

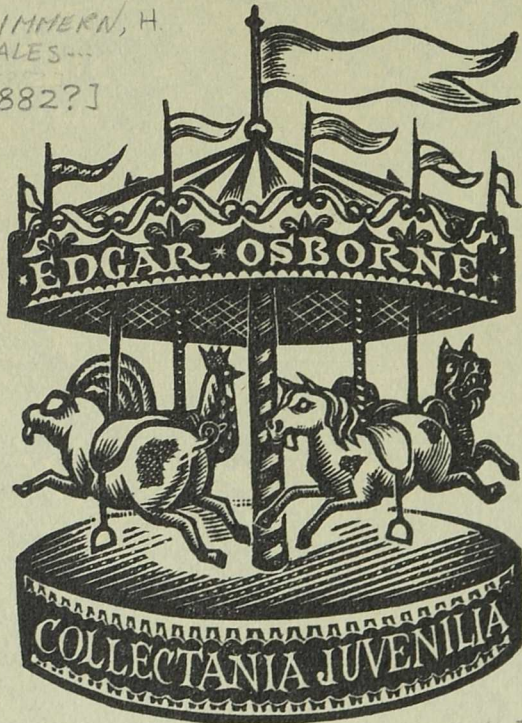


TALES FROM THE  
EDDA



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2 Illusts. by Kate Greenway that appear  
to p. 126 is not by her although under her name

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TALES FROM THE EDDA.

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KATE GREENAWAY

"THE GIANT LAY SLEEPING ON THE GROUND."

EDMUND EVANS.



# TALES FROM THE EDDA

TOLD BY

HELEN ZIMMERN.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

KATE GREENAWAY & OTHERS.

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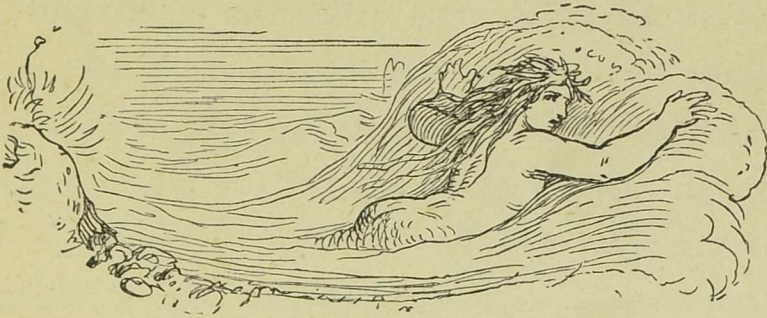
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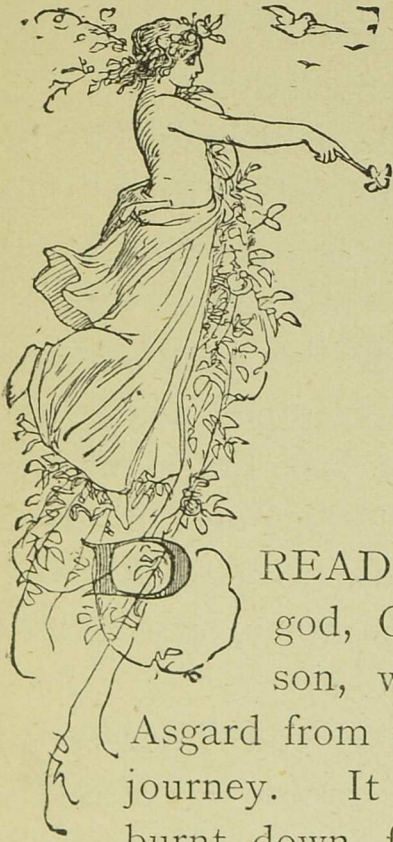
## INTRODUCTION.



THE old Norsemen, our forefathers, thought that what we now-a-days call the earth, was made up of several worlds. In the centre was Manheim or Midgard, the home of men, and under the earth's rind dwelt the kobolds and dwarfs, who worked the stones and metals, and acted as good sprites towards mortals. In the ocean that flowed round this earth dwelt Oegir, the sea-god, and beyond lay bare desolate Jötunheim, a land of bogs, morasses and rocks, the home of the giants, those wicked monsters who loved continually to fight against both gods and men. In the ocean, too, lived the great Midgard Snake, who held the earth encircled in her hideous embrace. On the borders of Jötunheim lay dark ice-bound Nifelheim, the dwelling place of direful Hel,

the gruesome Goddess of Death, whither all men came who died in their beds, for only those who died in battle were deemed worthy to enter at once into the halls of Walhalla, and to quaff goblets of golden mead at the tables of the gods. Far above the clouds lay Asgard, the home of the Gods or Ases, the pillars and rulers of the earth, and Walhalla was the special hall of Odin, the greatest among all the Gods. From his throne, Hlidskialf, he could survey all things, and, though he had but one eye, nothing was hidden from his sight.

Daily there came to him his trusty ravens, Hugin and Munin, who had scoured the world at his behest. They settled, one at his right hand, one at his left, and whispered into his ears the secrets they had gathered in their flight. Next in might to Odin was Thor, the ruler of the clouds and storms, who hurled the thunderbolt, and was the greatest foe to Jötunheim. Then there was Baldur the sinless, and the giver of all good; Loki the crafty, and many more; also Freyja, the helpmate of Odin, Iduna, and yet other fair goddesses besides. A right merry time they had of it in Asgard, many were their deeds and adventures, and it is of these I am about to recount a few.



## THOR'S BRIDAL EXPEDITION.

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**D**READ Ving Thor, the terrible god, Odin's eldest and warlike son, was about to return to Asgard from a long and adventurous journey. It was midday,—the sun burnt down fiercely upon the earth. Thor was hot and weary.

“I will rest a little while,” he thought.

So he spread out the large bearskin he always bore about, laid his shield on one side of him, his hammer, Miölnir, on the other, and was soon fast asleep.

It was most unwise of Thor to release his hammer from his hold, without which his strength was almost as nothing, for this hammer was very wonderful. It never missed the aim at which it was directed, and always returned to his hand, however far he cast it.

Now it happened that the giant-king, Thrym, had that day been on a whale-fishing expedition, and on his return home passed the spot where Thor lay sleeping; and so fast asleep was the god, that he did not hear the giant's heavy step, as it tramp, tramp, tramped nearer and nearer to the place. At last the giant saw Thor, and a wicked smile flew over his face, for he had not been slow to perceive that Miölnir, the precious hammer, lay utterly unguarded within his reach.

The weapon that made god Thor so redoubtable to the giant race! "What an opportunity!" he said to himself, stepping nearer, as softly as his heavy feet would permit. Quick as thought he bent over Thor, took up the hammer, and departed thence as fast as his long legs could carry him.

"Ha, ha, ha," he laughed to himself, "that was a good idea of yours, Thrym. Now god



Thor will be as harmless as a mortal, and there will be peace at last from his interference. But now what shall I do with Miölnir? Where shall I hide this hammer, for unless I am very cautious, some of those wily Ases (gods) may yet find means to deprive me of its possession."

Thus the giant pondered as he was striding towards his ice-bound castle in Jötunheim. He was much afraid lest Thor should wake before he reached it, for though he affected to despise the god whom he had deprived of his hammer, yet he really trembled at the mere thought of his fury.

But the giant's fears proved groundless; he reached his icy castle unharmed. Still he had not come to any conclusion as to what he should do with the stolen treasure. At last he bethought him to call all the mountain and metal-working dwarfs to his aid. He commanded them to dig a deep, deep hole in the earth, so deep that he could hide the thunder-god's hammer within it, that it might for ever be out of sight and reach.

His order was obeyed at once, and the little people set to work, digging, mining, knocking, and blasting, until at length they had made a

hole eight fathoms deep. Into this Thrym threw the stolen hammer, caused the hole to be re-filled, and grew quite easy in his mind.

Meanwhile, however, Thor had awakened from his sleep, and instantly missed his beloved weapon. He sought for it all round, and when he could see it nowhere his fury knew no bounds. He smote his head angrily, and blew so fiercely into his thick red beard, that a tremendous storm was felt on the earth. He beat his head in his despair; once more his angry breathing shook his beard. Then the storm on earth raged into a hurricane; it seemed to men as if the end of all things were at hand.

Filled with fury, Thor sped as quickly as he could to Asgard. The gods were horrorstricken when they saw his face, for his eyes glowed like fire.

“What has happened to Ving Thor?” they cried in a breath.

He did not heed them.

“Where is Loki? Call Loki to me!” he thundered. “Do you not hear? It is Loki I want, Loki!”

Now Loki was wily, and was generally chosen by the gods whenever they needed any

mission of peculiar nicety to be executed. He soon appeared in answer to Thor's appeal.

"Why does Ving Thor call for me?" asked Loki.

"Listen to my word, Loki," answered the Thunderer. "Hear what no one on earth yet knows, nor even any in heaven suspect: my hammer is stolen from me!"

When Loki heard this he began to condole with Thor, and to ask him what he meant to do now, without the weighty Miölnir to aid him in his exploits.

His words only made Thor more angry.

"I did not call you here to condole with me," he cried; "I called you here for help. You must restore my hammer to me; if you do not, the whole weight of my anger shall crush you."

"I will do my best to get your hammer back," said Loki, "but to do so, I must have Freyja's feather-garb, that I may fly over all the world, to find where Miölnir lies hidden. Think you I shall obtain that?"

"We shall see," answered Thor; and he went with Loki to Volkwang, the beautiful house of the goddess.

“Freyja,” said Thor, speaking first, “Freyja, will you lend me your feather-garb, so that I may find my Miölnir again?”

“I would give it you if it were of gold, you should have it if it were pure silver,” she answered, “provided only that you return it to me unharmed.”

Thor eagerly helped Loki to clothe himself in the goddess’s dress, and then bade him go hence as fast as the falcon feathers would carry him.

Loki at once winged his way in the direction of Giant-land, for who but a giant would dare to steal the hammer? On and on flew Loki, so fast that the wind whistled through his feathers, till he had left behind him the land of the Ases, and reached Jötunheim, where live the giants.

He flew hither and thither, peeped into this castle, listened at that door, where he might see or hear aught of the stolen hammer. In vain.

At last his flight brought him near to a grass-grown hillock. On this hillock sat Thrym, the giant-king, who was busy combing the manes of his horses, and decking his dogs

with golden collars. As he combed the long hair of the horses he rejoiced in his heart, and said—

“Be glad, my steeds, for ye need no more fear the anger of god Thor, nor dread lest ye feel the weight of his hammer. Eight fathoms deep does Miölnir lie buried in the earth; fetch him thence he who can.”

He laughed a loud mocking laugh; but Loki, in his feather-dress, had heard the giant's incautious words. In an instant he swooped down to the ground, resumed his own shape, and revealed himself to Thrym.

“Ah, god Loki!” exclaimed Thrym, how fares it with you and all the Ases at Asgard? Are they well and happy? and why do you journey, all alone, towards Giant-land?”

“Matters are not well with the Ases,” replied Loki, “since you hold hidden the Thunderer's mighty hammer. All mourn with him this grievous loss. I have come hither to bid you restore that you have taken wrongfully.”

“That I will never do,” laughed Thrym. “I hold Ving Thor's hammer hidden eight fathoms deep, and never will I restore it to the upper world, unless indeed Freyja herself comes to Jötunheim as my willing bride.”

“Is that your final decision?” asked Loki.  
“Can you make no other conditions?”

“No other,” replied the giant. “Either the fairest of the goddesses becomes my bride, or Miölnir remains lost to the gods for ever.”

Exceedingly sorrowful and perplexed, Loki returned to Asgard to report the ill success of his mission. The first person he met was Thor, who was standing at the door of his castle as Loki passed.

“Have you fulfilled my behest?” he cried.  
“Where is Miölnir? Let my hands once more feel its weight.”

“Alas!” answered Loki, “I have fulfilled your mission, but the hammer I could not bring. Thrym, the giant-king, retains it hidden fathoms deep, nor shall you regain it, he swears, unless you send him Freyja, that she may become his bride.”

Thor trembled for his beloved hammer when he heard this, for he doubted much whether Freyja would consent to be the giant’s bride. But there was no help for it, he must ask her. So he and Loki at once wended their way to Volkwang, and told the goddess about Thrym’s behest.

“Put on your bridal linen, Freyja, and travel with Loki towards Jötunheim,” he pleaded.

When Freyja heard this she was exceedingly wroth. She stamped her feet with such fury that the very hall of the gods trembled, and her shining gold necklace flew from her throat and broke to pieces on the ground.

“I go to Jötunheim!—the giant’s willing bride!—never!” she cried. “What do you dream of, god Thor, that you dare make such a proposal to me?”

The sound of her rage brought all the other gods and goddesses to the spot. Full of indignation she told them what Thrym had demanded. They were as horrified as she. What, Freyja, the Goddess of Love, the most beautiful of all the Asynior! how durst anyone ask her to be a giant’s wife! They stormed and scolded, until at last Heimdal reminded them that this would never do. Thor’s hammer must be restored to him at any cost, and in thus exciting themselves they were coming no nearer the point. Some other means of regaining Miölnir must be devised.

This wise speech restored the gods to reason.

They began to discuss the matter more calmly, but to no conclusion did they come. Once more it was Heimdal who spoke.

“Hear, all ye gods!” he cried, “why should we not dress Thor in bridal linen; let him wear Freyja’s beautiful shining necklace, so that his breast may shimmer with precious stones; at his side let him bear a large bunch of keys, as women do, and over his head he can wear the bridal veil. Dressed in this wise, Thor himself could go as the giant’s bride into Jötunheim. Say, is not this well?”

An exclamation of approval broke from all the gods. Only Thor disclaimed.

“I shall be called a woman by the Ases if I suffer myself to be thus dressed as a bride,” he said.

“How can you speak so, Thor?” answered Loki, reproachfully, “when you know, as well as we all do, that the giants will come here and conquer Asgard, unless we can get your hammer back amongst us.”

After a little further persuasion, Thor at last consented to represent Freyja at Jötunheim. The gods swathed him in bridal linen, let a long skirt flow from his hips, tied a heavy



bunch of keys round his waist, adorned his neck with the most precious gems, and threw over his head the thick white veil which concealed his great red beard. When his toilet was ended, all the gods laughed heartily at the appearance he presented. Loki said—

“Now I must be your maid, and together we will travel toward Giant-land.”

When they were both ready for their journey, the goats were fetched from off the mountain, harnessed to the low chariot, and the two gods set forth.

Thrym, the giant, had not been idle during Loki's absence. He knew of what importance it was to the gods that Thor should possess his hammer again, and did not therefore doubt for a moment but that Loki would return, bringing Freyja with him. So he commanded all his giants to strew the benches and floors with fresh rushes, to dress the walls, and make ready a mighty feast, for he expected Freyja, the lovely daughter of Niörd, as his bride.

His orders were promptly obeyed. The halls glistened in their gorgeous ornaments of gold and silver; sweet rushes scented the air, while in the kitchens huge oxen were roasted

whole, that the wedding guests might feed their fill. Thrym looked round his domain with delight; there was but one thing needed now—the bride.

At last the news of her arrival came. Thrym stepped forth to meet his guests. He received them with all courtesy, and led his veiled bride into the chief hall, which had been decked in her honour. Then he bade the giants prepare the meal, his guests must be weary, they came from afar; and he poured forth foaming ale to refresh them. Whole oxen were placed on the table, together with tuns full of mead; as well as all manner of sweets, which were destined for the women's consumption. But all these were eaten by Thor, and not only all the sweets, but he disposed of a full-grown ox, eight large salmon, and three tuns of mead as well.

This seemed a large quantity, even to the giant, and he whispered his astonishment to Loki.

“Never have I seen a bride eat so eagerly, never have I seen woman devour so much, or maiden swallow so many cups of mead!”

The cunning Loki, dressed as a slender woman, replied—

“Do not let Freyja’s appetite astonish you, Thrym; for eight long days she has not tasted food, so great has been her desire to get to Jötunheim.”

This satisfied the giant; but after a time he wished to see his bride face to face, and curiosity impelled him to look under her veil. But he started back in affright.

“How fearfully glow Freyja’s eyes!” he exclaimed. “It seemed to me as if her eyeballs were very fire.”

Again the ready-witted Loki appeased him.

“For eight long days,” he answered, “has Freyja enjoyed no repose, so ardent was her longing to be at Jötunheim.”

This pleased Thrym mightily, and he drank many bumpers more than was good for him, to his bride’s good health. At last the meal drew to an end, and Thrym demanded that the wedding should take place.

“That cannot be,” cried Loki, “until you restore to me the hammer of Thor.”

The giant thereupon commanded it should be brought in and laid on the maiden’s lap.

“There!” he said, “is Miölnir, my bridal gift to Freyja. I have kept my word to the

Ases, as I promised ; now let the wedding take place."

Thor's eyes glistened with pleasure as he once more grasped his dearly-loved hammer. To throw off his disguise, and seize his redoubted weapon was the work of scarcely a second ; the bride Freyja stood revealed the Thunderer Thor !

"It shall go ill with you now, you giant brood !" he cried, and his loud sonorous voice rang through the hall and filled all hearts with terror. "I will kill you to the last man here present, with my Miölnir, which you stole."

And as he spoke he flung it first at Thrym, who in an instant fell dead to the earth. Then he slew all Thrym's followers, until there were none left, no not one.

And thus did the son of Odin recover his hammer.

## THE WOLF FENRIS.

---



LOKI, the universal mischief-maker, the calumniator of all the gods, the grand contriver of deceit and fraud, was notwithstanding held by the Ases to be a worthy inmate of Asgard, and acknowledged as one of themselves. Still no one rendered him divine honours as they did to the other gods. He surpassed all beings that have ever lived, or will live, in the arts of perfidy and craft. Many and many a time he exposed the gods to very great perils by his tricks. He was of a very wily disposition,

and would occasionally even do an obliging thing. Thus it was, thanks to his artifices, that the Ases had several times been extricated out of great difficulties. In person he is said to have been most beautiful, slim, tall, and well-made.

Now Loki had three children, whose mother was a giantess of Jötunheim. They were a fearful progeny, no ordinary children, but monsters. The eldest was a wolf, Fenris by name. The second, called Jömungand, was a snake, the third was a stern ugly woman, Hela or Hel.

For some time Loki kept the existence of these children a secret from the gods at Asgard, for he feared their wrath when they should hear that he had allied himself with one of the giant race.

But nothing could remain long concealed from All-father Odin's penetrating glance. One day when his eye fell upon Jötunheim, he soon became aware of the monsters that were being reared there. When he learnt that these children were Loki's, he grew somewhat uneasy about them, for what could be expected from the children of such a father? and that

they had one of the hateful giant brood for their mother only made matters worse.

Odin called all the other gods and goddesses around him, and told them of the discovery he had just made. They held a short consultation as to what should be done, and finally decided to consult a prophetess about the future of Loki's children.

The prophesy proved very fearful indeed, for it was predicted of these children that they should work great evil unto the gods of Asgard.

Odin therefore determined to put them out of the way, though he knew better than all the Aesir, that no one, not even a god, can escape his fate. He sent a messenger to Jötunheim to fetch the three children into his presence. When they were come, he was at first somewhat perplexed what to do with them.

Hel, the ugly woman, half black, half flesh-coloured, he threw into Niflheim, and gave her power over nine regions, where she must provide lodging for such as were sent down to her, namely, those who had died of old age and of sickness. It was a very large domain, surrounded by high walls and shut in by mighty

gates of massive iron. The hall thereof is called Misery; her keys are Hunger, Greed is her knife, Sloth her servant, Delay her maid. Her threshold is Rottenness, her bed is Care, and the curtains that surround it are Threatening Evils.

Hel thus put out of the way, there still remained the fate of the snake and wolf for Odin to decide. The former he threw into the sea, and commanded it to remain there until the end of time.

Even while Odin spoke to it, the snake increased in size, getting both larger and longer. When it was in the ocean, it grew so fast that it had soon encircled the whole earth with its body, and was at last obliged to put its tail into its mouth, for it could find no more space to span. This is the Midgard snake.

The only one of Loki's offspring whom Odin did not know what to do with was the wolf, Fenris. At last, thinking him pretty harmless, a mere ordinary wolf, he decreed that the animal should remain at Asgard, and grow up among the gods.

Now this was an ill-considered decision on god Odin's part, for Fenris was a very fearful



beast, not at all like a common wolf. He was a horrid object to behold. His ugly jaws, when opened, seemed able to devour all surrounding things, his eyes darted fire, and his breath was like pestilence.

When the gods saw him they were terrified, and none of them liked to undertake the task of feeding him. They were all taken aback when they approached him, and saw the hideous jaws open to receive their food.

Only Tyr, among them all, had courage enough for the task, and to him the care of Fenris was henceforth consigned. Tyr was a god of war, a brave and mighty warrior, upon whom all in battle were wont to call; and not only was he brave, but very wise, so that it was said of clever people, "He is as wise as Tyr."

Loki's children thus disposed of, for a time all went well at Asgard. Fenris grew in size, and did full justice to the food that was brought him daily by Tyr. At last, however, it appeared to the Ases that he was becoming formidable; if he continued to grow at this rate he would soon be beyond their control, and many uneasy glances were cast into the wolf's lair.

One and another of the gods consulted the

Fates about this monster, and when they found that all the prophecies agreed in predicting much danger and final destruction to the gods, from Fenris, they thought it high time to render the animal innoxious. They laid their anxieties before Odin. He listened gravely, but with attention. He knew that Fate could not be averted for ever, though it might be for a time, and therefore he said they might do as they listed with Fenris.

After some parleying to and fro—everything at Asgard was always settled in full assembly—they determined to forge a strong chain, and therewith to bind Fenris. Bound, he would be more in their power than going loose, as he now did. They therefore commanded their smiths to make a mighty chain, and Thor himself superintended its manufacture.

They made a very strong one of iron, and called it Lading. It was so heavy that even Thor did not find it easy to carry.

Next day, when the wolf's feeding time was come, the gods accompanied Tyr. When Fenris had been fed, they shewed him the heavy chain.

“Behold, Fenris,” said Odin, “the assembled

gods would like to prove your strength. Permit us then to place this chain about your neck, to shew us whether you can break it or no."

Fenris looked at the chain, and not considering it over strong, he laid himself down quite meekly, and allowed them to put it round his throat. But when they had finished, and the two ends had been fastened together, he rose from the ground, and stretching his limbs to recover from the cramped position he had assumed, the chain broke asunder like glass, and every link lay dissevered on the ground.

Fenris uttered a fierce triumphant growl, but the gods shook their heads anxiously, and turned away much depressed. What should be done now! A stronger chain than Lading could hardly be made!

The smiths, however, promised to try. Thor once more superintended the work. They made a new chain, which they called Droma. It was half as thick again as the last, and so heavy that it was with difficulty Thor dragged it along.

With this chain they went to the wolf, and

once again Odin begged him to allow them to lay it about his neck.

“We only wish to prove your strength, Fenris,” he said; “if you break this chain also, you will indeed be famed far and wide as a wonder of strength; for it is a mightier fetter even than the last.”

That the chain was stronger the wolf saw very well, but he knew also that his strength had grown since he had burst asunder Lading. At the same time he considered he must run some risk if he desired to become famous.

“I will allow you to put on this chain, Father Odin,” he said, and lay down submissively.

Droma was linked round his huge neck before the whole company of the Ases, and when they saw Fenris securely bound in its iron clamps, an involuntary sigh of relief escaped them. The wolf was not slow to perceive this, and let them enjoy their supposed triumph for a while. Then he raised his huge body from the ground, shook himself, stretched his giant limbs, and in an instant Droma too was torn asunder, and the links of the heavy chain lay broken to pieces on the ground.

Crestfallen and anxious, the Ases left the

spot. Some help must be found against this animal, who was plainly outgrowing their power, and they clamorously demanded counsel of Odin.

“I do not know what to advise,” he said, “but if you wish it, I will send the youth Skirnir into Elf-land, to take counsel with the cunning Dwarfs. Perhaps they may be able to counsel us.”

“Do so,” cried the gods, “let us hear what the clever Dwarfs advise.”

So Odin sent forth Skirnir into the land of the Elves. He stated his errand to the chief Dwarf, and asked what assistance he could render to the anxious gods.

“Stay here a little time,” was the reply, “you shall be helped.”

Presently the Dwarf returned, bearing in his hand a slender string.

“See here,” he said, “this fetter is called Gleipnir. Take that to the gods; with it they will chain Fenris. You smile at my saying fetter. You need not do so. Though it is as soft and thin as silk, it is stronger than any chain ever made, for it is composed of things that are not.”

“Of what things?” asked Skirnir.

“Of the sound of cats’ footsteps, of the beards of women, of the roots of mountains, of the sinews of bears, and of the voice of fishes. Now go. Ask no further questions, but bear the treasure unto All-father.”

Skirnir obeyed. When he got back to Asgard the gods shook their heads very dubiously as they heard the result of his mission. However, they thanked him for the trouble he had taken in their behalf, and determined any way to give the Dwarf’s gift a trial, though they much doubted its efficacy.

“Perhaps it is stronger than it looks,” some one suggested.

“It does not need much to be that,” answered another sneeringly.

“Suppose we try if we can tear it,” proposed a third.

Which proposition was heartily agreed to, for there was nothing the gods liked better than testing their strength.

In vain one after another tugged at the slender silken band; it would not tear asunder. They then began to have a little more confidence in its power, and it was in a less

despairing mood that they all accompanied Tyr when Fenris' usual feeding time had arrived. Still they were anxious, for had not Fenris broken Lading and Droma, both chains which no Asa could break?

Once more Odin asked Fenris if he would allow a chain to be put upon him as a test of his strength, and he shewed him the Dwarf's thread as he spoke.

Fenris did not at all like the look of it, he began to suspect some treachery.

"It does not seem to me," he said, "that I shall gain much glory if I do tear this, which looks as weak as a spider's web. If, however, it is not merely what it looks, but has been made with cunning and deceit, it shall not come near me."

"How can you talk so, Fenris?" said Odin, "you who have shattered massive iron chains can surely break with ease a thin silken band. If, notwithstanding, you should not be able to burst it, you will then have shown that the gods have nothing to fear from you, and we shall release you at once."

But the wolf answered: "Not so. If you bind me so fast that I can no longer release

myself, you will mock me, I know, and will not unbind me. It will then be too late for me to help myself. Therefore I do not feel disposed to let you fasten this chain about me."

"I begin to suspect you are a coward," Odin said.

"That I will not be called," indignantly cried the wolf, "rather than you should call me so, I will agree to your request. But one condition I make, and that is, that one amongst you place his right hand in my mouth while I am being fettered, to prove that you intend no deceit against me."

At these words one god looked at another. They were much puzzled what to do. The wolf's determined manner and superior strength shewed them yet more plainly how needful it was that they should have him in their power, and yet not one of them felt inclined to sacrifice his right hand for the good of the rest. So they stood doubting for some time; and Fenris much enjoyed their perplexity.

At last, Tyr, who felt that something must be done to end this state of things, declared himself willing to do what the wolf desired.

"Proceed to chain Fenris," he said walking



up to the animal and placing his strong right hand in its jaws.

When the wolf was bound, they bade him rise, and shake off his chain as he had done before. But as he rose the string tightened round him ; he stretched himself, and it grew harder and stronger ; he shook himself ; to no purpose ; he was fast bound in its silken coils.

When the Ases saw this, they laughed aloud for joy that they were now safe from the dangerous beast. Tyr alone did not join in their mirth. Their security had cost him his hand.

Fenris was now fastened by the gods to a great rock, and this rock they planted firmly in the very depths of the earth, so that no power could ever loose him again. In vain the wolf howled and yelled, in vain he tried to snap at his deceivers. He was bound, and bound he must remain, until the great time of Ragnarök, which is the end of all things.

In that day he shall devour Odin, as has been prophesied, and shall thereupon himself be killed. But that day is yet far distant.

HOW THOR WAS DECEIVED BY  
THE GIANTS.

---

**I**T came about that Thor and Loki set out together for a journey in the Thunderer's goat-carriage. When they had driven all day, they arrived at the house of some peasants, and craved a night's lodging. This was willingly granted to them, though the good people regretted that they had no supper to offer them, having none for themselves.

“That does not signify,” said Thor, and, going out, he took his goats, slew them, and boiled them in a cauldron.

When they were tender he put them on the

table. "Here" he said, "is supper for us all. Only one thing I must beg of you: do not break any of these bones, but throw them upon that heap of goats' skins, that lies in the corner by the stove. If you do this you are heartily welcome to my meal."

The peasant, his wife, and children did not await a second invitation. They gladly sat down to eat the savoury-smelling food, and strictly obeyed Thor's behest. Only Thialfi, the peasant's son, finding himself unobserved, could not resist breaking the shankbone he was eating, to get at the marrow, a titbit he dearly loved. When the supper was eaten they all retired to rest.

Next morning Thor got up with the sun, dressed himself, took up his hammer, Miölnir, and went to the spot where the goats' skins lay. He touched the heap with his hammer, muttered a few words, and instantly his goats stood before him, whole as before, except one which limped a little. When Thor perceived this he grew very angry, and in a loud voice commanded the peasants to get up and account for their misdeeds.

"One among you," he cried, "has dared to

break the ankle-bone of my goat. You cannot deceive me, for see, the animal limps to-day which it did not before. Tell me at once which is the guilty one."

And Thor knitted his brows angrily as he spoke, his eyes shot fire, and he grasped his hammer so firmly that his knuckles grew white with the effort. The peasants trembled with fear as they beheld his fury. The father cried and lamented, and fell on his knees entreating to be spared. Then the others, seeing his dismay, cried also; the poor people were indeed deeply distressed.

This somewhat appeased Thor, for it proved to him at least that no malice had been intended. Indeed they offered him anything he liked to have in exchange for the mischief they had done.

"I will content myself with your son and daughter," he said, his mood softening; "they must become my servants and attend me everywhere."

"It shall be as you wish," answered the father, and so the matter ended.

The one goat being however incurably lame, Thor determined to leave them all behind him

at the peasant's house, and to continue his journey on foot. That same day he, Loki, and his new attendants, set their faces eastward, in the direction of Jötunheim, and travelled for a long time until they reached the sea. This they crossed, and landed on the opposite coast. They then walked on again for some time, till they found themselves in a dense forest. They wandered through it all day, and when night came on, had not seemingly neared its end. All the way through they had found nothing to eat; Thor's provision-bag, that Thialfi carried, had much dwindled in size since morning; they were getting both fatigued and hungry.

"Shall we not seek a place where we can pass the night?" asked Loki. "I am utterly spent."

"I see no house or castle anywhere around, do you?" asked Thor.

"Over there," said Thialfi, "it looks to me as if I saw something jut out above the trees; indeed I am sure it is so," he said, going a little nearer, "I can see a large hall quite plainly."

The travellers went in the direction indicated,

and came upon a strange erection. It did indeed seem a very large hall, with an entrance that took up the whole breadth of one end of the building.

“This will do,” they said, and they went in, ate their scanty supper, and settled down to sleep.

About midnight they were awakened by a great noise, and the earth shook so violently that the whole building trembled. Quick as lightning Thor sprang to his feet, seized Miölnir, and ran to the door to ascertain the cause of the disturbance. The other three, filled with fear, found their way into another and smaller hall; and there they lay trembling for fright. But, as nothing further occurred, they at last fell asleep again, only Thor could not find repose that night. He remained at the doorway, hammer in hand, prepared to defend himself whatever might happen; but nothing did, only once it seemed to Thor as if he heard a sound of groanings, still of that he was not sure.

At earliest dawn the travellers woke up. They had a long day's journey before them, for they wished to reach Jötunheim by nightfall.

They had not gone far before they found a man of enormous bulk lying fast asleep on the ground. He was snoring loudly, and when Thor heard him he understood whence came the noises that had disturbed him during the night. Not knowing what might now occur, Thor took out his belt of prowess, and girded it about him. It was possible he would need all his divine strength, which this belt greatly increased.

While he did so the giant awoke suddenly, and getting up from the ground displayed his whole tremendous size. When Thor saw him, it is said, that for the first time in his life he was afraid to make use of his mallet.

“What is your name?” he asked the monster.

“My name is Skrymir,” was the reply. “I do not need to ask yours, I know that you are Asa Thor. But what have you done with my glove?” and stretching out his hand, Skrymir picked it up.

Then Thor saw that that which had served them for their night’s lodging had been the giant’s glove, and that the chamber in which the other three had sought refuge was the

thumb. The god felt mortified. The giant did not or would not perceive this, and Thor kept his temper under.

“Will you let me be your travelling companion?” Skrymir asked. “I fancy we are both bound in the same direction.”

“Yes, if you wish it,” answered Thor, and they set off together.

After a time the giant complained of hunger, and opening his wallet he began to eat his breakfast. Thor and his companions did the same. When they had finished, Skrymir proposed that they should lay all their provisions together.

“It seems to me,” he said, turning to Thialfi, “as if you found your sack almost too heavy to carry, little man. Give it to me, I will tie it up with mine, and will carry them both until we separate.”

So speaking, the giant slung the bags across his shoulder, as if they had been feathers, and the travellers were not ill-pleased that the strongest among them should carry the greatest weight.

All day long the giant kept far ahead of his companions; he took such enormous strides,



they could not keep up with him. At dusk, he found for them a large oak-tree, under the shade of which they could sleep.

“Here is your wallet,” he said, giving it to Thialfi; “no doubt you want your supper. As for me, I shall lie down to sleep at once, I need no food.”

Indeed in a short time the giant was fast asleep, and snoring loud. Meanwhile Thor, to whom Thialfi had handed the wallet, set about opening it. To his utter astonishment he could not do so: not a string would untie, not one knot tear asunder. He tugged, he strained, he tried this way and that; all in vain—the wallet remained firmly closed. Thor grew exceedingly wrath at this; he felt convinced the giant must have played him some trick, and grasping Miölnir, he advanced to the spot where Skrymir lay snoring. He threw his redoubtable weapon with a well-aimed blow at the giant’s head.

Skrymir awoke as if nothing had happened.

“Did a leaf from the tree fall on my head?” he asked. “Why Asa Thor, are you not ready to sleep yet? I hope you have all supped well.”

“We were just going to lie down and sleep,” answered Thor, sulkily.

He was puzzled and annoyed, for never before had Miölnir missed doing its work of destruction. The god and his companions retired to rest under the oak-tree, but no sleep came to Thor that night; once more he spent it in watching. About midnight, he knew by Skrymir's loud snoring that the giant must be fast asleep. All the forest echoed with the noise he made, so Thor stole softly to the spot, hammer in hand. Angrily he launched it at the giant's head and saw it sink into the monster's skull up to the very handle. “Surely this must finish him,” thought Thor.

Not so. Skrymir unconcernedly raised himself upon his elbow, looked about him sleepily, and said “What can it be? It was as if an acorn had fallen on my brow. Well, how goes the night with you, Thor?”

“Oh, I have just woke up,” replied Thor, retreating hastily; “but it is only midnight, so we have plenty of time for sleep still.”

Notwithstanding this calm reply, Thor was boiling over with rage, and he swore to himself that if only opportunity offered he would strike

the giant such a third blow that he should never rise again. Meanwhile he laid himself down to rest, waiting till Skrymir should be once more fast asleep. A little before day-break he knew by Skrymir's breathing that this must be the case. Then he got up, went towards him, and threw Miölnir with such violence against the giant's temple, that the hammer went completely into it.

Skrymir raised himself upon his elbow, stroked his head and temple, and said, "Is there a bird's-nest above me? it seemed as if something had dropt on my face. Thor, where are you? Oh, you are awake, I see; it is about time for us to get up and dress, although you have not very much farther to go to reach Utgard. I heard you say amongst yourselves, that you did not consider me exactly a little man, but when you get to Utgard you will see far taller men than I. Now I will give you some good advice, which is, do not boast of your strength when you get there, for Utgard-Loki's courtiers will not, I know, stand the boasting of such mannikins as you are. If you cannot refrain from this, you had far better turn back; indeed I think it

would be the best thing for you to do. If, however, you are determined to proceed, keep well to the eastward—that is your nearest way. My road lies to the north, toward yonder mountains.”

Saying this, Skrymir took up his wallet, slung it over his back, wished his companions good-bye, and strode in the direction he had indicated.

Thor was not sorry to see him depart, and when he was fairly out of sight, he and his companions proceeded on their way. About noon they came into a vast plain, in which they perceived a city to be standing. But it was so high above them that in order to see it, they had to bend their heads as far back as they possibly could. Coming nearer, they found the city was surrounded by high walls, and that its entrance-gates were closed. Thor went up to one of them and tried to open it, but it did not yield: he tried another with the same result. Finally discovering that the bars were wide enough apart to allow of his slipping through them, they all proceeded to squeeze into the city that way.

A large hall was before them; they went

towards it, and as the door stood wide open, they walked in. A number of men, some of great stature, were sitting around a table; at one end sat the king, Utgard-Loki, whom they approached and saluted respectfully. He, however, scanned them from head to foot with a somewhat contemptuous air, and after looking at them some time in silence, said—

“You have come a long journey it seems, and if I do not mistake, that little being is Asa Thor. You don’t look imposing, if you are he,” he said, turning to Thor direct, “but perhaps you are more powerful than you appear to be. Now I should much like to know in what feats you and your companions think yourselves skilled; for you must be told, that no one is permitted to remain here among us who does not distinguish himself in some one thing above other men. To begin, then, what can you do, little one behind there?” he asked, pointing to Loki.

“I can eat faster than any one among you,” said Loki; “that is my art. I am willing to prove my words.”

“That would indeed be a great feat,” answered Utgard-Loki, “if you mean what

you say, and that we shall find out pretty quickly. Come hither, Logi," he called to a man who sat at the further end of the hall; "I wish you to try your strength with this Loki."

A trough full of meat was thereupon brought in and placed upon the floor. Loki seated himself at one end, Logi at the other; whichever got to the middle of the trough first was to be the victor.

Loki ate eagerly and so rapidly, that even Thor was amazed. The adversaries reached the middle of the trough at the same time, but when the matter was examined, it was found that Loki had only eaten the flesh, while Logi had devoured the bones also—and the trough besides! The company, therefore, decided that Loki was vanquished. Abashed and crestfallen, he retired into a corner of the hall.

It was Thialfi's turn now.

"Pray what can you do?" asked Utgard-Loki, turning to him with a sarcastic smile.

"I understand the art of running," he answered, "and am willing to match my strength with whomsoever you select."

“That is a great art,” said Utgard-Loki, “and one I much admire. You must, however, be greatly skilled; if you expect to conquer by it here. Nevertheless, you shall take your chance, and if you win, I shall indeed praise you.”

Thereupon, Utgard-Loki rose and went out of the hall, followed by all his courtiers into a large adjoining field. Here he caused distances to be measured and fixed; and this done, commanded a tall young stripling, named Hugi, to run a match with Thialfi. They were to run three courses. The first time Hugi outstripped his adversary so much, that he turned back again on reaching the goal and met him not far from the starting-place.

“Ah, ha, Thialfi,” cried Utgard-Loki, “you must stretch your legs better than that, if you wish to win this race. Still I must do you the credit to say that there has been no one here before who has appeared to me so swift-footed as you. Now begin the second course.”

This time Thialfi was a good bow-shot from the goal when Hugi had reached it.

“That is most excellent running,” said Utgard-Loki to Thialfi, but yet I hardly think

that you will win the match. However, the third course must decide: let it begin."

Once more the two set off at full speed, and once again Hugi had reached the goal before Thialfi had got half-way.

"It is enough," cried Utgard-Loki; "you are conquered, Thialfi."

"Yes, indeed, fairly conquered," cried all present, and Thialfi retired, feeling much annoyed.

It was now Thor's turn to prove his strength.

"Let us behold some proof of your dexterity, Asa Thor," said Utgard Loki; "what feat do you excel in? I am very curious to see your much-vaunted power, of which all people speak so highly. Your followers have not shown great skill, but I doubt not you will excel them, and carry off the palm. What act of prowess do you choose to perform?"

"I choose to measure my powers of drinking with whomsoever you like," answered Thor.

"It shall be as you wish," replied the giant. "Come, therefore, and let us return to the palace."

Once more within the hall, Utgard-Loki commanded his cup-bearer to bring the horn



from which his courtiers were wont to drink. When the man had brought it, the giant gave it to Thor, and said—

“We deem that person a good drinker who empties this horn at a single draught; some empty it with two, but no one is so bad a drinker as to need three.”

Thor looked at the horn; it did not seem so very big, although it was somewhat long; he was, moreover, very thirsty, and so had little doubt but that he should empty it at one draught. He began to drink, and drank as long and deeply as he could without setting down the cup or looking in. At last, however, he needed to draw breath, so he put down the horn to see how much liquor was left. To his surprise it appeared quite a small amount that had gone from it, and yet he had swallowed a large quantity, that he knew.

“You drank bravely,” said Utgard-Loki, “but not much. I should not have believed it, had anyone told me that Asa Thor could not drink better. I feel, however, quite convinced that you will empty the cup at your second draught.”

Thor did not answer; he was too angry.

He placed the horn to his lips, determined to take a yet greater draught than before; he drank until he was forced to stop for breath. When he looked into the horn, it seemed to him that less was gone out of it than the first time, although the horn could now be carried without spilling.

Then said Utgard-Loki, "How now, Thor; why do you spare your strength thus; if you mean to empty the horn at the third draught, you must indeed drink mightily. I must tell you the truth: you will not be called so great a man among us as you are held among the Ases, if you show no greater prowess in other things than you have shown in this."

This last speech only enraged Thor still more. He put the horn up to his mouth, and drank with all his strength as long as he could drink. When at last he looked into the cup, there was certainly rather more gone out of it than before, but still it was not empty. He handed the horn back to the cup-bearer.

"I will not drink any more," he said.

"It is pretty plain," spoke Utgard-Loki, "that your might is not so great as we deemed it to be. You certainly can do nothing in this way."

“I will try some other feat if you desire it,” said Thor, “and I can tell you that if I were at home among the Ases, such draughts as I have drunk would not be counted small. What new trial do you propose for my power?”

“We have a little game amongst ourselves,” said Utgard-Loki, “which is generally only played by mere youths; it just consists of lifting my cat there off the ground. I should never have ventured to propose such a game to Asa Thor, if he had not shown me that he can do far less than I imagined.”

While the giant was speaking, a large grey cat ran across the threshold into the hall. Thor went up to her, placed his hand under her, and tried to raise her up; but the cat only curved her back while Thor tugged at her, and when Thor pulled at her with all the strength he could muster, he only succeeded in raising one of her paws from the ground. Disgusted at his fruitless efforts, Thor abandoned the trial.

“This game has turned out just as I expected,” said Utgard-Loki. “The cat is somewhat big, and Thor is such a mite compared with the men who here surround us.”

“Small as I am,” cried Thor, his blood boiling over at these continued insults, “I am willing to wrestle with any of you, for now I am angry.”

“There is not one of these men,” said Utgard-Loki, looking around the hall, “who would not think it beneath him to wrestle with you. However,” he continued, “if you wish it, I will send for an old woman, my nurse Elli; you can wrestle with her. She has conquered many a man, who seemed to me not weaker than Thor.”

By the giant's order, a withered old crone entered the hall.

“I wish you to wrestle with Asa Thor,” commanded Utgard-Loki.

Alas! once again had Thor to suffer the ignominy of defeat, for the more he exerted himself, the more Elli resisted his attacks; at length the god began to lose his footing, and was thrown upon the ground.

“It is enough,” commanded Utgard-Loki, “cease the struggle. To you, Thor,” he continued, turning to the mortified god, “I will only say you need ask no one else at my court to measure his strength with you. We

have seen enough. Besides, it is getting late?"

He thereupon showed Thor and his companions to a place where they could pass the night, and where they were well provided for.

The next morning, when it began to dawn, Thor and his companions dressed themselves, and prepared to depart. Utgard-Loki hearing of this, came to see them, and ordered a table to be spread with the best of viands for their consumption. When they had finished their meal they were anxious to set off at once. Utgard-Loki accompanied them as far as the city gate. On parting, he asked Thor whether he was content with the result of his journey, and if he had met with any men mightier than himself.

"I cannot but feel," answered Thor, "that my visit here has been a cause of great dishonour to me, and I know you will henceforward consider me a puny man, which grieves me much."

"It is but fair," said Utgard-Loki, "that I should now tell you the truth, as you have left my hall, which, during my lifetime, and while I have my way, you shall not easily re-enter.

And, what is more, you should never have entered it now, had I known beforehand that you possess such enormous strength, through which you nearly brought great misfortunes on us all. Know then, I have been deceiving you, by illusions. No Skrymir met you in the forest; it was I. I laced your wallet with iron bands, so that you could not open it. When you gave me those three tremendous blows with your hammer, the first and least was strong enough to have caused my death if it had struck me. Did you see near my palace a mountain in which there are three deeply-dinted glens? Those are the dints made by your hammer, for I placed that mountain between you and me each time you struck at me, though you saw it not. It was the same thing with the games; I deceived you throughout. The first feat tried was Loki's; he eat bravely, like Hunger personified, but he, whom I named Logi, was no other than a blazing fire that burned up both meat and trough. Hugi, with whom Thialfi ran the race was my Thought; it could not have been expected, therefore, that Thialfi could measure it in speed. When you drank out of the horn,

and it seemed to you to decrease but slowly, you performed a wonder, by my troth, which I should not have held possible had I not seen it. The end of that horn lay in the sea ; you did not see that, but when you come there now, you will behold how much the ocean has sunk through your draughts ; they have caused what will henceforth be called the Ebb. When you lifted the cat, you did a deed no less wonderful, and, to tell you the truth, we were all much terrified when we saw you raise one of its paws from the ground ; for it was no cat, as it seemed, it was the Midgard Snake, that lies round the whole earth. When you tugged at it, it was scarcely long enough to encircle the world between its head and tail ; you raised it so high, it was not far from heaven. If possible, the wrestling-match was a still greater marvel ; for there never was, nor ever will be, a man whom Elli will not, sooner or later, lay low if he live but long enough, for Elli is Old Age. And now as we are parting, I will only add, that it will be better for us both if you do not come often to see me. If you do, I shall again defend myself and courtiers by the aid of illusions,

so that you may gain no power over me.”

When Thor had heard this speech to the end, his anger knew no bounds; grasping his hammer fiercely, he lifted it high in the air, but when he wanted to throw it, he could not see Utgard-Loki anywhere. He turned back to the palace, and thought to shatter it. But no palace could he see,—only wide smiling fields lay before him.

Then he turned again to continue his homeward way; still he was sore at heart, and swore vengeance against the whole brood of giants.

But he did not execute his vow at once.





## THE LIFE-GIVING APPLES.

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**I**N Asgard every god and goddess had an appointed place and function. Now among them all there was hardly one on whom a more important duty had been imposed than on Iduna, the wife of Bragi. To her was entrusted the care of those magic apples, without which the gods would grow old and gray. She kept them in a splendid golden casket. If any god or goddess felt old and weary, they had only to call on Iduna and ask for one of her wondrous apples, and at once the feeling was gone.

It was therefore not surprising that Iduna was held in great respect at Asgard. Hardly

a day passed but some of the mighty heroes called upon her ; even Thor the strong did not despise the juicy fruits.

Now it happened that these fruits, and with them Iduna, were once in great danger of being lost to the gods for ever. Odin, Loki, and Hoenir, were absent on a journey. They had been warring against their old enemies, the giants, and were now on their way home. Their journey had been long and tedious, for it had led them through barren moorlands, and over rocky mountains. Their stock of provisions had come to an end, and they were anxiously looking out for means to replenish it. At last they came into a valley where they saw a herd of oxen grazing.

“See the fine oxen,” cried Loki, who had been the first to spy them out ; “let us catch one of them, and cook him for our supper.”

No sooner said than done. No scruple about another’s property detained Loki, and in a very few minutes a large ox was caught, and some of its flesh placed in a kettle for the gods’ supper. They all three sought for sticks, which they piled round the pot, and soon a large fire was crackling merrily.

“Our supper will soon be ready now, I hope,” said Hoenir, rubbing his hands, after he had thrown another log into the blaze. “After our long fast it will be a treat to taste good ox-flesh again.”

The fire crackled on, and when the gods thought the flesh must be nearly cooked, Loki raised the lid of the kettle and peeped in. What was his surprise and dismay when he found the meat was as raw as when it was first put in.

“What can be the cause of this?” he cried. “Why, the flesh is not cooked at all! Methinks it does not generally need so long to make a fat piece of ox flesh tender.”

As he spoke he threw some more logs on the blazing fire, and the other two followed his example.

For some time they waited in patience, then Hoenir raised the kettle’s lid. Once more they found the meat as raw as when they had first put it in. This made them angry.

“There must be some mischief at work here,” cried Odin.

“I hope you do not reflect upon me,” answered Loki, nettled, “I am sure I am

as ready for my supper as any of you."

"No one thought of you, Loki," said Odin sharply. "You should not excuse yourself before you are accused."

"Come, all this talking won't cook our supper," interrupted Hoenir. "Let us not wander from the main point."

"That is true," said the other two. "What can be the meaning of this singular circumstance?"

While the gods were debating thus among themselves, they heard a sound as of talking in the oak-tree above them. They looked up, and saw an enormous eagle perched among its branches. The bird was muttering to itself—

"I could tell why the flesh will not cook—I could tell, I could tell; ask me, I could tell, I could tell."

"Tell, then, magpie of a bird!" cried Odin, angrily.

"I could tell, I could tell," went on the eagle; "I could tell, I could tell."

"If you do not speak at once, then," cried Odin, his aggravation gaining the mastery over him, "I will make you repent your silence."

“Oh, ho ; so, so,” cried the eagle ; “not so fast. But I am good-natured, I will tell. Let me share in eating the ox-flesh, and it shall soon be cooked. Is it agreed ?”

The gods were too hungry to refuse such a seemingly innocent demand. They unani- mously assented.

“Come down,” cried Loki, “and show us your manner of cooking. We are in haste.”

The bird flew down, perched upon the kettle, snatched up a leg and two shoulders of the ox, and was about to depart with them.

“Not so,” cried Loki ; “that was not our bargain.”

The bird turned a mocking glance at Loki. This incensed him still more. He took up a long, heavy stick, and let it fall with all his might on the eagle’s back. The bird turned angrily, finding himself attacked. Loki be- laboured him once more with his stick, and this time he drove it deep into the eagle’s back ; but he hurt himself in using so much force, and his hands clung fast to the other end of the pole. The eagle thus clogged could not mount into the air. He flew along over rocks, roots, and bushes, trailing the unhappy

god after him till he was almost torn to pieces. Loki screamed and yelled with pain. At last he could bear it no longer, and was obliged to sue the bird for mercy. Hearing this, the eagle stopped his flight.

“I am no bird,” he said, “but the giant, Thiassi, and I will not release you, Loki, whom I have at last got in my power, but on one condition.”

“Name it, I pray,” cried the agonized Loki; “if I can grant it, be sure I will. Anything to escape this torture.”

“My condition is, that you shall bring Iduna and her apples out of Asgard into my home,” said the eagle giant.

“That can never be,” said Loki; “name some possible condition, I entreat of you; this may not, must not be.”

“No other will suffice,” said the bird, and he recommenced his flight, till the agony of it soon became unbearable, and Loki once more called upon him to stop.

“You know my condition,” said the eagle, complying; “I accept no other.”

“Be it so, then,” said Loki; “let anything happen; rather would I grow old and die at

once, than any longer endure such tortures."

"It is agreed, then," said the giant, releasing Loki; "as soon as you return to Asgard, you will convey Iduna from thence."

"It is agreed," said Loki, thankful to feel himself once more free; and he set off in search of his companions.

"One word more," cried the eagle, flying after him; "you can tell Odin that it was giant Thiassi that kept the ox-flesh from cooking, for it was his ox you stole, and in his domains that you tried to cook it. Good-bye, then, for the present."

At the end of the wood Loki found his two companions, who had grown alarmed at his long absence. He told them what had occurred to him, and of the fearful tortures he had suffered. He also delivered Thiassi's message to Odin; but of the promise by which he had obtained his release he did not speak. He knew there was not a god at Asgard, but would rather slay him with his own hand than let Iduna and her apples go; so he kept his counsel on that point, half rejoicing in his mischievous heart at the strange sight Asgard would present when all its gods were growing

old and feeble, and could no longer eat of the golden apples to renew their strength.

When the gods had rested long enough to allow of Loki's somewhat recovering himself, they continued their journey homeward. Arrived at Asgard, one of the first things Odin and Hoenir did, was to call on Iduna. Loki very wisely preferred not to accompany them.

"Tell Iduna I shall be coming soon," he called after them, as they turned into the grove where stood the goddess's house.

Odin and Hoenir were right glad to taste one of Iduna's apples again. During the whole journey they had, of course, not eaten one of her precious fruits, and they felt fatigued and weak.

"We have come for some of your apples, as you no doubt guess, Iduna," they said, as they entered.

The goddess went in search of her golden casket, opened it, and handed a rosy apple to each of her guests. They eagerly bit into the juicy round, and as they did so, care and fatigue faded visibly from off their faces. Iduna watched them with interest. It was always a great pleasure to her to observe this



change take place, after some of the gods had been long away.

“ Ah, Iduna, what should we do without you and your apples ? ” said Odin, rising to leave ; you do indeed hold one of the most precious charges in Asgard.”

He went out, and was soon followed by Hoenir.

A little while after, Loki knocked at Iduna’s door.

“ Enter,” she cried. “ Ah, Loki, is it you ? I wondered not to see you come in with the others. Have your journeys taught you that you no longer need to taste of my life-giving fruit ? ” She held out a fine rosy apple to him as she spoke.

“ Not that exactly,” said Loki, holding out his hand for the fruit, of which he stood so much in need, while he affected to survey it with contempt : “ not that exactly ; but you must, know, Iduna, that in the course of my travels I came upon a grove of apples, not far from Asgard, compared to which yours are but poor, shrunken little things.”

“ Nay, that cannot be,” said Iduna, and she put her hand into the casket and held

up a few most perfect apples. "Loki is surely joking. I do not, cannot believe that any apples can exceed these in beauty."

"If you will not believe me," said Loki, in a nettled tone, "allow me to convince you."

"Most willingly," said Iduna. "Bring me some of those apples to compare with mine, so that I may judge whether their beauty is greater, as you say."

"That unfortunately I cannot do," said Loki; they are so delicate, that were I to pluck them and bring them here, some of their beauty would have gone before I could convey them hither, and you could with truth say they did not rival yours in loveliness."

"How can I see them, then?" asked Iduna.

"By coming with me to the grove," answered Loki. "I will escort you safely there and back again; none of the gods shall notice your absence. Indeed, I mean well by you; it pains me you should be so misled by Odin, as to be left to think your apples the most beautiful that exist, whilst every god who has travelled could tell you that they are as mere nothings to those that grow in the world outside."

“ I dare not leave,” said Iduna ; “ indeed I dare not. You know it, Loki, that I have sworn never to leave the casket. I dare not do it, though I should dearly love to see those apples, as you may well suppose.”

“ Oh, as to the casket,” laughed Loki, “ we will soon settle that. Take it with you—why not ? You will not be quitting it then.”

“ I do not like to,” hesitated Iduna.

“ Oh, nonsense,” said Loki. “ Why, where can be the harm ? Do all the other gods stick so fast at home as you ? It seems most unfair, to my mind, that you alone should never see the world.”

Iduna still wavered, but the great wish to see the apples, and Loki’s clever persuasions, gained the upper hand.

He at last wrung from her a promise that she would go with him. Loki thereupon appointed a place and time for them to meet, and took his departure, delighted with the success of his visit.

Iduna did not feel so happy ; her mind was oppressed with what she had promised, but curiosity gained the mastery.

At the appointed time she met Loki, bearing

her casket under her arm, and they both set forth together. When they had passed the gates of Asgard, Loki led Iduna into a dense forest.

“The grove I spoke of is not far distant,” he said. “Stay here a moment, while I look for the nearest road.”

“You will not be long, will you?” pleaded Iduna. “Remember I have never been alone in the world before, and shall feel frightened if you leave me.”

She did not like to mention that a large eagle, whom she saw perched in the branches of a neighbouring tree, was the chief cause of her alarm.

“Oh, I shall not be a moment gone,” said Loki, and sped away.

Hardly had he disappeared from view when the enormous bird—who was no other than Thiassi, clad in his eagle plumage—swooped down on the hapless goddess, caught her up in his talons, and flew with her and her precious casket towards Jötunheim, where lay his home.

In vain did Iduna call upon Loki for aid; she was fast held by the bird’s claws; escape

was impossible, and she too late saw how wrongly she had acted in yielding to the temptation Loki had held out to her. Arrived at Jötunheim, Thiassi locked her up safely in his strong castle. Iduna was very sorrowful and miserable—she despaired of ever again beholding Asgard.

Meanwhile, matters there went on most badly without her. For a day or two her absence—though it was at once discovered, and caused general alarm among the gods—did not make much perceptible difference. But after a while the gods grew weary, and longed for a taste of the life-giving apples. Some of them even turned grey, their gait was feeble and stooping; such a sight had never before been seen among them; and when day after day passed, and Iduna did not return their consternation bordered on despair. Each asked the other if he knew aught about the goddess's sudden disappearance, and each replied in the negative.

In desperation they at last applied to Odin for help. They all assembled in his palace, and a long, solemn meeting was held. Each god and goddess had to report when and where they had last beheld Iduna, and in this way

they learnt that some one had seen her walking with Loki, very near to the outer gates of Asgard.

“Loki, as usual,” exclaimed Odin, wearily; “ah me! what trouble and mischief that Asa causes us! Let him be brought hither,” he commanded. “I do not see him here: why is he alone absent?”

Loki was forthwith bound and brought into Odin’s presence.

“We understand,” said Odin, when Loki stood before him, “that it is you, Loki, who have led Iduna out of Asgard. Where is she?—what have you done with her? Speak; speak the truth, or my heaviest punishment shall fall on you.”

“What should I know of Iduna, and why do you apply to me?” answered Loki. Indeed, I think I was away on a journey when she was first missed, and therefore——”

“A truce to your idle words!” cried Odin, wrathfully; “you were not asked to make a speech, but to answer the plain truth to a plain question. Where is Iduna? Either you answer, or I kill you on the spot.”

When Loki heard these words he grew very

frightened: he had often encountered Odin's displeasure, but never before had he heard him speak in such a tone. There was clearly no help for him—he must speak the truth.

“Iduna is at Jötunheim,” he said.

“At Jötunheim!” exclaimed all the gods, in dismay.

“At Jötunheim!” repeated Odin; “and, pray, how did she come there?”

“If Freyja will lend me her feather garb,” said Loki, avoiding the question, “I will promise to try and get her back.”

This offer to obtain Iduna back was so much more important, just now, than to hear the details of her disappearance, that Odin at once asked Freyja if she would grant Loki's request.

“Certainly,” said Freyja; “what good is a feather garb to me, now I am getting old and sickly? Bring Iduna back; I have no other wish.”

The feather-garb was brought; Loki put it on, and flew as swiftly as his feathers would bear him out of Asgard, glad to escape so easily. He wondered whether the rescue of Iduna would be as light a task;—he feared not. Soon he was at Jötunheim, and at once

sought out the giant Thiassi's palace. In his falcon plumage he perched himself on one of its towers, whence he could survey the whole building. He soon discovered that Iduna was held prisoner here, but she was so safely guarded by the giant that his heart quailed at the thought of how he should release her.

It happened that same afternoon that Thiassi left home for a fishing expedition on the lake and a great many of his followers went with him. This was Loki's opportunity. Scarcely had the giant left his castle than Loki, in his falcon plumage, flew to Iduna's window, and called her softly by name. When Iduna heard herself called, she trembled with joy, for she felt sure it was some one from Asgard come to release her from this weary confinement; but she dared not show her pleasure, lest it should attract her gaoler's attention. Listlessly, as she had often done before now, she approached the window to look for that help which, as yet had never come. When she drew nearer, she recognised Freyja's feather-dress, and she soon guessed whom it contained. She put her hand to her mouth to enjoin silence.

"Come nearer the window," whispered Loki.  
"Bring your casket."



Iduna obeyed. Thereupon Loki touched her, and changed her into a nut; this fell on the window-sill, just outside the bars, and Loki instantly seized it in his beak and flew off as fast as he could towards Asgard.

But Iduna's sudden disappearance from the room had, of course, not been unperceived at Jötunheim; an alarm was instantly raised throughout the castle, and some one was sent after Thiassi to inform him of the event. He immediately put on his eagle plumage, and flew towards Asgard. His flight was more rapid than Loki's, and in a short time he had nearly overtaken him. Loki, when he saw himself pursued, redoubled his speed: it was a hard race for dear life.

Some of the gods who were on the walls of Asgard, looking out for tidings of Iduna, saw the two birds approaching, and soon guessed who they were. They therefore piled a bundle of chips on the spot towards which the two were making. The instant Loki had passed they set fire to the heap, so that Thiassi—who could not stop his flight, being in full swing—set fire to his plumage, and thus fell into the power of the gods. They killed him instantly,

even within the portals of the celestial home—a thing they had never done before.

Their joy was great at having Iduna among them once more; there was not a god or goddess who did not call on her that day to taste again those precious apples. The streets of Asgard resumed their wonted aspect; and no grey-headed, bent old men were any longer seen to walk in them. As for Iduna, she felt somewhat ashamed of herself for having been so easily taken in, and secretly vowed never to quit the walls of Asgard again. Loki kept quiet for awhile, out of the gods' way; whether he really felt sorry for his misdeeds or not, is another matter.

But the whole affair was not so easily passed over and settled as the gods thought, for when the news of Thiassi's murder spread to Jötunheim, Skadi, the giant's only child, was very wroth. She put on a suit of armour, took spear and sword, and went towards Asgard to avenge her father's death. Odin was the first person she sought, and from him she demanded retribution for this murder.

“We are willing to atone for the deed,” said Odin. “Your father's is the first blood

that has been shed within our gates ; what compensation do you ask ?”

“ That one of the Ases should become my husband,” she answered.

At first Odin was not inclined to grant this bold request, but after a time a compromise was effected ; Skadi should choose a husband from among the Ases, but she should see nothing of them except their feet ; in this wise Odin hoped that none of the most valuable of his gods would be taken from him. Skadi assented to this arrangement, and all the gods excepting Odin, were placed side by side behind a curtain, from beneath which only their feet peeped forth. Skadi inspected them carefully ; some were well shaped, some ill ; but at last she came upon a pair of feet so perfect in their form, that she felt sure they could belong only to Baldur, the most amiable and beautiful of all the gods.

“ I choose the owner of these feet,” said Skadi.

The curtain fell, but no Baldur stood before the disappointed giantess—it was ugly Njôrd, of Noatun, the ruler of the winds and tempest.

However, she had chosen, and must abide

by her choice. That same day Skadi married Njôrd, one of the ugliest, but one of the wealthiest of the gods.

It is said, though whether correctly or not is uncertain, that Odin did more than he had stipulated for Skadi. Beholding her disappointment at her choice, he took out Thiassi's eyes, and placed them as shining stars in the heavens, which pleased his daughter much.

Certain it is that Njôrd and Skadi could never agree as to their choice of a residence; Skadi wished to dwell in her father's castle at Jötunheim, and Njôrd loved to be near the sea. At last, after much squabbling, they agreed to spend nine nights at Jötunheim, and three at Noatun successively. Yet even this arrangement did not answer after a time. One day when Njôrd came back to his beloved home he was heard to sing :

Of mountains I'm weary ;  
Not long was I there—  
Not more than nine nights ;  
But the howl of the wolf,  
Methought, sounded ill  
To the song of the swan-bird.

Skadi, who overheard this, sang in reply :

Ne'er can I sleep  
In my couch on the strand,  
For the scream of the sea-fowl,  
The mew as he comes  
Every morn from the main,  
Is sure to awake me.

Another arrangement must clearly be made, and they resolved to separate. Skadi returned to her mountain fastness for ever. Here, snow-shoes on her feet and bow in hand, she passed all her time in the chase of wild beasts—an occupation she dearly loved. Njôrd meanwhile made himself quite happy at Noatun, and it is even said he took to himself another wife.

Now, all these things need never have come to pass but for the wiles of Loki and the curiosity of Iduna.



## HRUNGNIR'S VISIT TO ASGARD.

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ONCE upon a time, when the Thunderer Thor had gone eastward to combat with the giants, as was his wont, for it was but rarely that the Jötuns left in peace the gods of Asgard ; Odin bethought him that he too would visit one of these monsters, and he determined to seek out Hrungnir, the tallest and stoutest of them all. So he mounted Sleipnir, the steed that bore All-Father through the air and over the waves of the sea swift as the wind, and directed his course to Jötunheim.

Now his golden helmet shone in the sun, and Hrungnir saw it, and beheld also how

Sleipnir cleft the sea and the clouds. Then he cried in amazement—

“What steed is this, that can ride through the clouds and the waters?”

While he was yet speaking, Odin rode into the entrance of the giants' hall, and stood before Hrungnir.

“Truly this is a noble steed,” cried Hrungnir.

“I will wager my head that there is not its like in Jötunheim,” proudly answered Odin.

Hrungnir knit his brows when he heard these words.

“Be not so sure,” he muttered; “your horse is good, but my own is still better, and I will prove to you that it can leap higher with its four feet than yours with its eight.”

To prove his words, he leaped upon his own steed, Gullfaxi, and swore that he would cause Odin to repent his boasting.

Then Odin, when he saw that Hrungnir's anger was aroused, gave rein to Sleipnir with all speed, and turned him towards Asgard. He rode fast as the storm-wind, and though Hrungnir followed with all haste, he could not overtake him. Neither god nor giant

halted until they had come to the gates of Asgard, and in his anger Hrungrir did not see that he had crossed the boundaries of the Ases, and that he was in the domain of Odin, who had already dismounted, and entered into Walhalla.

Now Odin might have been wroth with the giant for riding in thus uninvited, but like the good god he was, he chose rather to return Hrungrir's wrong with kindness. He was aware also that he had provoked the giant's ire. So he came forth into the porch to greet Hrungrir, and invited him to rest in his halls, and banquet with the Ases.

"Right gladly will I do so," said Hrungrir, and he sprang down from Gullfaxi, and entered the shining halls of Walhalla.

When he was seated at the banquetting table, Hrungrir quaffed the mead lustily, and called continually that his cup might be filled anew. Then Odin commanded the cup-bearer that they should place before the giant the drinking bowls of Thor. These were two goblets of great size, and none of the Ases save Thor could empty them at a draught. When Hrungrir saw them stand before him,



filled to the brim with foaming mead, he resolved that the Ases should see his strength. He lifted the bowls to his lips, and with a mighty gulp, drained them to the dregs. But Hrungnir, though he had indeed drunk dry the cups of Thor, had not Thor's power to withstand the evils that were hidden in the mead. When he had emptied the goblets yet a second time, he was disguised in drink, and in his drunkenness he boasted mightily.

“You Ases, who vaunt your strength,” he cried, “why I despise you. You are but flies as compared to me, and like flies I will crush you all between my thumb and finger. I will bear these halls upon my shoulders, and carry them down to Jötunheim. I will sink Asgard into the lowest realm of Hel. But stay, there are two of you that I will spare, Freya and Sif shall go with me and be my cup-bearers.”

And as he spoke, in his drunkenness, he leered at the fair goddess, and held out the cups that she should replenish them.

Freya did so trembling, and the gods knew not what they should do. But Hrungnir lifted the goblets, and cried :

“I will drink dry all the mead in these halls.”

After a while, however, they grew weary of his idle bragging, and lost patience, and some of them were angry.

“Where is Thor?” they cried, and wherefore is he absent?”

One after another they called on Thor, while Hrungrnir grew yet more drunken, and bawled in his cups.

Thor when he heard himself thus invoked at Asgard, flew thither with lightning speed. In a moment he stood within the banquet halls, his brows knit with anger, his hand grasping Miölnir, the trusty weapon.

“What is it,” he cried, “wherefore do the gods require my aid?”

Before, however, they could answer him, his eye lighted upon Hrungrnir, and he shouted in tones of thunder—

“What do I see? Wherefore is it permitted to a Jötun to feast in these halls? Who has allowed him to drink from my cups, and why does Freya fill them before him?”

The sight of Thor and the sound of his angry voice had sobered Hrungrnir, who feared the Thunderer above all the gods.

Therefore, before the Ases had opened their lips, the giant had spoken.

"I am here," he said, "at the bidding of Odin, and my mission is one of peace."

This speech, however, did not appease Thor.

"You shall rue this invitation," he said, "ere ever you leave these walls," and he closed his hands yet more firmly round his hammer, and raised it in threatening fashion towards Hrungnir.

Now Hrungnir was afraid, though he would not show it, but he rose up, and said—

"It seems to me, Asa Thor, that you will gain but little honour if you overcome a man that is unarmed, it would betoken more courage on your part to meet me in fight at Griottunagard, on the borders of Jötunheim. Had I my weapons here I would meet you at once in yonder wood, but since this is not so, you would do ill to fight me unarmed."

"You speak rightly," said Thor, replacing his hammer within his belt. "I counsel you, however, to quit these halls without delay, and when the moon shall have sunk eight times I will measure myself with you in battle."

Hrungnir, who knew that Thor was not to be trifled with, made haste to depart, and he was right glad when he found himself once more safe and sound upon Gullfaxi, with Asgard left far behind him. But he was uneasy in his soul, for he could not help thinking of the duel that awaited him.

When Hrungnir returned to Jötunheim, he called together a council of the Giants, and laid before them the story of his visit to Asgard, and what had been the result, and he consulted with them as to what had best be done. The Jötuns did not at all like the news. They held Thor in great awe, and they feared what might come about if he should slay Hrungnir, who was the strongest of them all. They debated what they should do, and never before had there been such heavy counsels in Jötunheim. At last they bethought them of a device. They got together clay, and formed of it a man, that was nine miles in height, and three miles in breadth, if you measured him across the shoulders. But when they had made it, they did not know what to do for a heart, for they could find none big enough to fit the giant,

At last they put inside him the heart of a mare, but it proved but a timid thing before Thor. When this clay man was ready and armed for the fight, Hrungnir made himself ready also. His own heart was of stone, sharp and three-cornered, his head too was of stone and so was his broad thick shield. This shield he held before him, and in his hand he grasped his club, which was a huge whetstone, and he counted upon its might. Thus armed he was not lovely to behold in his anger as he stood beside his clay squire at the gates of Griottunagard, awaiting the coming of Asa Thor.

Thor did not keep them waiting. At the appointed time the sound of thunder was heard throughout the land and Thor alighted from his goat chariot at Jötunheim. He had brought with him his trusty servant Thialfi to be his squire, and Thialfi ran in front of the god to announce his coming.

When Thialfi saw Hrungnir he cried "You are ill protected, Jötun. It is true you bear your shield before you, but Thor has seen you where you stand, and he is about to enter the earth and attack you from below."

When Hrungrnir heard this he quickly cast his shield under his feet and stood upon it.

Then he grasped his whetstone tightly with both hands.

At this moment lightning flashed on all sides and the growlings of thunder were heard. In the midst of the fire stood Thor, and the anger of the Ases was upon him so that none could behold him without fear. Miölnir was in his hand, and he swung it with all his force and cast it at the Giant. Hrungrnir too lifted his club and threw it, but the hammer met it as it sped and shattered it. One half fell deep into the earth and formed a great rock whence all the whetstones come to this day. The other half lodged in the forehead of Thor so that he was thrown to the ground with its force. But Miölnir had not stopped in its work of destruction. It had sped past the club to the stone head of Hrungrnir and broke it in bits so that he died. He fell forward upon the ground, and in falling it came about that he stumbled over the prostrate Thor, so that his giant foot lay upon the Ases neck.. Meantime Thialfi had attacked the squire of clay and demolished him at a blow. When he had thus despatched

him, he looked about for his master and saw where he lay. He then strove to raise him, but he could not free him from the giant's foot. Then in his despair he called upon the Ases to help him. They came in answer to his appeal, but none of them could lift the mighty weight, and it seemed as if Thor would perish thus miserably. Three days and three nights they strove in vain, and they were downcast and perplexed.

Now the news had come to Thor's home, and when his son Magni heard it, he resolved to go to the rescue of his father. He cared not that the Ases laughed at his resolve, for he was but three summers old, and they could not think that an infant would achieve that wherein they had failed. But when Magni came to Jötunheim, behold he raised the leg of the giant as though it had been a feather, and freed his father from this evil bondage.

"I am filled with shame, father," he said, "that I come too late, I believe I could have sent this monster into the realms of Hel with one blow from my fist."

"You have done well," said Thor, "and I can but rejoice over your deed and laud it.

You will indeed become a mighty man and do honour to my name. And because of what you have done to day I will bestow on you Gullfaxi, the horse of the giant, that you may ride him in remembrance of this feat."

But though Thor was now rescued from death, he yet bore in his forehead the whetstone, and it pained him much. In vain did he try to move or loosen it, nothing would cause it to stir.

Then the wife of Thor called in the aid of a sorceress, and begged her to sing her incantations over him till he should be cured. So Groa came and sang over Thor till the stone loosened in his flesh. When Thor felt this he was filled with joy and hope, and because he desired to reward Groa for her labours, which were heavy, he cast about in his mind how he should give her pleasure in return. Then he remembered that her husband Orwandil was absent, and that she was disquieted about him, and he bethought him that he might quiet her fears.

"Groa," he said, "how can I thank you for what you are doing for me? The thought that I shall soon be rid of this stone does indeed give me pleasure, and now I think I can tell



you something that will rejoice you. In my late wanderings in Jötunheim I encountered Orwandil, your husband. Know, therefore, that he is safe and sound, for on these very shoulders I bore him across a stream."

"And wherefore did he need to be carried?" asked Groa.

"The ice had numbed his feet and he would have perished but for my aid, I placed him in a basket and carried him across the river: and in token that I speak true I can show you one of his frost-bitten toes, which I broke off as it stuck out of the basket, and flung into the sky, where it now shines a bright star."

"Oh Thor," said Groa, you make me happy indeed; and will my husband soon return to me?"

"He is even now upon the road," said Thor. When Groa heard this she forgot all about the charms she was practising, and starting up she flew towards her horse, leaving Thor with the splinter in his head. There it remained until the end, and that is why it was the duty of all men to cast from them such stones, for every stone they cast from them loosened that fixed in the forehead of Asa Thor.



## THE DEATH OF BALDUR.

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OF all the sons of Odin, Baldur was the most beloved. His fair countenance and bright sunshiny smile gained for him the name of the Beautiful. He was of a less warlike disposition than his fellow Ases, yet, though gentle and mild, he was wise, and when he gave judgment, it was such, that his decisions were never departed from. His heavenly mansion was named Breidablick, and it was said that nothing unclean could enter therein.

Now Baldur had, of late, been teased by bad dreams, and as they continued to torment him

night after night, he at last mentioned the matter in full assembly of the gods.

“Sleep,” he explained to them, “has become a thing I dread, instead of being a refreshment. I seem confined in a dungeon, and terrible things happen round me from which I cannot escape.”

Uneasy looks passed round the assembly as they listened to Baldur’s words. Odin, above all, was much troubled, for he knew that the fate of the other gods depended on that of Baldur, and he feared lest these dreams foreboded evil to his beloved son.

“My fellow-gods,” spoke Odin, “Baldur’s life is precious to us all, not only because we love him, but because, if aught happened to him, evil would also befall us; for so it is written in the Book of Fate. What counsel ye that we should do in this sore strait?”

For a long time there was no answer to Odin’s question. Then one and another of the gods rose to make a proposal, but none were good; till at last Freyja, the wife of Odin and mother of Baldur, stood up to speak. Her mother’s heart yearned over her favourite, and had spoken wisdom to her mind.

“What think ye,” she said, “of my advice? I hold that if my son Baldur must die, as his evil dreams portend, he can but die by the means of some person or thing. Let us avert this fate.”

“But how?” asked Odin. “To avert his fate is just what we desire, but how will you withhold all persons and things from harming our well-beloved?”

“By causing all things to swear they will not hurt him,” she replied. “Leave this to me. If the Ases but think my council good, I will attend to its execution.”

Then uprose all the Ases, and pronounced her decision wise. Odin alone was in doubt whether even this precaution were enough. But as he could council no better, he held his peace.

Freyja descended to earth. She visited all things, and made them swear they would not harm Baldur. All swore to her that which she asked. Fire and water, iron and all other metals, stones, the various kinds of earth, trees, flowers; all sickness and disease, all poisons and noxious vapours, as well as all animals, the four-footed, the birds, insects

fishes, creeping things ; not one of them refused to take the oath. Happy in her son's immunity from all manner of evil, Freyja returned to Asgard.

Great joy reigned among the gods when they heard of the good success of her mission on earth, and all ran to the house of Baldur to wish him joy of his good fortune.

“ See how all things love Baldur,” they said, “ even lifeless things will not harm him. Happy indeed are we that our best-beloved is saved to us again.”

Only Odin did not join in the universal rejoicing. He was still uneasy at he knew not what. So, without telling the gods, without even informing Freyja of what he was about to do, he saddled his good horse, Sleipnir, being minded to ride unto Niflheim, the kingdom of Hel. He would enquire of her whether she knew of any danger threatening his son Baldur.

The eight-legged horse carried Odin with lightning speed down the steep abyss that leads to Hel's fearful abode. As he drew near, the dog, that guarded the portals of her house, perceived the stranger, and sprang forward,

baying fiercely. The dog was a fearful beast. His ugly jaws hung wide open, and were stained with blood, and his yelping was a horrible noise to hear. But, terrible as he was, he did not frighten All-father Odin, who rode on boldly, disregarding his bark, till he was right before the house of Hel. Then he dismounted from his horse, and began chanting an ancient Runic rhyme. He turned his face towards the north as he chanted it, and beat the ground with his stick, and then listened.

At length a low sullen sound breathed through the still air. It was the voice of her whom god Odin was awakening from the dead; the spirit of the deceased Vala, whom he had called once more into life by his incantations.

“Who calls me,” spoke the spirit; “and who is he that dares break in upon the quiet of my tomb? Long have my bones lain tranquil in their grave; snow has whitened it, rain has drenched it, dew has bedewed it, many a time. Dead was I long, why didst thou wake me? What is thy name?”

“I am called Wegtam,” answered Odin,

for he was anxious to conceal his name, "and am but a wayfaring man, unknown to thee. It is my desire to know something of Niflheim. Tell me for whom these seats are strewn with gold, and whose form is to repose in yonder glittering bed?"

"In yonder chamber that thou seest," answered the Vala, "that goblet ready filled awaiteth the coming one, the best among the Ases. They call him Baldur; the gods are filled with despair, for Baldur, even he, is consecrated unto death. Question me no more, thou wayfaring man, but let me sleep again."

"Cease not yet, Vala, for I have more to ask. I would know what man it is that shall kill Odin's son. Speak, I command thee."

"Hödur, his brother, shall send hither the best-beloved, Baldur the Fair; he is the man that threatens with danger god Odin's son. Ask me no further, for I would sleep again."

"Cease not yet, Vala, for I have more to ask. I would know who shall avenge this foul deed upon Hödur, and shall bring to the scaffold Baldur's destroyer?"

"God Odin, I know thee now; ride home

again. Thou art no traveller come here to question me, none but thy mighty self would dare thus to pry into the far-off sanctuary of the dim future. When that dread day shall come, when Loki shall burst his chain, and everlasting twilight, even Ragnarök, descend upon earth, then, and then only, shall the death of god Baldur be at last avenged. Now hie thee hence, for I would rest in my quiet grave till that time come."

When Odin heard these words he remounted Sleipnir, and he was very sorrowful, for he knew now that the doom could not be averted, and that Baldur the Beautiful must die. But he determined not to speak of it to any of the gods.

These, meanwhile, rejoicing in Baldur's immunity from ill, had been delighting in all manner of games and trials of skill, in which they made him play the chief part. One of their favourite pastimes was to place Baldur in their midst, that he might serve them for a mark; then they would shoot arrows at him, or hurl heavy stones and battle-axes. It gave them pleasure to see how none of these things caused Baldur any hurt, but glanced off



mindful of their solemn oath. Do what they would, not one pain could Baldur feel, and the gods rejoiced when they discovered this.

There was only one among them to whom Baldur's security gave no pleasure, and that was Loki. It was not the first time that Baldur's good fortune had annoyed him. He was envious, too, of all the love that god received; and when he found that, beside all other favours, he had also gained immunity from harm, his wrath arose within him; for Loki had been absent from Asgard while these things happened, and had only just returned in the midst of one of these pastimes of the Ases. His envious heart knew no rest, he looked on till he could bear it no longer, and then left the field, brooding malice, and how he could best do harm to Baldur.

At last he bethought him of a plan. He changed his shape into that of an aged woman, and, thus disguised, went to the house of Freyja, and advanced to the steps of her throne. With his usual cunning, he began his speech by congratulating Freyja upon her good fortune.

“Ah,” he said, “you may indeed hold

yourself blessed above all mothers. Every other, live she in heaven or on earth, is subject to fears for the life of her son; you alone know your child safe from evil, and can rejoice over it the more, as it is by your means, and thanks to your good council, that he enjoys this wonderful security. But are you indeed sure that all things have sworn your oath? Even now the gods at their meeting are throwing darts at Baldur; it would be terrible had you forgotten any person or thing."

"Nay, but I have not," she answered. "All earthly things were visited by me, not a tree or shrub escaped me; I did not deem the smallest shoot too insignificant to swear its oath, lest one day it should grow a mighty tree and threaten my Baldur. I went so far that I half meant to make that weak, feeble plant, the mistletoe, swear also. You know it, perchance—it grows on the eastern side of Valhalla; but I refrained. It seemed too young and weakly to be asked for an oath; why, it cannot even draw its own nourishment from the earth, it has not strength enough, but is forced to grow on another tree, and be fed by

it. It was too slight a thing, and I passed it by."

This was great news to Loki: he drank in Freyja's words with eagerness. "If Fate decrees Baldur's death," he thought in his wicked heart, "then even the weakest reed will be endowed with power enough to work him ill." So, having gained the object of his visit, he departed, still retaining his disguise, till he was far from Freyja's house. Then, resuming his own shape, he sped as fast as he could towards Valhalla. Eagerly he ran to its eastern side, and there—yes, just as Freyja, described it—he saw a mighty oak, and growing upon it a straggling shrub, which he knew at once to be the mistletoe.

Loki looked round cautiously to see if any one perceived him. Then, finding he was quite alone, he advanced to the tree and broke a branch off the parasitic shoot. Fast as he had come he sped back to Asgard. He found the gods assembled at their wonted games. Only Hödur, Baldur's brother, stood outside the circle of the men; he could not join in any games, for he was blind. Loki went up to where he stood.

"Why do you not shoot at Baldur?" he

asked. "Would not you also like to take a shot at him?"

"I cannot," answered Hödur, "for I am blind, and cannot see where Baldur stands. I have no weapon."

"Nay," said Loki, "that shall not hinder you; you should do honour to your brother as the others do, and throw some missile at his head. This slender reed will suffice. There, take it in your hand, I will direct your aim."

As he spoke, he pressed the mistletoe bough into Hödur's hand. The blind man took it; he was glad for once not to be left out of all the sports, and he aimed as Loki directed.

Alas! the aim was but too true! The slender branch proved more powerful than arrow or spear: the favourite of the gods had received a fatal blow, he sank to earth, his breath failed him, and in a few seconds he was dead.

When the assembled gods saw this terrible sight, they were speechless with horror, they did not even think of approaching Baldur to see if life were indeed extinct, so shocked were they at the dastardly deed. Mutely they looked at one another, as though they questioned who could have done this thing. One

thought was in all their minds, vengeance against its perpetrator. When at last they recovered somewhat from the shock, they broke into loud lamentation ; not one of them could gain composure enough to speak. Odin was the most distressed of all the Ases, and with good reason, for none knew so well as he what terrible things Baldur's loss forboded for the gods.

At last, when the Ases recovered somewhat from the first outburst of their grief, Freyja, the mother of the murdered man, was the first to speak.

“ Who among you all,” she asked, “ desires to gain my love and goodwill ? Is there one of you that will dare ride into the dread kingdom of Hel, and try to win back from her my beloved son Baldur ? I will pay any ransom Hel may ask, if she will only permit our best-loved to return to Asgard.”

No one answered. All feared to undertake so hopeless a mission.

“ I know well,” added Freyja, “ that Hel is implacable, and never restores what she has once obtained. But who can tell ? perhaps even she may make an exception in favour of

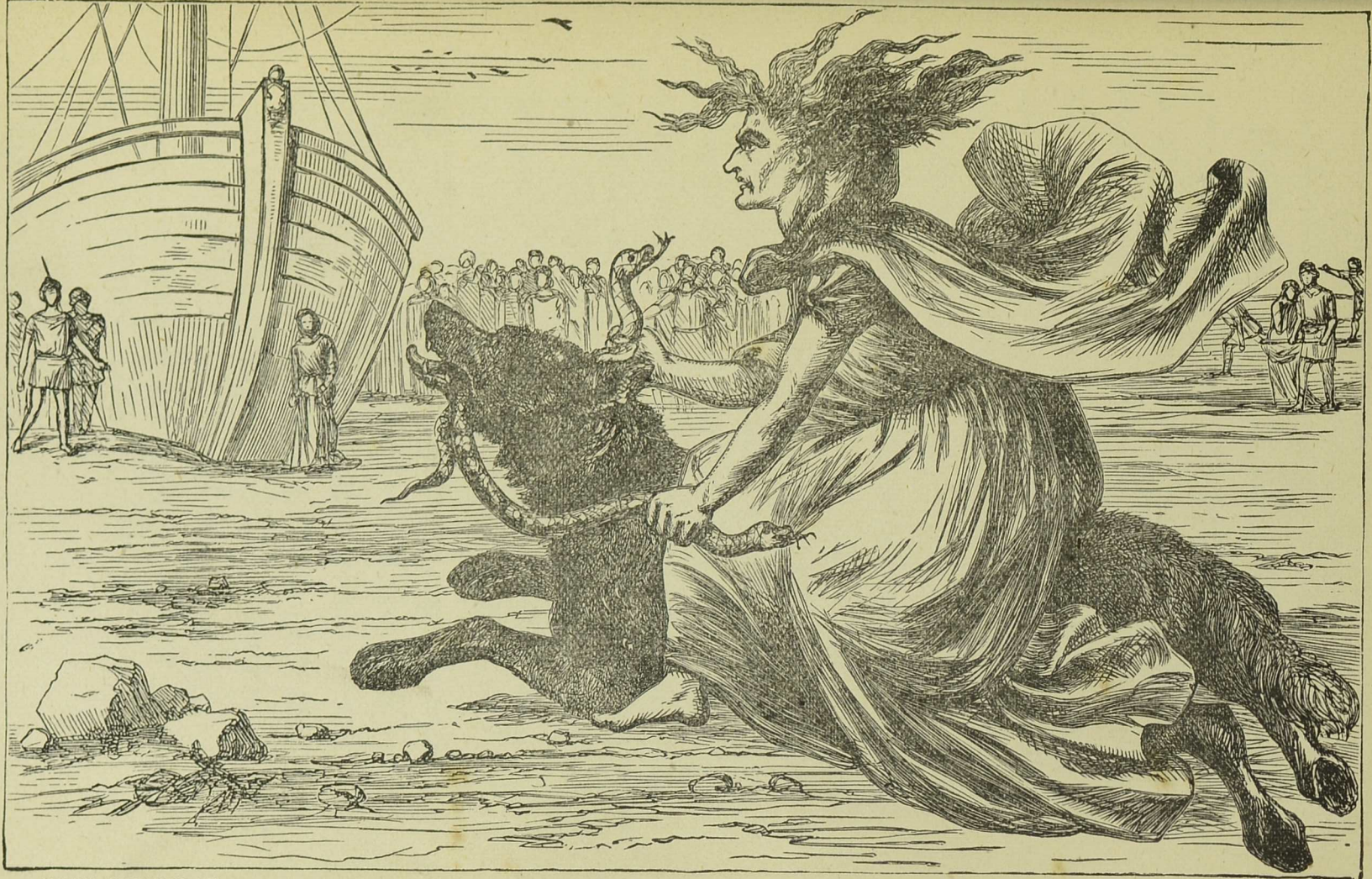
our Baldur? Is there none of you that will attempt the ride?"

"I will attempt it!" at last said Hermodur the Nimble.

"I will lend you Sleipnir to ride upon," said Odin; "he will carry you faster than any other horse could do."

Then Odin commanded that Sleipnir should be saddled, and brought before him. Hermodur mounted him at once, and galloped off without delay. All the gods bade him good-speed with a sigh: they misdoubted much the success of his mission.

Meanwhile the Ases prepared to render the last honours to Baldur, and to burn his body. They lifted up the dead god and bore him mournfully to the sea-shore, where stood his ship Hringhorn, one of the largest in the world. Upon it they intended to erect his funeral pile. The ship was a gigantic one, and stood, when not in use, on the dry land. The gods prepared to push it into the water, but all their united strength proved unable to make it move an inch from where it rested. In vain did they try; in vain did even Thor essay his giant strength against it.



KATE GREENWAY.

“She came, a hideous apparition, riding on a wolf.”—Page 99.

EDMUND EVANS





Perplexed at this unlooked-for obstacle, the gods consulted what had best be done in this juncture. One of them proposed that they should send for help to Jötunheim, and a messenger was despatched thither to ask for the services of the giantess Hyrrockin, who was famed for her enormous strength, greater than any of the Ases.

In due time she came, a hideous apparition, riding on a wolf, whom she bridled with venomous snakes. She sprang from her strange steed as she approached the assembled Ases. Odin at once commanded that four of his servants should hold the animal, but their united strength failed to keep it in check, until at last they threw the wolf on the ground and seated themselves upon him. Even then it was with difficulty that they kept him under.

The giantess immediately approached the ship: she pushed it with such force, that the veins on her forehead swelled with exertion, but she only pushed once, and the mighty ship slid into the sea, though so violent had been the motion, that fire flashed from its sides, and the ground trembled so much that all the lands on earth felt the vibration.

This sight filled Thor with envy ; he felt it was an insult to his strength that a woman should have accomplished that of which he was incapable. His ever ready wrath got the better of his wisdom, and he swung his hammer Miölnir high aloft to fling at Hyrrockin, and would have killed her, had not the Ases interfered and held him back.

Meanwhile the giantess, undismayed, departed as speechlessly as she had done her appointed task. She silently mounted her horrid steed, and galloped away.

The gods then began to build a tall funeral pile on the ship's deck upon which, when it was finished, the body of Baldur was tenderly uplifted and laid. There remained nothing to be done save the setting it on fire.

Up to this time Nanna, the beloved and loving wife of Baldur, had beheld all these preparations in speechless, tearless woe. But when she saw the body of her dear loved one about to be borne away from her for ever, she could contain herself no longer ; with one loud cry of anguish she sprang towards the body, and sank down lifeless at its side. Grief had broken her heart.

Then two of the Ases came forward and bore her body, together with her husband's, on board the ship, so that their ashes might be mingled on the same pile, and loud was their wailing and grief at this second bereavement.

When all the preparations were ended, and the faithful couple laid side by side, Baldur's favourite horse, fully caparisoned, was led on board the ship, that he might perish with his master. Then an Asa set fire to the pile. As the first tongue of flame shot up to view, Thor hallowed the ship and its precious freight with three blows from Miölnir. Then the wind filled the sails, and slowly, slowly, Hringhorn floated out to sea. Until late that night the red light of the burning ship illumined the horizon, and lighted up the crests of the waves.

Thus death had entered into Asgard, the home of the gods, and there was not one, save Loki, who did not feel sad and lonely. He, the contriver of all this mischief, had escaped the instant after directing the fatal blow, to a lonely chasm, known only to himself. Here he executed wild dances of pleasure, and gave utterance to cries of joy at his successful villany.

While all these things were passing at Asgard, fleet-footed Sleipnir was bearing the messenger of the gods to the regions of Hel. For nine days and nights he had ridden through deep valleys, so dark that he could hardly see before him. On the dawn of the tenth day he reached the river Gjöll, which forms the boundary of Niflheim. A bridge led across it which was covered with glittering gold. Hermodur rode over it. When he arrived at the opposite side, the maiden who kept the bridge sprang forward in terror.

“What is thy name?” she asked. “Who art thou? Whence come? But yesterday five bands of dead warriors passed over this bridge, yet all of them together did not cause it to tremble and shake as thou and thy horse have made it do. Nor is thy hue that of death. Speak, what wouldest thou in the kingdom of pale Hel?”

Hermodur answered, “I ride to Hel to seek Baldur. Hast thou, perchance, seen him pass this way?”

“In very truth have I seen him pass the Gjöll bridge; he and Nanna both together; but what of that?”

“I am sent hither by the gods,” said Hermodur, “to beg Hel to restore unto us our beloved Baldur.”

“A strange request,” replied the maiden, “and one never preferred ere this. Dost thou believe it possible to waken pity in Hel’s cold breast? Ah! I much misdoubt the success of such an undertaking. However, go thy way; that path to the left will bring thee to the bars which surround Hel’s house. I wish thee good speed.”

So saying, the maiden vanished.

Hermodur rode forward in the direction indicated until he stood before the tall, iron barriers. Nowhere could he see a gate or any place of entrance. Leaping off Sleipnir’s back, he drew its girths as tight as the horse could bear them, remounted, stuck his spurs into its flanks, and, with one bound, horse and rider cleared the iron bars, and stood at the threshold of Hel.

Then Hermodur dismounted and entered the hall, where he saw countless shadows seated all around, but on the place of honour sat Baldur, his brother. Hermodur approached him and told him wherefore he had come. He

demanded to be led before Hel. He told her of the sorrow of the gods at Baldur's loss, and conjured her to permit the beloved of all beings to return to the sun-light.

"Let Baldur return with me at once," Hermodur pleaded, "so that lamentation be heard no longer at Asgard."

"Listen," said Hel, and as she uttered this first word Hermodur shuddered. He had never heard a voice so terrible, so hollow. "Listen; I will not be deaf to the entreaties of the gods, but Baldur cannot ride forth with thee. That which thou sayest must first be proved. But Baldur is beloved of all beings and things, now, therefore, I will restore him to Asgard on one condition—it is this: if all things in the world, living as well as lifeless, shall weep for Baldur, then shall he return unto the Aesir, but he must remain with me if there be found so much as one person or thing that speaks a word against him, or refuses to weep at tidings of his death."

"It is well," answered Hermodur, and he took his leave of Hel much comforted. He knew how dearly Baldur was loved, and he feared not that anything in earth or sky would

refuse its tribute of tears. He prepared to set out at once from Niflheim; Baldur conducted him to the threshold, and the gods parted full of good hopes. Nanna sent a casket and other gifts to Freyja, and Baldur sent Odin a ring.

As fast as Sleipnir would bear him, Hermodur rode forth, and right glad was he to behold the sunlight once more. Arrived at Asgard, he gave a full account of what he had seen and heard, and all the Ases were filled with hopes that Baldur the Beautiful would soon be in their midst again.

Wherefore the gods sent messengers unto all ends of the world, begging all beings and things to weep for Baldur, that he might be delivered out of the hands of Hel. The request was complied with willingly; not a being, not a thing, refused to shed tears for Baldur. The gods wept, the giants, the dwarfs, the human beings wept. All plants and trees were hung with heavy drops of brine, and the very stones sweated dew. In fact, the whole of earth and heaven was bathed in tears that were wept for Baldur's death.

Full of joy at the sight, the messengers

returned from all ends of the world and reported to Odin how successful their mission had been. Now Baldur could not fail to be restored to them.

Only one of the messengers had not yet re-entered Asgard, but there was no fear lest his mission should have been unsuccessful; grief for Baldur had been so universal. And indeed he had the same story to relate, and was returning full of joy when at the very doors of Asgard he was detained. A hideous old giantess sat spinning in a rocky cavern, and as she spun she crooned a song, and the song ran thus—

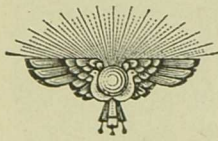
“Thöck’s eyes shall keep dry ! Thöcks eyes shall keep dry !  
Nor in life nor in death had I need of Baldur ;  
Let Hel keep that which she hath,  
Thöck’s eyes shall keep dry ! Thöck’s eyes shall keep dry !”

Then the messenger went in and implored the hag to weep for Baldur. She refused; he prayed yet again and again; it was too terrible that on the very eve of success Baldur should be lost to men and gods for ever, because this one woman refused him her tribute of tears. In vain did he plead. At last, sighing with a sigh that shook the earth, he re-entered Asgard, and told his sad tale to Odin.



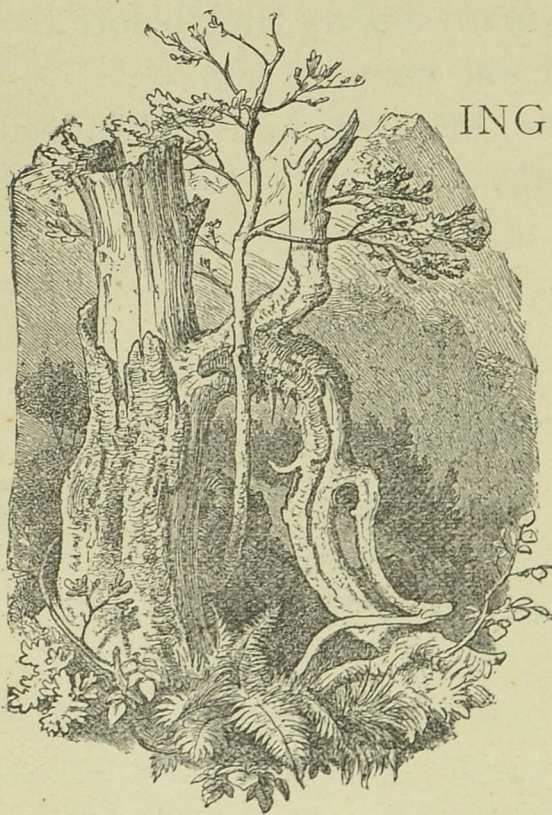
And thus it was that Baldur never returned to Asgard ; and it was Loki who had banished him thence, for the old hag was no other than he, and so he ended the evil work he had begun with the mistletoe-bough. His crime did not remain hidden from the Ases, and they vowed vengeance against him in their hearts. But the time when they could execute it was not yet ripe, and it was destined that Loki should yet play the gods many a sorry trick before the just punishment came home to him.

It came in time, however, and was indeed terrible in its wrath.



## OEGIR'S BANQUET.

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ING OEGIR, the sea-god, once went to pay a visit to the gods at Asgard. They entertained him magnificently; banquets were given in his honour, stories were told, and sagas sung to please him. The mighty

Oesir vied with one another how best to delight him.

Soon after this, Oegir, who did not wish to be outdone, invited all the gods of Asgard to celebrate with him the feast of the autumnal equinox. They came. A great banquet was spread for them; eight days they feasted right royally, and at the end of that time there was still plenty left to eat. But the barrels of drink were getting emptier and emptier, and at last the Ases discovered to their dismay that there would soon be no more ale left.

“What shall we do without ale to give a zest to the banquet?” they asked disconsolately.

“Give us more drink, Oegir,” said Thor.

“Alas! I have no more to give,” said the sea-god; “yet I could soon find a remedy, had I but a kettle large enough to brew ale for such a mighty company. There lies malt enough in my castle.”

“Is that all you will need to give us drink?” spoke Tyr; “then help can soon be found.”

“How, how!” exclaimed Oegir.

“Speak, Tyr, and tell us how,” cried all the Ases.

“Far to the East,” said Tyr, “lives the

giant Hymir, my mighty father ; he possesses a cauldron that is a whole mile deep. If Thor will come with me, I will undertake to fetch it ; alone I could not."

"That I will, right gladly," said Thor, to whom the prospect of an adventure was always welcome, particularly of one in which a giant was to be outwitted ; for he still smarted under his recent defeat. "That I will," he said.

"But do you think you can get possession of this famous cauldron ?" asked Oegir.

"By a trick, most certainly," said Tyr, "Hymir will not give it up willingly ; you of that may be sure."

"Let us be gone," said Thor impatiently ; and he went out of the hall and himself saddled his goats and put them into his carriage.

At dusk they reached the dwelling of Hymir, which was built in a rocky chasm. The giant was from home ; but Tyr's grandmother, an ugly crone, who had nine hundred heads, welcomed them kindly, and bade them descend from their carriage and enter the castle. When they were within the gates, she said—

"Strangers, I pray you let me hide you

awhile in this huge kettle ; my son Hymir is often ill-humoured towards guests ; I would rather prepare him for your arrival."

"It is well," said Tyr ; and both he and the astonished Thor stepped into the huge kettle, the object of their journey thither.

While Thor was still lost in admiring the cauldron's huge dimensions, and in imagination rejoicing at the gallons of ale that could be brewed within its mighty limits, heavy steps were heard approaching the castle. It was Hymir, who had come home from hunting, and was in a very ill-humour indeed, for he had had but small success that day. He entered the hall and threw down his hunting accoutrements with an exclamation of disgust.

"Be of good cheer, Hymir," said his wife ; "for you have guests in the house. Your son has arrived after a long absence, and has brought with him a mighty one, the Thunderer Thor.

When Hymir heard this, the blood rushed into his cheeks ; he blew into his thick black beard and looked round him with eyes so fierce, that one of the beams of the ceiling burst, and seven cauldrons came clattering

down to the ground. Tyr and Thor came forward and placed themselves before the giant. He measured them a long while with his dark piercing eye ; not one of them spoke a word. The giant's spirit boded him ill from the Thunderer's unexpected visit ; still he deemed it wiser not to seek a quarrel with him. Therefore he spoke at last and said,—

“ You are welcome, Thor ; I pray you take supper with me to-night.”

“ That will I right gladly,” answered Thor ; “ my long journey has made me hungry ; I do not need much pressing to eat.”

Hymir therefore commanded that three oxen should be killed and roasted. When they were ready, the trio sat down to eat, and Thor ate for his share alone two of the oxen. That seemed much even to a giant's appetite.

“ I cannot entertain such guests as you for long together,” he said. “ If you stay over to-morrow we must each supply our own supper from the produce of our hunting. My stores would soon be empty by such an appetite.”

“ Right gladly will I go with you to hunt or to fish,” said Thor, and thereupon lay down to rest.

Next morning at daybreak, Hymir announced his intention to go out fishing, to seek for the day's provender.

"I will accompany you," said Thor.

"As you like," said Hymir; "but I doubt much whether a young stripling like you will be of much use to me on the sea. You are too small, and will feel cold if I remain out as long as I am wont to do, or go out as far towards the icebergs."

"Do not let that distress you," said Thor; "it remains to be seen which of us two will first desire to return to land."

Thor tried to speak as calmly as he could, though his anger was roused, and it needed but little more for Hymir to have felt the weight of the Thunderer's hammer. But he checked himself, for he wished to shew him his strength in other ways. Instead he asked—

"Have you anything to give me as bait, Hymir?"

"That you must find for yourself," said the giant, and went on making his boat ready.

Then Thor went to the pasture where Hymir's herd of oxen were grazing, caught the largest and fiercest of them, and wrung his

head off. Hymir bit his lips with rage as he beheld this, but did not say a word. Thor took up the head and placed it in the boat, which Hymir was just pushing into the water, and then sprang in himself after it.

“Can you row?” asked Hymir, as Thor took his seat at the prow of the boat.

“As well as you can,” said Thor; and seizing two oars, pulled so that the boat flew through the foamy waves.

Hymir meanwhile rowed with his back to Thor. The boat shot along at lightning speed. When they had rowed thus for some time, Hymir drew in his oars and said,—

“This is the part where I am used to fish.”

“What!” cried Thor; “are you tired already? and we have only just set out! Dare not you row farther to sea?”

This speech vexed Hymir.

“I tired!” he said, “not I. I thought you might be, and therefore proposed that we should stop. As that is not the case, by all means let us row on.”

They did so, therefore, and for some time pulled mightily, so that the little skiff flew far out into mid-ocean. Hymir grew alarmed;



Thor's strength seemed to increase instead of flagging; each moment they drove faster and faster over the waves.

“Stop!” cried Hymir at last; “we must go no further, it would be dangerous. Already we have come to the region where lies the mighty Midgard snake; if I mistake not, we are even now rowing above its head.”

“That is well,” said Thor; “it is for that very snake I desired to fish to-day.”

The giant looked at him with astonishment, but there was something in Thor's manner that forbade remark. The Thunderer laid aside his oars, took out his strong fishing line, arranged it, fixed the bull's head on its hook for bait, then cast the line into the sea, and it soon reached the bottom.

The Midgard snake, whose head rested in this region, was not often plagued by fishermen; and therefore, when it saw an ox's head come sinking through the sea, it never expected to find it attached to an angler's line. Eagerly it snapped at the bait, and in an instant the hook had caught its throat. When the snake felt the pain, it shuddered and tugged at the hook so hard, that even mighty Thor

was forced to hold by the boat's side for support. But this seeming defeat only put Thor on his mettle. Collecting all his divine strength, he pulled, and pulled again. At first neither snake nor Asa would yield; then Thor pulled so hard at his line that his feet went right through the vessel, and he had to stand on the ocean's bottom.

But this accident disturbed him little; though the giant did not take the matter so calmly, when he saw the waves come in and out of the skiff. Thor continued to pull and pull, trying to hoist the serpent up to the boat's edge. At last he conquered. Like the ridge of a mountain, a long, green, shimmering back arose from out the water. Then followed an ugly dragon's tail, which lashed the ocean into foam; and still Thor pulled. Then came an ugly flattened head, with fiercely rolling eyes, that darted fire and fury from their depths; and still Thor pulled. And there came to view wide-spread nostrils, and hideous gaping jaws, spitting forth venom and smoke; yet Thor was not unnerved, but pulled on, trying to land the monster.

Hymir, who beheld this spectacle in silence,

had grown paler and paler. His fear at last knew no bounds; and, just at the moment when Thor swung his hammer aloft to strike the serpent's head, he took out his knife and hastily cut the Asa's line. The serpent fell back into the sea with a mighty thud, and the waters splashed up sky-high on all sides.

Thor's anger at being thus baffled knew no bounds. He raised his hand and struck the giant such a blow on the head, that Hymir fell sidelong into the water. Then Thor took up the boat and all its contents on his shoulders,—there were three whales in it that Hymir had caught,—and, without even stopping to bale out the water, carried the whole like a feather to land. Hymir, when he recovered from his blow, had to wade ashore as best he could; and he silently determined, when next he went out fishing, not to choose Thunderer Thor for his companion.

Still, his insolent spirit was not at rest; and, on the evening of their return, he could not resist once more vaunting his strength against that of Thor.

“You row well enough,” he said; “that I will not deny; but that may be habit; even the

weakest learn such things by practice. But I misdoubt me much whether you could, for instance, break this crystal goblet out of which I drink.”

Thor looked at the goblet, examined it well, and then glanced round for something to throw it at. At last he fixed upon a granite pillar that supported the hall at its centre. He dashed the goblet against it with all his might. The pillar split in half with a loud noise, but the goblet returned into Hymir's hand perfectly sound. Then Thor took it a second time, and, noticing the giant's shield which hung against the wall, threw it with force against its edge. The shield sprang in twain, and the wall behind it received a mighty crack ; but still the goblet remained unbroken. Upon this Thor grew angry. He fetched the cup once more from Hymir, to whom it had returned, bent his knee, and threw it with all his force at the giant's forehead.

“ Break, forehead or goblet,” he cried ; “ I care not which.” A sound of shivering glass echoed through the hall, the cup lay in fragments on the ground, but the giant's brow remained unwounded.

“My greatest pleasure is gone,” sighed Hymir, “now that that cup is broken. Indeed, Thor, you have forced me to acknowledge your power. I have detained you already far too long from Oegir and the other Ases who await you. Tell me why you ever came thence to trouble me.”

“Give me your cauldron,” said Thor, “and I will trouble you no further.”

“Go then,” spoke Hymir; “and you may take yon kettle, if you can carry it. If you can, I shall confess you are the strongest among gods and men. Stay; let my son Tyr try first if he can move the cauldron.”

Tyr did as he was bid; but in vain did he endeavour twice, thrice, to move the kettle but an inch. He tried his hardest, for he would fain have shown his father that he also was a proper man.

At last Thor grew impatient at these vain attempts.

“I do not need your help,” he said. “Take my goat chariot and drive back to Oegir. Say I am coming with the cauldron; it will not be long before I follow you.”

So saying he took up the cauldron, clapt it

on his head like a hat, and strode with it out of the hall. The brim of the cauldron reached down to his knees! He walked on some distance without looking back. When he did so, he became aware that Hymir was pursuing him with a mighty band of men, for Thor had not been gone long before Hymir regretted having let the cauldron go. When Thor saw this he stopped, took the kettle from his head, set it on the ground, and, grasping Miölnir firmly in his hands, awaited their nearer approach.

He had not long to wait. Miölnir was soon dispatched on his errand of death; first Hymir, then all his followers, were struck down by the Thunderer's mallet. Thus Thor had his first revenge upon the giants for the tricks they had played him at Utgard-Loki's court. Elated and strengthened with success, he once more raised the cauldron on his head, and strode as fast as his legs would carry him to Oegir's house.

The Ases received him with loud cheers of joy, and they could not praise his prowess and strength enough. Oegir at once set about brewing ale in the mighty cauldron; and before long there was indeed drink enough, and the

banquet recommenced. The merriment ran higher than ever; many ascribed this to the new ale that had been brewed in Hymir's cauldron, saying they had never tasted such beer before. Everyone was content, and admired the arrangements of the feast and the waiting of Oegir's servants.

This praise vexed Loki, and out of sheer wantonness he killed one of those servants. When the Ases saw this, they all sprang up from their seats, seized their spears and shields, and pursued Loki into the forest. When he had disappeared from view, they returned to the banquet; and for some days there was rest from Loki's mischief-making.

After a while, however, he returned, and, stopping a servant in the outer hall, demanded of him what conversation the gods were carrying on within.

"They are speaking of fights and of praiseworthy deeds of arms," said the servant, "and of each several Asa they have deeds of prowess to tell. Only of you can neither As nor Asynia say a good word."

"I will enter the hall myself," said Loki, "and will slander *them*."

“Do not so,” begged the servant; “they bade you never return here among them; ill may befall you if you do aught more to vex the Ases.”

“What care I?” said Loki, and he strode into the hall with a firm, defiant tread.

When the Ases saw him enter they were all silent, and the conversation that a moment before had been so lively stopped; and yet Loki was unabashed.

“I am thirsty,” he said, “and have come a long distance; give me a drink of sweet ale, I pray.”

Not a word of answer came.

“Give me to drink, I beg,” he continued.

Still no notice was taken.

“I ask for drink,” he repeated. “Why are you silent, all ye gods? you answer me never a word. Find me a place at your banquet, or else bid me begone.”

“The Ases will never find you a place at their banquet,” said Bragi, at last breaking the silence. “They know too well whom to admit to such an honour, and whom to reject.”

“Is this so, Odin?” asked Loki, turning to All-father. “Am I refused a place at this



feast, and do you forget that I am also your brother, and that you were never to refuse me drink and food? I claim that promise now."

"Find a place for the wolf's father at the banquet," said Odin to one of the gods; "it must even be as he says. But beware, Loki, how you slander us any more in Oegir's hall."

Loki seated himself at the place indicated, and for a while he ate and drank in silence. But after a time Oegir's powerful ale made him talkative; and, one after the other, he began to launch abuse and calumnies against each god and goddess present. Odin tried to silence him; in vain. He even spoke ill of All-father, and his evil tongue knew no bounds. He boasted to Freyja that it was all his doing that Baldur the Fair could never more sit in the assembly of the gods. He taunted Tyr with unfitness for fight, saying it would be a poor wretch that would deign to tackle him, who had only a left hand, seeing that his son, the wolf, had bitten off the brawny right.

At last Thor, thinking to silence Loki, threatened to stop his mouth with Miölnir if he would not hold his peace.

"Either you shall feel Miölnir's weight," he

cried, "or I will throw you far out to the eastward, so that no man may see you more."

"In your place, Thor, I would not speak of going eastward," said the unabashed Loki; "methinks you gained little glory there, when you were fain to creep into a giant's thumb for shelter and safety."

"Silence, impudent wight," cried Thor, "or Miölnir shall shatter every bone in your vile body."

"Many more years do I intend to live, for all your hammer's blows; remember, you are not always invincible; remember Skrymir and the knots he tied in your wallet, so that you had to go without your supper, and nearly fainted for want of food."

"Once more," screamed Thor, "will you be silent? It is your last chance I give you now, or Miölnir will force you to shut your slandering mouth for ever."

"I will from hence," said Loki; "for I have spoken enough. Neither god nor goddess has this day escaped my slandering tongue. Before you only do I retire; for I know you, and do not doubt but you will strike. One word to you, Oegir, and I am gone. You have

given the gods a banquet, and I, an Asa, have been expelled from it; another you shall never give. For, ere the gods visit you again, the flames will have licked up your possessions, ay, and all the world besides. I go now, and my face here shall trouble you no further."

With one bound Loki cleared the threshold, and was outside the hall.

The Ases breathed more lightly when his back was turned; but all merriment had fled from among them, for Loki had left a sting rankling in every heart.

When the gods at length left Oegir's hospitable halls and returned to Asgard, they swore one and all that Loki's incessant mischief-making should go on no longer; that he should no longer be the spoiler of their pleasures, and do naught but what was ill. They swore it on their honour as Ases, and it was not long before they carried their oath into execution.



## THE PUNISHMENT OF LOKI.

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**F**VIL and mischievous as had been the deeds of Loki, there was not one among them all that had made him so hated at Asgard, as the way in which he had caused the death of Baldur, and then refused him the tribute of a tear, which might redeem him from the realms of Hel. For some time past he had been visibly shunned at Asgard whenever he showed his handsome face in the streets, and he began instinctively to feel that there was danger for him in presenting himself too often before the Ases. He therefore appeared more and more rarely, and at last, after the incident at Oegir's banquet, absented himself from them altogether, and



KATE GREENAWAY.

THE PUNISHMENT OF LOKI.

EDMUND EVANS.



hid himself among the mountain fastnesses, in secret places known to him alone.

Here, deeming he should probably have to stay for all time, he built himself a house, but the feeling of insecurity being strong upon him, though its situation was extremely retired, he determined to give it four doors. He hoped in this way to be able to escape all dangers, from whatever side they might approach.

Still he could not feel easy. He spent his days in wondering what plans the Ases would devise for his capture and punishment, and his cunning head had already discovered innumerable stratagems for eluding their supposed attacks. Often and often he would change himself into a salmon, and hide under the cooling spray of a waterfall, where he would give himself up entirely to these meditations.

“They cannot catch me in this form,” he thought, “nor can they see me here, hidden under all this spray. And I am not such a fool as to be caught with any bait.”

In this way time went on. None of the Ases came near the spot, and of all the various attacks Loki fancied they were meditating against him not one had ever come to pass.

He began to find this mode of life very dull, and wondered how and when it would end.

One day, as he sat by the water's edge, he fell to watching the play of the fish that disported themselves in the clear waters. Suddenly it came into his head that these fish might be caught if a large bag were drawn through the water. Then it struck him that such a bag would be most useful if the water could pass in and out of it, and if it were so made that the fish, once caught, could not escape.

He determined to try the experiment, and taking flax and yarn, began to pull the threads backwards and forwards, knotting them at regular intervals. The occupation fascinated him, and night coming on, he re-entered his house, made a bright fire and continued to weave on at his invention—the first fishing net.

Thus he sat on till far into the night, unheeding everything but his new occupation; his usual vigilance forgotten and relaxed.

Meanwhile All-father Odin, mounted on the throne Hlidskialf, whence he could survey the whole world, had at length discovered Loki's hiding place. He at once made the news



known throughout Asgard, and a party of Ases, accompanied by Odin, set out to bind and punish the eternal mischief-maker. They set out, and were already near the house before Loki, absorbed in his net-making, was aware of their approach.

The instant he perceived them he knew there was not a second of time to lose. He threw the net he had been so carefully making into the fire, and hastily changed himself into his salmon shape. With a great splash he sprang into the water, just as the impetuous Thor, who had rushed on a-head of his brother Ases, thought to grasp him.

When the rest of the gods came up to the river's edge, Thor could only point out to them the shining salmon, which they were quite powerless to capture. Their souls were filled with mortification at the sight, and the irate Thor was blowing into his thick red beard with dangerous mien.

Disappointed of their prey they went into the house, hoping to find they scarce knew what. They seated themselves round the still smouldering embers, feeling very small and foolish, and wondering what they should do

next. Should they return to Asgard in disgrace, their mission unfulfilled, or should they await the time when it might please Loki to quit his fish disguise and resume his Asa form? a thing they knew him far too well to believe he was likely to do, while he suspected their presence there.

They deliberated on these things. Kvasir alone had no advice to offer. He was intently looking into the hot embers, for there was a strange something there that attracted his gaze, a something he had never beheld before.

Now Kvasir was of all the Ases the one most gifted with the power of perception. His quick sight, his acute penetration, were famed in all Asgard. The gods, therefore, seeing him thus abstracted, left him in peace. They felt sure that as soon as he had arrived at any conclusion he would impart his thoughts.

“Ases,” he suddenly exclaimed, “Loki himself has left us the clue by which we can capture him in his present shape. See there, among the embers I can trace the vestiges of cords that have been burnt. It seems to me that if such a thing were passed through the water a fish might be caught with it.”

The gods pressed round to see the impression of the net which Kvasir had discovered, and they all agreed with him in his surmise.

“We must endeavour to copy this thing,” said Kvasir, “that is, if god Odin agree.”

“Most certainly,” said Odin.

So they all sat down to work, and with Loki’s own flax and yarn, succeeded in weaving a net like that of which they saw the imprint in the ashes.

When it was finished they carried it to the edge of the river and threw it into the water; Thor holding it at one end, and the rest of the Ases at the other; thus jointly they drew it gently backwards and forwards through the water. Loki’s horror was great when he found that his own invention was thus turned against himself. He swam about in terror lest he should be caught in the meshes of the net, and once or twice escaped them but narrowly. To his great delight he perceived two stones, and creeping between them he several times felt the net pass harmlessly over him.

The gods were aware that the meshes had grazed against some living thing, and hoped when they drew it out to find their prey in the

net. Great was their disappointment on finding it empty.

Kvasir then suggested that they should attach stones to one end of the net, so that its weight might make it sweep the bed of the river. The Ases followed his advice, and once more began to draw the net through the waters.

This new plan succeeded in chasing Loki out of his hiding-place. In an instant he became aware that he was not far from the fall. Darting rapidly onward, he swam to the river's brink, and giving a leap across the net, he hid himself among the foaming waters.

Then the gods were no further than before, except that they now knew exactly where Loki was. The Ases divided into two bands, one standing on each side of the fall. Thor waded into the middle of the stream and held the net. Then Loki perceived that there were but two chances of escape for him. He must either swim out to sea, or once more leap over the net. He chose the latter course, and prepared to leap over the ready-spread snare. Thor snatched at him in his spring and indeed caught him. But Loki was so slippery that

he would have escaped even then, if Thor had not held him very fast by the tail.

That is the reason why the tails of salmon have since been so fine and pointed.

So Loki was caught at last.

The gods made him resume his own shape, and then without any questioning, dragged him to the spot they had selected for his punishment. They took him into a cavern where they had previously put three enormous masses of rock, placed at an angle. In these they had bored three holes, and it was on this pile that Loki was destined to expiate all his wrongdoings and crimes. Then they took stout thongs of iron, and bound him on to the points of the rock. It was a terrible position, and one of great agony.

But the gods were not content with this. They did not consider that any punishment could be too great for Loki, so they bethought them what more they could do to render his situation terrible.

Then it occurred to one of them that they should hang a poisonous snake above his head, in such wise that its venom should fall without ceasing, drop by drop, on his face. They

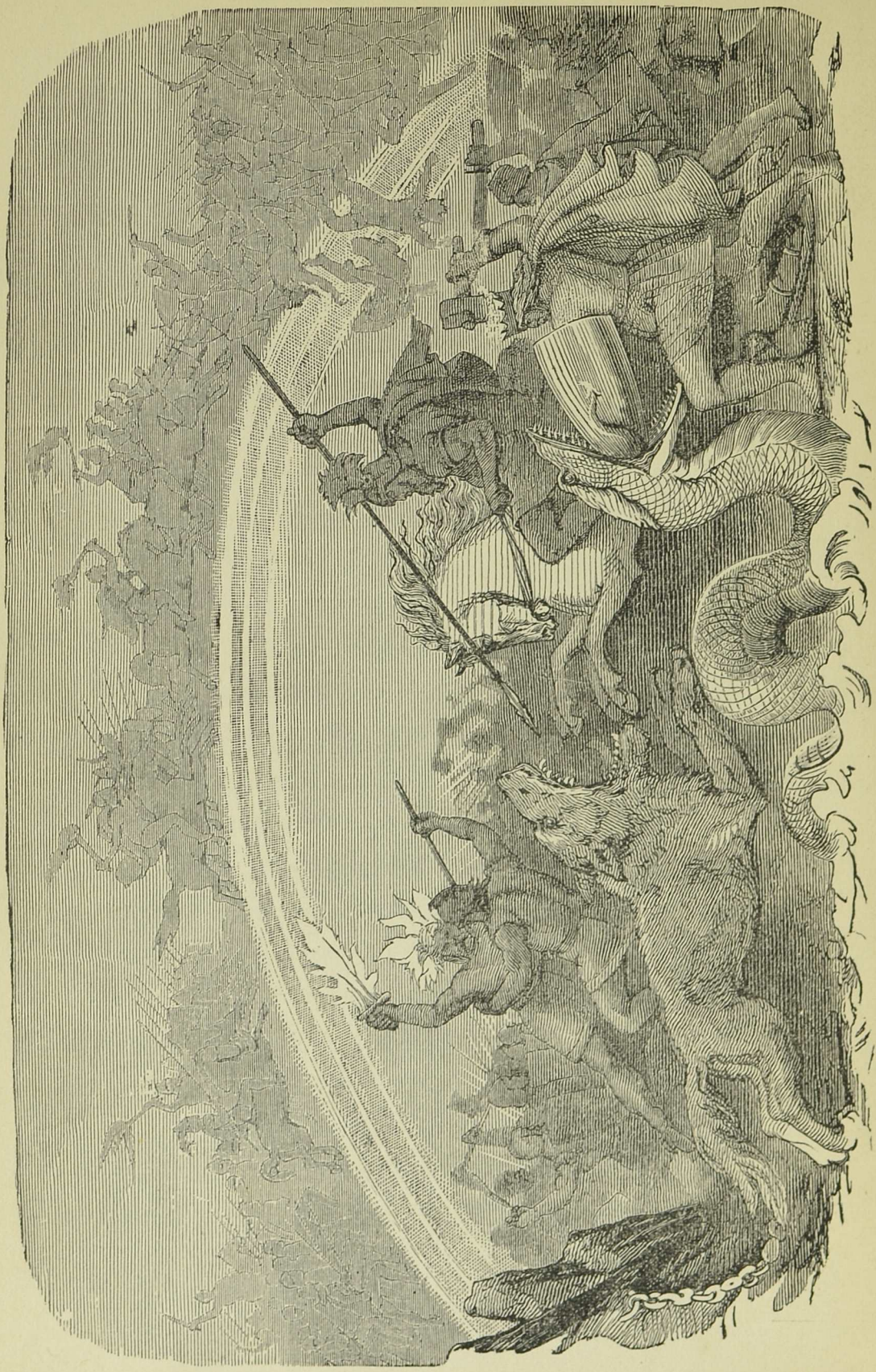
chained the serpent also to the rock, just above the unlucky Loki's head, and left him alone in his agony.

But even Loki, miscreant as he was, was not without a being in the world who loved him. His wife Siguna loved him dearly, and when she heard of the terrible fate that had befallen her husband, she immediately left Asgard and set forth to join him. She took up her place beside him, and held in her hand a cup in which she caught the venom that fell from the serpent, thus relieving Loki of one of his terrible miseries.

Day and night she did this for him, never ceasing from her task nor quitting her post. Only when the cup was full was she forced to withdraw it, and that second even was more than Loki well could bear. His agonies at such times were so great that he would struggle with all his might and main to tear himself away from the rocks to which he was bound, and his howls were fearful to hear.

This was the punishment of Loki, which he was destined to endure until the time of Ragnarök, which is the end of all things.






RAGNARÖK.



## RAGNARÖK.

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OW though Thor fought so bravely against the Jötuns, he knew as did the other gods right well that once on a time a mighty war would break forth between them and the giants, wherein the gods would be vanquished. This was not to be wholly without cause, for the gods had not kept themselves stainless from sin, neither had they always kept their word nor scorned to do deeds of vileness, wherefore evil had dominion over them. It came about that in Asgard and in Midgard sin was abroad. Envy and evil feelings caused brethren to slay one another, fathers murdered their infants, relentless cruelty stalked abroad and there was neither faith nor

love in heaven or earth. The powers of evil were unloosed. At this time the gods wandered mournfully through the realms of Asgard, and dreadful things were foretold by the dwarfs. But the fulfilment thereof did not come at once, and meanwhile oppressive stillness reigned in the upper realms, and the sullen din of war was heard in the lower regions of the world. Gods, men, and things awaited what they knew must come. Then there came upon the world a winter, severer than any that had ever come before, and the snow fell down from all quarters of the skies and buried the earth beneath its mantle. The winds became hurricanes, and blew fierce and chill, and the sun lost his power. For three years did this winter endure and no summer came to warm the land. And yet though they suffered grievously, men did not abstain from their wickedness. Then the bonds of the earth were unloosed, so that it shook greatly, and all the trees that were upon it were uprooted, the mountains fell down from their heights, and there were chasms that yawned even into the kingdom of Hel. All chains and fetters were broken and torn asunder so that Loki was released from his shackles

and the Fenris Wolf escaped from the halter that had been made.

When all these things had come to pass, it was known that Ragnarök, the Twilight of the gods was at hand as it had been foretold of old. Then the Fenris Wolf sought out Loki his father, and they gathered about them all things that were vile. The sea tossed and moaned in fury, and the Midgard snake raised her head. Her writhing shook the world to its foundations and caused the waters to overflow, and her fiery breath spread pestilence throughout the land. Men went in shoals down into the realms of Hel, and vultures and eagles fought for their unburied bones. The shadow of Death hung over the world and troubled even the halls of Asgard, and the gods looked sorrowfully upon their gleaming homes, and upon the shady groves that should so soon be theirs no longer.

Then suddenly there burst forth from the lands of eternal ice the ghastly death-ship Nagelfari that is built of the nails of dead men that have been left uncut. In the stern sat the mighty giant Hrym, and he steered its course right towards Asgard. The ship was filled with

Jötuns armed with javelins and spears and terrible to look upon in their fury. Loki was with them and Surtur with his flaming sword and the fiery sons of Muspel; it was an army dreadful to behold.

Now Heimdal, the watchman, who was ever stationed at the Bridge Bifröst, that is, the entrance to Asgard, saw the ship and its crew. He blew a loud blast on his horn that resounded through all the regions of Asgard. Odin heard it and all the Ases and they knew what had come about, and made them ready for the last fight. The eight hundred doors of Walhalla were opened, and there rode forth thence the heroes that had fallen in combat, to fight once more the battle of the gods. Odin sprang upon Sleipnir his steed, and put his golden helmet upon his head and armed himself with his mighty spear. While they yet armed the ship came across the everlasting sea and landed its fearful load. The giants and their followers put themselves in order and rode across the bridge Bifröst into the very heart of Asgard and the rainbow bridge broke beneath their weight.

Then gods and giants drew themselves up

in battle array upon the endless plains of Midgard. Odin rode at the head of the Ases and there were with him eight hundred thousand heroes of Walhalla. Beside Odin strode Thor, the undaunted, and in his hand he swung Miölnir his trusty hammer.

Opposed to the Ases were the wild Jötuns, and with them was the Fenris Wolf and the ugly Midgard snake. The cruel jaws of Fenris hung open ready to devour all things and his eyes shot fire, while the Midgard serpent writhed, and pestilence and noxious vapours breathed from her nostrils.

Then Heimdal once more blew a blast on his horn and it was the signal for the awful battle to begin. It raged so terribly that none can tell thereof, for the world has not seen its like and will not again. All-Father Odin, fell upon the odious wolf and wrestled with him right valiantly, but at last Fenris overcame All-Father, as it had been foretold and Odin and Sleipnir were devoured by his jaws. But it was written also that Odin should be avenged. For Widar the son of Odin attacked the beast and seized him by the jaws. He wrenched them asunder by his strength and pierced him

to the heart with his sword. Yet Widar was not to escape his doom. For in the agony of death the wolf caught him in his clutches and tore him so that he died.

While these things were doing the heroes fought with the giants and their host and overcame many of them, and laid them low, but in the end the Jötuns triumphed over the heroes of Asgard.

In vain Thor the unconquered strove to aid his brethren. The Midgard snake had sought him forth as her special prey, and for many hours they combated together. After a long time the serpent was overcome by Thor, but hardly had he slain her, when he fell down dead at her side, for her poisonous breath had stricken him. Tyr, Heimdal and all the other Ases perished also, and yet the battle raged fierce and hot.

Then Surtur flung his flaming sword into the midst, and there was fire kindled in all the world. The flames licked the doors of the heavens and pierced even into the bowels of the earth, and all that was upon the land and all that was in the water or high in the sky was shrivelled into nought by the destroying fire.

Asgard was blotted out and Midgard, Jötunheim too and the regions of Hel, the terrible. The sun that had long been darkened went out, and the stars fell from the skies. The earth quaked and trembled and the heavens were rent in twain, and the fire ceased not until all things created had been destroyed.

When all had perished, the fire ended, but the world was filled with qualms of thick smoke. The air was murky and heavy and the everlasting sea overflowed all things, there moved in its depths no creature, nor were stars reflected in its surface, for there was neither heaven nor earth. How long this lasted it is not given unto men to know.

Then it came about that the earth arose from the bosom of the waters, for it had not perished, and the waters withdrew into their place. A new sun was born to shine down upon the world and a new moon and stars were lit. Then the earth was clothed with thick verdure, as in the spring-time when it is in its beauty, and corn sprouted forth unsown upon its sides. Shrubs too and trees came forth and flowers made the air rich with perfume. After many days there were created on its surface a

pair of mortals, sinless and fair, and from them have sprung all the races of men. The Ases also reappeared in heaven and sat once more upon thrones of gold guiding the universe and guarding the children of men. Only the evil had perished in Ragnarök, for only evil can be destroyed. Good must triumph and remain for ever, for it is written that in the end good shall reign upon earth and all things be given over to its dominion.





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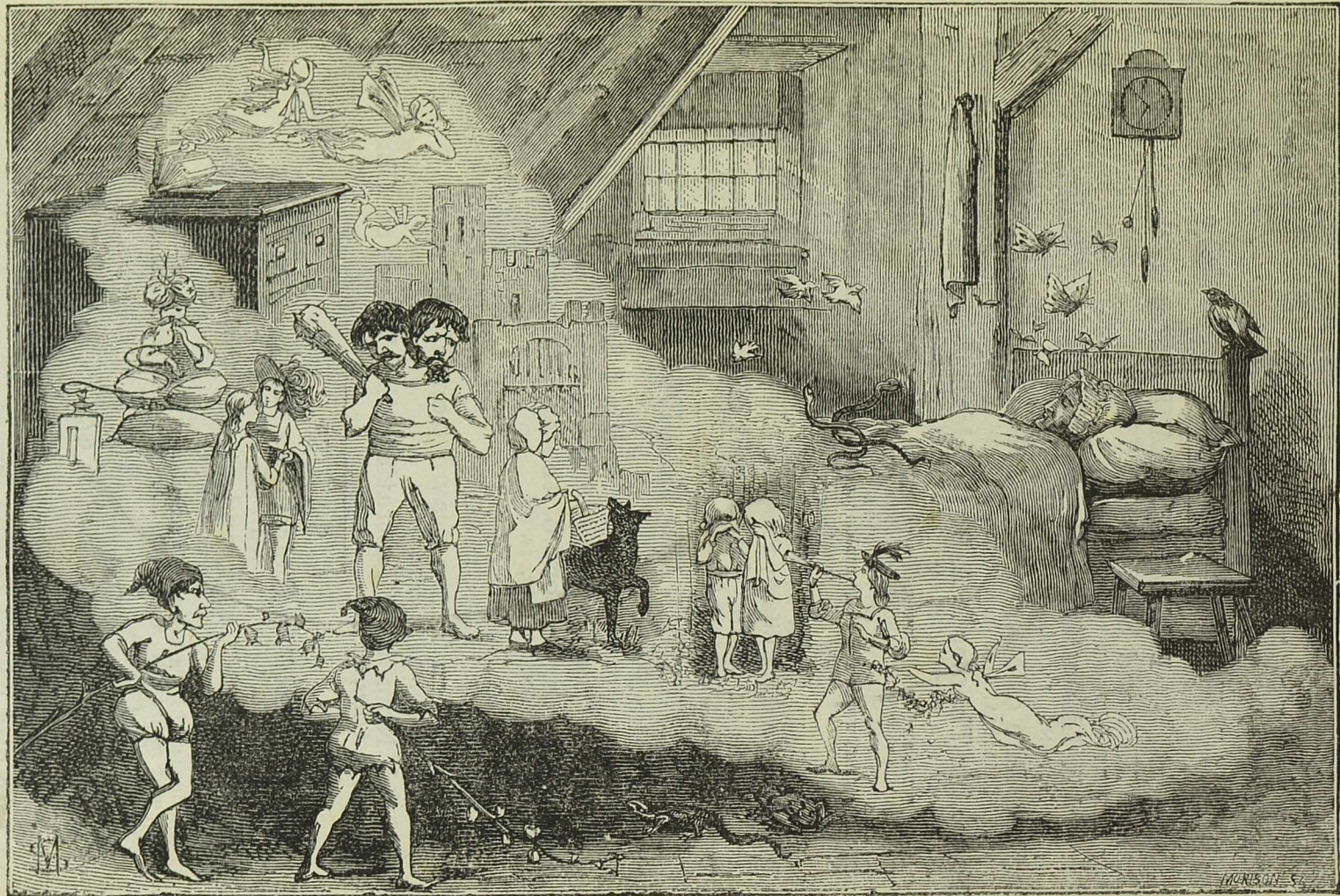
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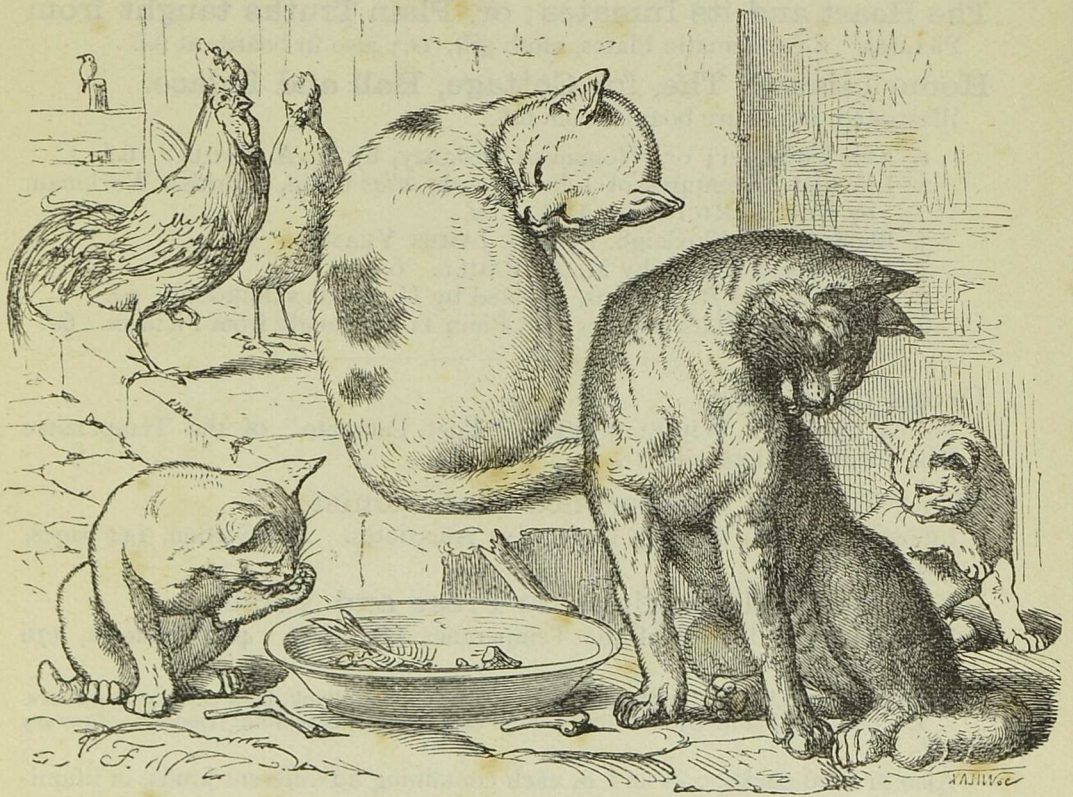
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