love the smell of beasts' blood, that is his affair, but the blood of men is more honorable than that, and reserved for better work. He says that I put into the mind of Frey to be done with the slaughter of men. Have it that I did; did I not well to bring his mind to what is excellent in men? Of what use to Frey is there or what pleasure can he have in the blood of base or craven men? I said that I would shed the blood of this vile old man, and so I would if I thought that

Frey would be the better of it. But the fact is that it would make the ground sick, and Frey would curse you for the gift. Have done with that, and be sure that Frey does not need blood at all, but honesty and the good works of your hands. If you have children, offer them to Frey, but alive, not dead. Shed marrow rather than blood, and Frey will approve your fruitfulness and bless the seed and the seed-plot. And if blood must be shed, let Frey shed his own for you, as the God of the Christians did, Who gives His people every day His body to eat and His blood to drink—which turn in their breasts to milk and in their veins to courage. Let Frey show himself such a god, and you will have no need for lascivious-minded old men to lead you into their own nasty vices." Then, turning to Whitebeard, he said, "Get you gone, old monster, and gnash your gums apart where none can see your impotent malice."

The people applauded him when he had

done. Some brought branches of trees, and some nests of eggs to Frey. Then Gunnar turned him round to face them, and they rejoiced.

But Sigrid was pale and trembling, and would not look at Gunnar or speak to him all the rest of the day. She stood about by Frey, and put her hand in his, and talked to him, sometimes touching his beard.

Gunnar made the best of it, and let her alone; but seeing her next day in the same mood of alienation, he asked her what the matter was, and said, "Is there anything I can do about it?"

She began to tremble again, and violently; but she used all her force to control herself, and presently told him that all he could do was to leave the place.

"If you seek my happiness," she said, "that is what you will do."

"Well," said Gunnar, "I do wish you happy, sweetheart."

"Ah," said she, "it is your sweethearting of me that has made this trouble."

"Well," he said again, "and it does make trouble, my dear; but it is a pleasant trouble when all's said; and there's a remedy for it."

"It is that which I desire," she said, and he said, "So do I desire it."

Then she said, "Do you know what you did yesterday? You made me untrue to Frey."

"How so?"

"Why, you drove me to say what was untrue. He did not speak his mind to me. That is not true. Or, if he did, what he said was quite otherwise."

"You mean," said Gunnar, "that the mind of Frey, as you understand it, is not my mind."

"Certainly it is not," she said. "He hates you. He does not rest because of you."

Gunnar looked at her. "You mean, I believe, that you do not rest."

She stamped her foot. "It is the same

thing. If he does not rest, how can I rest?"

Gunnar said, "It is not at all the same thing. And do you think you would rest better if I went away?"

She shook her head, but did not speak. He saw that she was crying.

"Well," said he, after a while, "then I shall not go, but will stay here and make Frey a little more friendly."

"Ah," she said in her tears, "you won't do that. He is jealous of you. You can see it."

"I see nothing of it, I assure you," Gunnar said, "and he has no cause. But there are many ways of curing jealousy, one of which is easy."

She waited to hear what it was, but without asking. She wanted to know very badly, but Gunnar did not tell her what it was. So after a while of waiting she said, "You are hateful; I hate you," and walked away.

Gunnar went out into the sun; and by-and-by she came back with needlework and sat

where she could see him at his business of tending the temple-garth; but she would not speak to him for the rest of the day.

The season wore to the winter. With the first snow and the fall of the leaf men began to make ready for the winter feasts. There was now no question of Gunnar going. No man could travel that country in the winter when the days are but a few hours long, and the snow is deep and bends the trees to the earth. Gunnar, who did not want to go at all, put it jokingly to Sigrid that perhaps the god of the wolves wanted a human sacrifice, and that perhaps it was himself they wanted. She showed him her eyes full of trouble, and he was touched.

"You don't wish me to say that?"

She said, "I cannot bear you to talk lightly of such things."

"Frey would be glad of such a sacrifice, I am thinking."

She left him instantly and went to Frey. But she soon came back again. She was never long away from where he happened to be.

XII

The Winter Feasts

THE custom of the winter, when no man could work, was to make merry with what had been gained in the summer. Men killed pigs and sheep, and drank their mead out of horns. This was the time for skalds and story-tellers.

But the village where Gunnar was now settled was a holy village, because of Frey's house. It was proper that no feast should be held unless Frey were present at it. He was carried from homestead to homestead; and where he was there was Sigrid his wife, and there now was Gunnar also. Those three always sat on the dais with the giver of the feast, and when the tables were ready they had the chief seats. Sigrid was waited

upon as if she had been a man, and great respect was shown her, which she sullenly received. Once she had told Gunnar that she disliked being noticed. She had said that she had been happiest in the days when she was keeping pigs in the forest; and he had said that he understood that very well. Now he put that down as the reason why she had a hang-dog look at these merry-makings, ate little, drank less, said little and laughed not at all. When the drinking began she always left the hall and sat with the women in the bower. Frey was left—and then it was that Gunnar in his cups used to take liberties with Frey—to clap a clout over one of his eyes, or stick an apple on a spike of his crown. He was wary how he played these tricks, for in some company it would have been taken very ill; but in some, and when men were far disguised in drink, his japes went well enough, and gave him satisfaction.

He was by now entirely out of conceit with Frey. That a god should be throned in the world he sincerely believed—and could swear to a hundred or more; but that one should be caged in a painted block he did not believe. As for his marriage, that made the hairs on his back bristle, and his neck to swell. A good deal of talk went on when Sigrid was gone with the women. He listened to it and raged, but outwardly he was still, and found nothing to say. The people expected—or some of them—that Sigrid would bring Frey a child. Some said that she had miscarried; none thought it unlikely. Things were said and tales were told of Frey which amazed him while they made him angry.

"At this rate," he said to himself, "I shall be an atheist or a Christian. Would that King Olaf could hear me say so. He would countermand his rope and make me one of his household."

Then he found out that it interested him more to hear tales of Sigrid than it disgusted him; and he said to himself then, "Frey and I shall be fighting for Sigrid one of these days. I learn that I am in love with her." But he knew that it would be a shame to tell her so, and resolved that she should learn nothing about it.

There was never a merrier winter in that village, and never a man more beloved than Gunnar was. He was no skald, but his tales were without end, and so were his jokes. He had had his share of travel, and now they had their portion in it. He told them of Micklegarth and of the great King of the Greeks. He said that there was a temple there dedicated to divine wisdom, which was a paragon and wonder of the world. The king did sacrifice there every day to his god —and there was nothing in the temple less precious than gold. He spoke of that other

Garth in the North, a Russian city, which was envious of the Greek kingdom, and wishful to rival it. Then of Frey's worship he had something to say. In Iceland, he said, Frey was worshiped, and there had been a priest of his there called Ravenkeld, who had not only built a house for him with five or six images of Frey set round in a circle, but had had a famous stallion which he shared with the god. No one but Ravenkeld or Frey might ride this horse, which also had a stud of twelve mares for his own use and pleasure. Ravenkeld had made a vow that he would have the life of any man who should ride the horse; and he kept it, though it cost him all that he had. For once there came to him a certain man called Thoreir, who was wishful to serve him. Ravenkeld made a shepherd of him, and set him also to keep guard over Frey's horse and his mares, warning him of the vow he had made. Then, on a day, thirty sheep were lost and Thoreir must

ride far to find them. Never a mare of the twelve could he come near, but Frey's horse stood; so he saddled him and rode him all day. Ravenkeld came to know about it and went out to find Thoreir, who was lying on the stone wall, counting his sheep over.

"How came you to ride my horse," said Ravenkeld, "when I warned you to ride any other but him?"

Thoreir told him how it was. Then Ravenkeld said:

"I am sorry, but we make vows one day and find them heavy another."

Then he drove his spear through Thoreir's back and slew him. He paid for doing that, for he was outlawed by Thoreir's kindred at the *Thing,* and they came upon him unawares, and pierced his legs at the tendons of the knees and hung him up by them for a day. When they came to take him down the blood was in his eyes and he was as near dead as might be. Then they banished him with

hardly any money or goods; but yet he prospered and got his own back again. But when he was restored to his ease and wealth he said that he had no opinion of Frey at all, and would have no more to do with him. He broke up the images and turned the god's house into a byre for his cows, and had no religion thereafter that ever Gunnar heard tell of.

"And that," he said, "is the way of men. They make a god first and unmake him afterwards—and all that is foolishness."

But the people said, "How can that be when we know very well what Frey here does for us, sending the rain in proper time upon the earth?"

"Now tell me this," said Gunnar; "do you pray to Frey for rain when the wind is in the east?"

"We do not," they said, "for that would be waste of breath."

"So it would," said Gunnar, "and so also

if the wind blow from the south. For then the rain will come of itself."

"That would be Frey's doing, we hold," said they. Then Gunnar smiled.

"You are lucky," he said, "and so is Frey."

They always took Frey back after the feasts, two or three men bearing him up between them; and many a tumble they had in the snowdrifts, if they were not very sure-footed, through drink or otherwise. One night, when they had some way to go, Gunnar picked up Sigrid and carried her through the worst of the drifts.

"Oh, you should not, you should not," she said; but he laughed.

"You are so small a thing," he said, "it would be a shame."

But she hid her face in his shoulder and said again that he should not carry her. He had a great mind to kiss her, but he did not do it just then.

"Well," said he, "let your husband carry you." And then he called out, "Hi you, Frey, come and carry Sigrid through the snow."

But just then Frey and his bearers were all rolling in the snow together.

"You see how it is with poor Frey," Gunnar said. "He has had too much to drink and can't carry himself, so what would he do if he had you, too?"

After that he got into the way of carrying her, and she grew accustomed to it, looked for it, and held her arms out for him to lift her when they came out of the feast.

Gunnar enjoyed himself, but did not tell her so, nor speak of it at all. He took it as a thing of course that he should serve her, and she accepted it. But there was no love-making, even though the days were dark, and there was nothing to be done out of doors. He said to himself:

"She is Frey's wife, or believes herself so.

I don't care a flick of the fingers for Frey, but for her I do care."

They were thrown very much together, and found nothing amiss with that. Gunnar talked to her of his travels and told her stories as they sat by the fire. He had a happy way with him which made all people like him and give him their confidence. He neither took liberties nor allowed them; but if you were simple and gave yourself no airs he was very gentle and good-humored. Sigrid had no suspicions of him, nor need for any. He would be incapable of doing her any harm. It was because he was afraid of making her unhappy that he left off teasing her about Frey. At first he had been rather given to it, but he saw that she was troubled by it, and did not know what to say. Then he stopped his gibes and mockery.

XIII

Frey Makes Ready to Go His Rounds

BY slow degrees the winter wore out; the clouds broke up, and the thick snow-fleece was pitted all over as if it had been a blanket which moths had fretted. The days grew longer; men looked up, feeling the sun; the thatches began to drip, and then to run, and to dig for themselves deep channels in the snow. Then began roof-slides by broad blocks at a time, and a man might be buried in slush before he knew it.

Sigrid said that they must make ready Frey's wagon for the road, and told Gunnar where it was stored and asked him to fetch it out. As soon as the buds began to swell on the trees they must be off. Gunnar was glad of some work, and soon had the wagon

out of the shedding and haled it into the forecourt.

This wagon was a gaudy affair, being painted all over in red, blue and yellow. The wheels were red and so was the pole. White oxen drew it, which had red trappings and brazen stars on their foreheads. Upright poles at the four corners of the wagon carried a wooden canopy, and held rods also for the curtains which shut Frey off from mortal eyes until such times as he would appear and, having been propitiated with offerings, suffer himself to be carried into the fields. Over these curtains Sigrid was now busy. They were green and had dragons, the sun, the moon and stars, and runes also sewn upon them, of red and white colors. The inside of the tent which these curtains made was a fair chamber. In the forepart Frey stood when he was traveling; in the afterpart was his bed where he lay at night. But the parts were not

divided off There was no bed-chamber for him as he had in his winter house. The men who went with the wagon, and tended the oxen, must lie out in the open to sleep, or in the sacking slung beneath where the beast-fodder was carried.

Gunnar thought that he would have no men to help him, and Sigrid said, "Oh, no, we want no others. With you to help all will go well."

"You trust me, I see," said Gunnar, and Sigrid looked at him with friendly eyes.

"How should I not? Are you not the trustiest of men?"

"If you were not so kind to me," he told her, "perhaps I should not be so trusty. And it may be that we should both be the better for it. But I have a soft heart, and you have found that out."

"I know nothing of your heart," she said. "That is the last thing that I know about you."

"So be it," said Gunnar. "Now tell me what you wish to be at with this wonderful affair."

It did not suit her very well just then to be talking of the wagon, so she crossed her knee and clasped it with her hands.

"The heart of a man is like the snow just now, I think. It is quickly melted where the sun strikes it or the rain falls upon it. It is easy to make a dint in it. But below that there is ice. In small matters a man will be kind enough; but there may be great matters which may break themselves to pieces against him before he will be moved."

Gunnar made no answer, but busied himself examining the wagon. He broke a bubble of paint with his thumb, and said:

"Look at that now. There's bad workmanship for you."

"It is exactly the contrary with women," said Sigrid. "A girl's heart is like a spring which is guarded by overhanging snow and a

thin film of ice. The first thaw breaks that through, and the water wells up warm. But the film, while it remains there, is respectable; for it denotes that the spring beneath is to be guarded from defiling hands."

Gunnar was very busy. He ran his hand up and down the pole.

"The man who painted this machine," he said, "was a botcher. He has never so much as planed this pole. It is as rough as an earl's tongue. Just you feel it, sweetheart."

She was offended: "If you don't care to listen to me, I don't care, either, to observe your wagon. It is a strange way to woo a sweetheart to have her in contempt."

"My dear one," said Gunnar—and now he looked at her—"it is true that you know nothing of a man's heart, which moves him to do things rather than to talk about them. And this wagon is not mine, but Frey's, and I am to work upon it by your desire."

Her eyes filled with tears. "Ah," she said,

"do I not know whose wagon it is? Is this a time to remind me of it?" Gunnar looked quickly about him. Nobody was by. So then he went to Sigrid, and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Don't cry, pretty one," he said, "otherwise there will be the mischief between Frey and me."

Then he kissed her; and that was the first time that ever he did it, strange as it may appear. She sat very still, and all drawn up into a bunch, as if she felt chilly, which she did for a minute. Then she went into Frey's house and stayed there for a good time. Gunnar shook his head, and went to fetch the tools that he needed for cleaning the paint off the wagon.

He took a long time over it, and was very happy to be so busy. He cleaned off all the old paint, which was many coats thick, and smoothed the wood to his fancy. Then he set

to work with new colors and was at it many days from dawn to dusk. It began to look very splendid, with a green ground, and yellow wheels and pole, and with flowers, trees, birds and beasts upon all that in blue, red and white. He painted also the sky and the sun and rivers winding among meadows. Then he had the sea, with ships upon it, because Sigrid did not know what the sea was like. And he wrote runes all round the panels of the wagon, sayings such as were common in his country, such as "Bare is Back without Brother Behind it," and so on.

Sigrid was much the better for being kissed, though she was very careful not to say so. She thought that Gunnar would not perceive it, but he did. Her eyes were larger and softer; her color was higher; she was quieter in her ways, not so restless, and certainly not so testy. She used to sit contentedly with her curtains while he worked at his painting, and could now admire what he did. She talked

no more about the difference between a man's heart and a woman's, perhaps because she knew more. It was not hard to discern these changes in her.

"This wagon," said Gunnar, "is a paragon. It is my masterpiece." The time had come when all was done, even to the hangings of Frey's bed, and the containing boards of the same.

"Now, sweetheart," said he, "it is for you to consider whether we shall not give your lord a lick of paint. To my eye he would be the better for it, but you know his fancy better than I do."

She said shortly, "He is well enough." She could not bear his jokes about Frey just now.

"He is not then," said Gunnar. "He will look shabby in his new wagon. Just try him for yourself and see."

She was most unwilling, but yet she allowed

him to put Frey up in the forepart of the wain.

"Look at him," said Gunnar. "Look at the brown blur upon his neck; and see how smeared his cheeks are. There is no shine left. To my thinking he is failing in one eye. It is like the eye of a dead fish. There should be new gilding on his cone. Strange how a new wagon shows him up."

She was not looking at Frey at all; but when Gunnar had him down in the court and was about to take his clothes off, she sprang forward with flaming cheeks and dangerous eyes.

"I dare you to touch him."

Gunnar stood. "As you please," he said. "It is nothing to me. Let him go bleary to his work."

She shifted about and paced the court uneasily. "He is very well as he is. If anything is to be done to him I will do it."

"As you please," said Gunnar again, and left the court. He went out into the forest where the birds were singing. He looked to

see if any were nesting yet, and was away three or four hours.

When he came back Frey was in his house again, and he examined what Sigrid had done. She had washed him; Gunnar thought he looked sadly bleached about the chaps, and there was flaws in his beard. His neck was pinker. She had tried to repaint his right eye.

While he was looking at Frey Sigrid came in. She was flushed, and prepared to be angry in a moment.

"I suppose you think I have made matters worse," she said.

"What do you think yourself?" he asked her.

"He will do well enough," she answered. But he told her:

"You have not helped his eye-works. He is looking two ways at once."

"It is what you would say."

"It is what I do say," he answered, "because it is true."

"I know what you think of him," she cried out sharply. "You have no need to tell me."

Gunnar replied, "He looked shabby before, and in want of a lick; but you have made him look like a boiled goose."

Sigrid was seriously vexed. She looked as if she were all over spines, like a teasel. But the worst of it was that she knew Gunnar was right, as well as he did himself. Meantime Gunnar walked comfortably about, by and large, while she stood opening and shutting her hands.

"You are hard to please," she said at last, in a dry voice. "Yet I do think that I have mishandled his right eye. Perhaps you will mend it for me."

"Ah," said Gunnar, "and for him, too, I will mend it, though he has no liking for me. Look at him, I ask you, from where you stand, and then from where I do. Whereas his eyes used to follow us about to see what we were

doing, now he sees nothing of us at all. Kindly look for yourself."

She did as he told her. She examined Frey very carefully from where she stood and then crossed the floor and stood by Gunnar and looked at Frey.

"Well?" said Gunnar.

Her answer was not in words, but she looked up at Gunnar with a faint smile. So then he kissed her again, and that kiss was a long one and lasted some time.

"Frey cannot see," she said presently, "and it is my fault. Mend his eye for me."

"Why," said Gunnar, "do you want him to see us?"

She said, "Not always—but sometimes it doesn't matter."

Gunnar said that he would put the eye right, and, more than that, he would freshen Frey up altogether. He pointed out many flaws in his painting.

Sigrid was not in the mood to deny him

anything just now. She agreed readily, and was going away. But she came back again.

"Promise me one thing," she said.

"I will promise you a dozen things," said Gunnar.

"One only. It is that you will only paint what you can see."

Gunnar, who was very quick, said, "I will obey you; but in that case you must cover him in a blanket, lest I spoil his clothes."

She brought him a blanket, and left him. Gunnar put Frey's eye in order, and touched up his cheeks and scarlet nostrils for him. He sized the cone for gilding, and put a tinge more red into his beard.

Then he looked at him with his head on one side and one eye shut.

"You are a fine figure of a god, Frey. We are something alike, I believe. But for all that I see that you don't love me."

He was at the end of the room as he stood;

but for all that Frey had him in view, and looked furious.

After that there was nothing to do but wait the moment when Frey should start on his rounds.

XIV

Frey Starts on His Rounds

THE weather was mild and open when Frey set out in his wagon, and the roads were heavy. They plunged into the forest ways, where the tracks were swimming in melting snow, and the air was rife with dripping trees. But the birds were all awake, the buds were shining, there was spring in the air. Gunnar walked beside the oxen and touched their necks now and then with the nodding point of his switch; Frey kept his bed, and Sigrid trudged beside Gunnar, heedless of the wet and mire. Sometimes she took his hand, sometimes his arm; sometimes his arm supported her. She was very happy, and talked and laughed as she had never before.

Now she could laugh at Frey, it seems.

"Frey is snoozing," she said. "He doesn't see what we see."

"No," said Gunnar; "but let him alone. He will have to work by-and-by. It is no light matter to order the yearly affairs of the earth."

"No, indeed," she said. "Besides, you have cut off his blood-offerings which he loves."

"He will be all the better for that," Gunnar replied. "Such food makes fat."

The first village which they reached received them with acclamations. Children with flowers, women with their children, men with their women were there to receive them. They crowded the green track, they came flying through the forest on all sides. The oxen trudged over budded boughs and the first-born of flowers. The curtains of the forepart were open. Sigrid sat in the wagon by the side of Frey, who shook on his perch. The people were frantic, and many tried to climb

the cart that they might touch Frey's new cloak, or kiss the budded staff in his hand. Gunnar had all to do to keep them free of the wheels. The elders of the village were before the first house and turned when the wagon drew nigh to walk before it to the god-house. It was late by the time they had reached it and got Frey carried in; but there were torchlights everywhere flaring about like fiery serpents, and burning all the pools of water till they looked like melted gold.

The people told of great sacrifice in the morning, a boy and girl who were but just mature, and a foreign woman who had been found lost and benighted in the time of snow. Then Gunnar made it plain to them that these things were not to be.

"Frey," he said, "utterly abhors this blood-shedding, which, if you persist in it, will fairly ruin your tillage of the year. I know what he will do, for he has done it already. He

will turn his back upon your fields, and nothing will move him. Be warned therefore, before it is too late."

The people were dismayed, and many murmured. Then Gunnar said:

"Bring me your victims, and I will show you the mind of Frey;" which was done. The victims, bound tightly with withy-bands, were set before him. With his knife Gunnar cut their bonds.

"You are free," he said, "and no one dare touch you, for Frey wills it. He will bless these fields, seeing that he has blessed you, who are more to him than fields."

Sigrid, who was standing close by, now said, "He speaks truly the mind of Frey, as I myself can testify."

So that year there were no bloody rites, but all other things were done as they had been from time out of mind. They carried Frey about their fields, and said prayers and sang his praises; and so they went on their way

through the forest from village to village. Everywhere Gunnar stopped the sacrifices, and everywhere Sigrid upheld him. In time she was even beforehand with him, and much more vehement than he had ever been. He admired the spirit in which she did it, but advised her to be prudent.

"If you say too much," he told her, "they will believe you to be under my thumb."

She did not reply to that at first; but presently she said, "If they charged me with that I should not gainsay it."

He smiled with his eyes as well as his lips. "You might find it a softer one than Frey's," he said.

She turned away her face, but gave him her hand to hold. He began to talk his nonsense, setting himself the task of making her laugh; for he thought to himself, "They are better when they laugh, for they cannot do it unless their hearts are light."

XV

The Snowstorm

AFTER many weeks' journeying in dense woodland country, Frey's wagon was now to cross a range of high mountains. The forest grew lighter, the way was steadily uphill, the wind blew cooler, the trees were more backward. At last they were fairly in the uplands among boulders of rock, with here and there a few pines, or a grove of birch. It became like winter again, except for the length of daylight.

There was a rough road by which the mountains were to be passed. They reached it at sunset, and it seemed likely they would have to spend the night upon the top where the snow was still deep. It began to blow

fitfully from the east and north, and Gunnar did not like the look of things at all.

"Sweetheart," he said, "we had best shelter hereabout, for I doubt it is coming on to blow, and we might have snowstorms up above."

"No," said Sigrid, "I feel sure we had best get on. They await us on the further side of the mountain, but a little way down."

"As you will," said Gunnar; "only keep yourself warm inside, and make your curtains as snug as you can."

He had spoken truly. The wind increased, and the powdery snow began flitting in wreaths over the frozen ground. Gunnar put a blanket round Sigrid and drew his coat closer about him. The oxen plodded on without taking notice. But both wind and snow were in their faces, and it was a slow business.

Gunnar kept his eye on the look of the sky. He saw masses of dark cloud behind the moun-

tain range, inky toward the middle, brown at the edges.

"There's a mort of snow to come," he said.

It grew dark quickly, and he sent Sigrid into the wagon.

"Get to bed," he told her, "and wrap yourself up warmly. The first good rock I come to I shall shelter the cattle."

"And what will you do yourself?" she wanted to know.

"I shall turn the wagon back to the wind," he said, "and cover the oxen. Then I will do the best for myself I can."

She wasn't satisfied and seemed unwilling to leave him, but he told her again to go to bed.

"Well," she said, "I will go, but you shall kiss me first."

It was the first time she had ever asked that of him, and he gave her what she wanted, though he had other things to think about then, and plenty of them.

She went away after that, and he trudged along. The snow was coming thick now; he felt it like gnats against his face, and knew that his beard was stiff with it. The front of his clothes was like a board, and his knees ached with the strain. The oxen stopped several times; but he lured them on, and often gave a hand to the wheel. But he had to stop as often to let them breathe themselves, and every time he did so, they were the harder to move. The fury of the wind drove the snow in wreaths; banks of it formed, through which the cattle stumbled, or failed to stumble. When they failed he had to kick a passage for them.

The point came beyond which he could not get them to move. It was at a bend of the road between high rocks. The wind came down the channel in fury, the snow was blinding. He felt, for he could not see, the trembling beasts, and understood that there was no

moving them. Sigrid within the curtains made no sign. Gunnar considered that here they must remain until the storm ceased.

He found stones for the hind wheels of the wain, unyoked the oxen and led them out of the fury of the weather. He sought in the choked underpart for their coverings, but could not find them there. They would be in the wagon, and he must have them by all means. He gave them fodder, however, and then wondered what he should do to get their clothing, and to help himself. He was not cold, for his exertions had been too severe, but he would soon become so. Should he make himself a rampart of snow and crouch under that? He knew there was danger of swooning, and rejected the thought. Should he then stamp up and down, flapping his arms until daybreak? He knew that he could not.

"It seems I am to perish for the sake of a wooden god!" His heart grew hot within him. "Accursed idol," he said, "if I had you

here I would fight it out with you! And I vow that if I come through this pass with safety, and see again my own land, I will take King Olaf's religion, which does not send fair women to sleep with painted stocks."

"Sigrid has little love to spare for the like of me," he said aloud. "What knows she whether I live or die? There she snuggles asleep with Frey in her arms."

He heard the voice of Sigrid then, with tears in it. "No, no, I do not. Come in and you shall see."

He stared before him. "Sigrid, are you awake?"

She answered, "I am awake, and wait for you."

"Then," said he, "I come, but first give me covering for the cattle or they will perish, for they are now running sweat."

"Stay," she said; "you shall have them; but then you must come."

He was now on fire, and trembling, but

he waited while she struck tinder and blew a flame from which she lit a candle. After a time which was enough to cool any one, but did not cool him, she handed him out the wrappings. He made the beasts as snug as he could, and when he had done the candle was still burning fitfully.

XVI

Marriage of Sigrid

GUNNAR stood by the wagon, backing the storm. He waited for Sigrid to call him. He could see her shadow moving about, and that she seemed very busy. His temper began to rise. "What is the matter now? Have I not earned shelter yet? Or does she wait until I am frost-bitten?"

Her voice came scared from the curtains. "Are you there, Gunnar?"

"Ha! Am I here? I am a hillock of snow. There is nothing left of me that is not ice. Have you no ruth, then?"

Her voice had great fear in it. "I am afraid of Frey. He is very angry."

Then Gunnar's wrath overflowed and was bitter in the mouth. "What, is Frey angry?

Ah, but I am angry, too. I'll deal with Frey. Let me get at him."

He climbed the wagon wheel and put his head and shoulders in the curtains. He saw Frey standing in the cart. With a lurch forward, he got him by the beard and pulled him over toward himself. "Now, Frey, you and I are at grips. Come, out with you."

He now had Frey under the arms, and was hauling him out. When he had got so much of him out as was enough, he let go, and Frey, overbalancing, fell upon his head into the snow. The gleaming of the candle showed him the ax hanging on its accustomed nail.

"I'll take that," he said, and got down with it in his hand.

Now he set Frey up in the snow and took him by the ears. Frey had his crown on, but none of his clothes. Seeing him now as he really was, Gunnar's blood boiled within him.

"Dangerous, malignant idol," he said, with his teeth clenched, "whether you are devil or

stock you shall be neither within these few minutes. To what monstrous pass have you brought us, to keep true lovers apart! You, to keep lovers apart! To what shameful drudgery you turn this sweet woman. You, to drudge a woman! Ah, block of abomination, the one good thing you have done is to turn my heart to a faith that is cleaner than yours. If you have set me free, now it is my turn. Here's for Sigrid—and to let the fiend out of the tree."

With that he swung the ax high in the air and brought it down upon the head of Frey. Frey was cloven from the crown to the chine, and fell neatly in halves on either side of him. Gunnar looked up. The cloudwrack had blown over, the sky was clear and gemmed with stars.

"Frey has ridden off on the storm," he said. Then he called aloud, "Sigrid!"

And her faint voice answered, "Gunnar."

He climbed into the wagon.

XVII

Morrow of the Storm

THE storm had abated in the night, the weather of the morning was fair, with a wind from the south. Gunnar, when he went out and looked about him, thought that it would be possible to take up the journey by noon.

But there were more serious things to consider. Frey was dead and in two halves, and how could they go without Frey? How could they go with him, either? He did not know what had better be done.

But Sigrid knew very well. When Gunnar came back to her she told him.

"We must go on," she said, "and it is for you now to be Frey. You are strikingly like

him. You would do much greater miracles than ever he did—as," she said, "you have already done."

Gunnar thought about it. "It could be done, I dare say. But we have no wagoner. You would not have Frey drive his own team."

She said, "We shall easily find a teamster in the country. And until we have one I can drive the beasts."

Gunnar said that that would not suit him at all. But they settled it this way, that he should drive until they were nearing the village, which lay upon a shoulder of the mountain, not far from the pass on the further side. Then Sigrid would go and find a wagoner and return with him.

It was necessary to mend Frey's oak-leaf crown, which was in two pieces. Gunnar joined them neatly together, and gilded the edges of the fracture. The ax had been very sharp, the cut very clean. There was no

trouble with Frey's clothing; Gunnar was happy to resume his cloak.

Scarlet paint to his nostrils was all that he needed to make him as like Frey as need be; but he did not need as yet to change his nature and attributes. There would be time enough for that when Sigrid was gone for the wagoner.

They took up the journey again through the fast-melting snow. It was hard work, but the sun was shining, the sky without a cloud; they made way and reached the top of the pass without serious delay. Thence they could see the village below them. They saw also that on that side of the mountain the snow had not drifted so much. It had been exposed to the full fury of the wind, which had blown the snow off as fast as it fell. Gunnar considered that this would be a good place to wait for the teamster; but Sigrid told him that a little way down there was a better.

"There is a shelter there," she said, "and a little birch wood. You will be more concealed, and I shall not have so far to come back to you."

Gunnar laughed. "Now that you have me, you are glad of me."

Her answer was a long look, and a sigh from a full heart.

They found the little wood and steered the team there. It was in the full sun, with very little snow. Flowers were blowing there, and the birds were very busy. Gunnar kissed Sigrid and saw her go on her errand.

As for her, she went on her way rejoicing. She did what she could not remember to have done before—for she was by nature grave and silent: she sang snatches of little songs, at first with no words to them, but afterwards words came of themselves—names which she had had for Gunnar a long time stored in her heart, and others of the kind. After a few

turns of the road she saw a group of men in a walled close, and went to them.

They said that they were expecting Frey and his wagon, fearing that the storm would have stayed him.

"Frey is quite well," she said, "but we have lost our wagoner, who was a Norwegian, and Frey's priest also. He disappeared in the storm, and we suppose he perished in a drift."

"Better men than he have perished last night," said one of the men. "But who may you be, mistress?"

Sigrid said, "I am Frey's wife." And then they all knew her and saluted her with great respect.

"Frey sent me," said she, "to find a man of yours to lead his wagon into your village. Afterwards we must let him choose one who will continue with him on his rounds. It is not likely he will have a new man from every village. He would not be pleased with that."

They talked together, and then said they would all come gladly.

"Very good," she said. "You shall all bring us into the village. Now we will go back, for Frey is alone, and I don't know what he may do. He is very strange this morning, and I believe might be dangerous if he were vexed or in any way put out."

They struck off up the mountain, and when they came to the wagon in the birch wood, there stood Frey with shining nostrils, very fierce, in the cart. He had drawn the curtains so that he might look out over the country. Sigrid called their attention to that.

"You see how it is with him," she said. "Now I tell you that when I left him those curtains were closely drawn."

One of the men said that a night out on the mountain in such a storm was enough to make anybody angry.

Gunnar stood up very regally while the men

stood before him bareheaded. One man said a kind of a prayer, deprecating his anger; but Frey took no notice of him.

Sigrid said, "Better get on as soon as may be. He will be hungry, and will do no work until he is satisfied."

She got up into the wagon and sat beside Frey, and put her hand within his arm. The men urged the oxen down the road, and so they came to the village.

As soon as Sigrid saw the concourse which was out to meet them she drew the curtains, and was immediately in Gunnar's arms. But then, after that, she had to learn what were his intentions.

He said, "I will have no blood-offerings at all. If they must slay oxen and sheep, let it be for a good dinner. I will join them there and they shall be the better of it, as I shall be. But their offerings shall be gold or silver, or clothing, if they wish to serve me. Eggs, too, I will take, or cheese, or milk, or bread.

Therefore, Sigrid, you must make them understand, and more than that, you must drive it into the head of the man you choose for priest, that blood-sacrifices are an abomination to me."

She promised him that she would see to it all; and so they came into the village with the people flocking about them. When they had taken up their place and the oxen had been unyoked, fed and watered, Sigrid took the headmen apart and told them the mind of Frey. They were disappointed. They said that they had many victims whom they were anxious to dispose of, and not much gold or silver at any rate, and none which they could spare. They hoped, therefore, that Frey would accept of the accustomed sacrifice, which was a great interest to the people.

Sigrid said, "I see how it is. You wish to glut yourself at Frey's charge, and to rid yourself of what you don't want, nor Frey, either. But Frey knows this better than you do, and

is not to be deceived. You will find out very soon that I am right."

They said that he should have eggs, bread, cheese and milk, and went away very discontented.

The hour of the sacrifice was now at hand. Trestles and boards were laid before the wagon to hold up the altar and to make degrees of approach to it. Then, when songs had been sung and prayers offered, Sigrid drew the curtains apart and revealed Frey to them.

They brought baskets of bread, cheeses in the round, milk and eggs. With a bearer of eggs Frey worked his first miracle.

A certain man came up with a basketful of eggs; there may have been two dozen of them. He knelt before Frey in his place in the row, waiting his turn. Gunnar, watching him, saw him fingering the eggs while he waited, turning them over, lifting one and weighing it in his hands. Presently he saw him take two

from the basket and slip them in his pocket. When he put his hand to them again Frey brought his budded staff smartly down upon the back of it, and smashed it into his eggs. The man gave a yell, and fell down upon his face. All the rest shrank away in consternation, and there was great commotion down below. The man, sobbing and blubbering, drew out of his pocket the stolen eggs. Never had been such a miracle as this within the memory of man. The immediate effect of it was to bring out treasure to the shrine. Women brought their marriage crowns, men their rings and armlets. Fine cloth was offered and stuff embroidered with silk and gold. In the evening there was a feast, to which Frey himself came, and to their wonder and satisfaction ate and drank with the best. He said little; but he listened, and nodded his head when he was pleased, or knit his brows when he was angry. Next day he was drawn in his wagon to their closes and fields, and blessed

them all very graciously. He gave them to understand through his wife that by banking up a torrent they could easily turn it and make a head of water enough to keep the pasture green all the summer through. Another thing he told them was how to make conduit pipes of the split trunks of trees, hollowed out. All these things were wonderful, and carried the name and fame of Frey before him. The offerings poured into his treasury; he was rich, and had no more trouble with blood-sacrifices. By the end of the sowing season Frey was so rich that the wagon could scarcely hold him, his wife and the treasure. He talked to Sigrid about it, and said, "Sweetheart, I am thinking that we should do well to have a bodyguard before we get into our own country."

Sigrid, who was sitting on his knee at the time, said that no one would dare to attack Frey; but Gunnar nodded his head.

"Fame is a strange thing," he told her; "it

takes the guise that is most in men's fancy. Now, for one man who has heard report of our miracles, there will be twenty who know that we have a full treasury. I am minded to have a guard before we cross the river and come into the parts where we are known best. And do you know what I am thinking is going to be the crown of Frey's achievement?"

She said, wonderingly, "No." Then Gunnar kissed her. And then she told him that she knew quite well what he meant, and that the truth was so.

"Great is Frey," said Gunnar.

XVIII

News of Frey Reaches Norway

IN Norway, under King Olaf Trygvasson, affairs were prospering all this while. The king had settled his kingdom into his own ways, and being of a restless and acquisitive mind, he was already thinking how he could better himself. He had thought more than once of Iceland as a heathen country stocked with fine people well worth the pains of conversion.

"To drive them to the water may cost me five hundred lives," he said, "but you may take that as a sowing of which the harvest will be a thousandfold. Christ will win souls and I a new realm." The more he thought of it the more he desired to do it.

Then there came strange news out of Sweden, of painful interest to King Olaf. He heard of mighty stirrings of the pagan people out there, of miracles wrought by their chief god Frey which surpassed any which his own priests could do. What struck him most in these accounts was that the manner of devotion had been changed. Frey, he was assured, was milder-mannered, and would have nothing to do with human sacrifice. More than that, blood-offerings of all sorts were utterly done away with. The king could not understand it, and talked it over with the lords of his council.

"It looks to me," he said, "as if Frey were half-way to being a Christian. Not only will he have no bloodshed, but all his works are those of mercy. He heals the sick, comforts the fatherless, gives sight to the blind, sets captives free! There is something in all this which I cannot fathom. But let me tell you that the baptism of a heathen god would

be a thing to root the true faith in the rock, as it should be. Then it would stand fast forever."

Some said one thing, and some another. But Sigurd Helming looked down at his finger nails with his brows drawn up very high, and said nothing at all.

He was so pointedly silent that the king observed it. "Well," he asked him, "and what are you thinking to see in your finger nails?"

Sigurd held up the forefinger of one hand. "There is a white fleck in this one," he said, "which warns me of a stranger in Sweden."

"Well," said King Olaf, "and that is true to report. What next?"

"Sir," said Sigurd, "a stranger to my knowledge went into Sweden a year ago, and has not been heard of as coming out again. That was my brother Gunnar, who went for a good reason."

The king frowned. "You did no service to

this country when you warned him of my anger."

"Sir," Sigurd said, "I know that. But I was very sure then that he had no part in Halward's slaughter, and I believe that you had an inkling of how the case stood. Otherwise you had not kept me in your council, but had expelled me the realm."

"Well," said the king, "what I have heard since has softened my resentment; but I know nothing. What makes you see the mind of Gunnar in these heathen doings?"

"The knowledge I have of his mind," said Sigurd. "He is a merry man and a mild-mannered man until he is vexed. Now, he never would sacrifice beasts to the gods in the old days when the gods required it. And he always said that it was better to kill a man outright than to keep him in chains or darkness. These are two reasons. Lastly, if it is true that Frey had a woman for his wife, I believe that Gunnar has her now, and that the

next miracle of Frey's we hear about will be that she is to give him a child."

The king took hold of his chin under his beard, and considered. Then he said, "Sigurd, do you go into Sweden and witness some of the doings of Frey. If you are right in what you suspect—and I think that you are—you will see Gunnar, and maybe he will tell you the truth of the matter. It is an old story by now, but I don't say that I shall not have a word with the slayer of Halward hereafter if I happen to meet with him."

Sigurd said that he would gladly go to Sweden. It was settled that he should set out in the summer when the passes were open and Frey at home again.

XIX

Sigurd in Sweden. The Battle of the Ford

SIGURD said that he should go to Sweden by sea, as that was the quicker way for one who did not know the land ways. He had a ship fitted out, and was often down on the hard, either going to his ship or coming from it.

One day he saw, or thought he saw, Gunnar sitting there in the sun. It was a man of about his size in a cloak which he had been fond of wearing; a faded red cloak with a hood to it which stuck out in a bunch upon his shoulders. After a good look at him he knew that it could not be Gunnar, but was still curious about the cloak. He went up to the

man until he could touch him, and then did touch him by lifting up the hem of the cloak to see if the braid were like that of Gunnar's. It was the very same.

"Good day to you," Sigurd said, and the man, seeing a lord beside him, rose up and saluted him. He looked like a fisherman or seafarer.

"I was interested in your cloak," Sigurd said. "I think my brother Gunnar will have given it to you. But he left the country more than a twelvemonth ago, and I see that you have worn it hard."

The man laughed. "Not so hard then," he said, "seeing I have not had it in my hands more than a few days, and this is but the second time I have worn it."

"From whom did you receive it? I must needs know, for a good deal hangs upon what you tell me."

The man stared, and then looked rather sullen. "It is fairly mine," he said, "as a

thing is that comes from the bottom of the sea."

Now it was Sigurd who stared. "You fished it up from the sea-bed?"

"It came up with my anchor six nights ago or seven."

"Where were you moored?"

He pointed out to sea. "I was lying just off the Ness, having been out with the nets. But the wind shifted at sunset, and I was not hurried, so stayed there snug enough till morning. It is a soft bottom there. In the morning I shipped my anchor, and up comes this cloak with a great stone in the hood of it. It had been cast there by somebody who wanted it to stay there, but you see things went awry with him."

"They did so," said Sigurd. "Now I will give you three crowns for the cloak as it stands."

"If you do that you do a foolish thing," said the man, "but it is not for me to stop you."

"It's not so foolish as you suppose," Sigurd answered. He paid over his money, and away with the cloak.

"I take you with me to find your master," he said to it, very well satisfied with his morning's work.

He made a good journey in his ship, coasted the land of Sweden and ran up a long way into the land. He arrived there toward the middle of the summer, and made inquiries of the whereabouts of the woodland Frey. Hereabouts, they told him, he was not worshiped, though great tales were told of him which had shaken many, and moved some to go into the forest country to judge for themselves. They gave him certain information where that country was. He was to follow the course of the river up into the land. When it ran finer he would come to a good ford. On the west of that lay the country of the woodland Frey.

Sigurd set off on horseback with a good retinue, and made long journeys. In about ten days or a fortnight the river began to run brokenly; in a day more he should be at the ford. So it proved. The country ran flat in a broad valley, on the west of which, climbing gradually to the mountains, so far as the eye could see, there was forest.

They kept a lookout for the ford, and presently a man of theirs, riding in front, stopped, looked earnestly, and then held up his hand with a spear in it. They came up with him.

"What is it you see?" Sigurd asked him.

"I see the ford," he said, "and I see also men fighting about it. And it seems to me that twenty are attacking a few."

Sigurd was looking as they all were. "What are those white animals I see on this bank?"

"They are oxen," said the lookout man.

"I see also a great wagon they have behind them. And I believe that Frey is in the

wagon. What I marvel at is that he should be there at all and not among the fighters."

"Would Frey fight men?" he was asked.

"If he is what I believe him," said Sigurd, "he would gladly fight men."

They rode on cautiously, taking what cover they could, and came up within a bowshot of the fight. Then they saw that there were eight men against the twenty, of whom some were fallen into the river, and some fell even as they looked. Nevertheless, the greater party was prevailing. They had pushed back the eight to the close neighborhood of the wagon, and it looked as if it would go hard with them. Frey, they could see, stood fixedly in the front of the cart with his crown on his head, and his cone and rod in his hands. Sigurd wondered at him, and could not think it was Gunnar.

But even while he thought, he saw Frey drop his cone and reach stealthily behind him. He found what he wanted and held it behind

his back, staring all the while fixedly in front.

Then all of a sudden Frey roared aloud, making a terrible booming noise, and leaped from the cart into the midst of the fight. Sigurd now saw that he had in his right hand an ax, and remarked with pleasure how doughtily he laid about him with it, and how men fell before him. Frey kept up his roaring, which was like the noise of a great buzzing windmill, and seemed to paralyze his enemies, who gave back in confusion until they were at the water's edge.

"Now is our time," said Sigurd, and gave the order to set on.

So they did, with spears, and completed the rout. All the remnant of the assailants was slain. Then Sigurd turned him to Frey.

"This is the last of your miracles, brother," he said, "or the last but one. You had no need of us."

Gunnar turned upon him in wonderment. "Ah, it is you Sigurd! I cry you hail!"

Then they shook hands and embraced each other with great joy.

Gunnar told Sigurd that he had had suspicions of some such thing, "since the people on this side of the river have no love for Frey," and knew what a treasure he had in his wagon. He had prepared himself beforehand with a tolerable company; but the marauders were in greater force than he had thought for. "So it was needful for Frey himself to make an example of them."

Then Sigurd asked to be shown the treasure; "and they tell me, Gunnar, that you have more than gold and silver with you."

"So I have," said Gunnar, "as you shall see."

He called Sigrid, who then came down from the cart and greeted Sigurd with gravity and timidity mingled. She stood very close to Gunnar all the time. Sigurd approved highly of her, and said, "I see that the crowning wonder of Frey's life on earth is to

be accomplished in her." This he said to Gunnar when they were alone, and Gunnar did not deny it.

When they had eaten, drunken and rested themselves, Gunnar desired to know what had brought his brother adventuring into these wilds. Sigurd said, Well! he had heard rumors of Frey's doings which put him in mind of Gunnar. These had been spoken of in the king's council, and authority given to him to go out and satisfy himself.

"And I may tell you," he continued, "that King Olaf's anger with you is over, and that you need not fear the sight of a tree any more. But we will talk about that another time. Let me see this fine treasure of yours which your magic has drawn from the Swedes."

Gunnar said, "I don't know that there was much magic about it. I gave them what they wanted, they gave me what I wanted. It seems a fair barter. And let me tell you, it

is no light matter for me to be silent when men are feasting; and to fill up my nostrils with red paint every morning—that is worth its price also."

"But you had a pretty wife to talk with," said Sigurd.

"To be sure I had," Gunnar replied, "and a great to-do before I had her."

Sigrid brought out the treasure to show to Sigurd. He was amazed.

"I had not believed there was so much gold and silver in Sweden," he said. Then he saw the cloths, the tissues of silk and linen, and the raiment. By-and-by he turned over the green and brown cloak which Gunnar had brought with him from Drontheim. "Here is a notable cloak," he said, "the like of which I have seen before."

"Have you though?" said Gunnar, and laughed. "That is Frey's own cloak, which I vowed to him when I took service under him, and long before I made palings of him."

Sigurd said, "Wait a little. I think I can match it." He went away to his company and came back with Gunnar's red-hooded cloak in his hands. "Here," he said, "is a fellow to it, somewhat tousled and time-worn. Do you know it?"

Gunnar handled it with affection. "That is an old friend which I never thought to see again," he said. "The last time I saw it, it was on the back of a dirty rascal."

Sigurd told him the tale of its recovery, and how a great stone had come up in the hood of it. Gunnar said:

"I see it—but I saw it all at the time."

"I did not," said Sigurd, "but now I do. I shall keep both of these cloaks, by your leave," he said. "King Olaf requires to be convinced."

Gunnar said that he was ready to go back with his brother the way he had come, but that he would send Frey's wagon home across the ford.

"If they need a new Frey," he said, "they will make one for themselves."

"There's a new Frey on the road," said Sigurd, "who would give them great satisfaction;" but Gunnar said that he had had enough godship.

So they returned along the river road, and Sigrid had her first sight of the sea, and a taste of its quality.

XX

The End of the Tale

GUNNAR found himself rich with all his Swedish treasure, and bought land in a dale of Drontheim, and set to work building a fine house. About Christmastime Sigrid gave birth to a son, which was a great affair. But before any of these things happened to him he had to see King Olaf, who received him with a wry smile.

"So you are not only contumacious, but inveterate in sin," he said; but Gunnar could see that he wasn't angry. "You not only deny my God, but set yourself up as His rival. And now you are in my hands, what am I to do?"

"Sir," said Gunnar, "it is rather true that

the only way I had of escaping your rope was to run among the heathen. As for my godhead, that in a sense was forced upon me. I would have you remark that I slew a god before I became one myself."

"You slew a god and took his wife," said the king. "I should like to see Frey's wife. You shall bring her to me, if you please. I have many questions to put to her."

So Sigrid was brought to King Olaf, who questioned her alone. But he found it one thing to question and another thing to get answered. As to her origin, she was quite willing to repeat all that she had told Gunnar early in her acquaintance with him. King Olaf knew her country and the city of Prag, from which it seemed she had come, very well. Then he wanted to know about her marriage with Frey, and she became dumb. How long was it before she knew that Frey was nought? No answer. What sort of communication had passed between her and Frey? No an-

swer. Was Frey kind to her? Did he beat her? Was it his eyes which dominated her? No answers.

Lastly he said this: "Have you told Gunnar everything that there is to tell?"

To that she answered, "Yes," and her eyes were unclouded and not afraid of the king's.

"Well!" said Olaf; and that was all there was to say about it.

The king told Gunnar that he was not married at all, to which Gunnar answered, "Ho, am I not?" But he went on to say that he had vowed himself to Christianity on the night of his marriage, and that he and Sigrid were very ready to accomplish the vow. The king agreed to it; so the pair of them went into the water with the Bishop of Drontheim, and were afterwards married again by the laws of Christendom and Holy Church.

Men sat still then for the winter, and in the spring King Olaf gathered his hosts and fitted out his long ships for work in Iceland. Gun-

nar excused himself, saying that he was busy with his new house and his child; but he spoke more freely to Sigurd.

"I know one thing which you intend doing over there," he said, "and I will have no share in it myself. I owe no grudge to Ogmund Dint, though it was a dirty trick he played me for his own beastly ends. But I got Sigrid out of the adventure and everything I possess, and that's enough for me."

"Plenty," said Sigurd, "and I am with you, and should do the same if I were in your place. But the king won't have slayings done in Norway unavenged. He is very bitter against Ogmund, and I fancy it will go hard with him."

"I don't doubt that," said Gunnar. "King Olaf is a hard nut to crack."

The expedition sailed, and sailed north. The landing was made in Shaw Firth where Ogmund's father, Raven, was a great man.

But Ogmund himself was not there. Wigfus, who was in the host, told the king where he would be found, and when matters had been settled in the north the fleet sailed about to the east of Iceland and made a new landing, not far from Thwartwater.

Ogmund was one of the first of the chieftains in those parts to submit himself to King Olaf's baptism.

The king received him coldly and put him on one side. "I will consider of it," he said, "but first I wish to see old Battle-Glum, who is a man after my own heart."

Battle-Glum was brought before him, and refused to have anything to do with Christianity. "I am an old man now," he said, "looking out for my end. It is late for me to change my opinions. Thor is the god I worship, and in that faith will I die. It matters very little to me whether I die at your hands, or in my bed. I have settled all my affairs. Wigfus will take Thwartwater after me. He

is young and can follow what gods he pleases. So also can Ogmund, my foster-son."

"Wigfus your son," said the king, "is a Christian already; but Ogmund your foster-son is not. He is here at hand, and I will have him in before you that you may know something about him before you die."

Ogmund was brought in, and Sigurd also was present. Sigurd said, "The last time you were in Drontheim you left something behind you which I desire to give back. But there is some doubt left as to which of two things is yours, and I would have you settle it, Ogmund."

Ogmund said that he would do so with pleasure.

Then Sigurd said, "You left a dead man lying in his blood, and a cloak."

Ogmund Dint said that he left no cloak, "and as for the man, I slew him fairly."

Sigurd said, "You left two cloaks, one in the water with a great stone in it, and one on the

back of my brother Gunnar. Here they are. Which do you say is yours?"

Ogmund was very troubled. He touched the fine cloak. "I say that that is mine."

"You lie, Ogmund," said Sigurd. "That was in Gunnar's keeping. He gave it to me."

Then Ogmund was for justifying himself to the king; but King Olaf told the story at length to Battle-Glum. Glum listened to it, and said little. "Thrall's blood will show itself," he remarked finally. "I expected something of the kind." Then he turned to King Olaf and said, "Do you propose to have this man baptized?" The king said, "I do."

Then Battle-Glum said, "And do you ask me to be of the same religion?" The king told him he could do as he pleased.

"You are a credit to any religion," he told him.

Ogmund Dint asked vehemently for baptism.

"You shall have it," said King Olaf.

"You shall be baptized first and hanged afterwards, lest your punishment be eternal as well as temporal."

Which was done.

THE END

DATE DUE

GAYLORD			PRINTED IN U.S.A.