

**ТОМАС
КАРЛЕЙЛЬ**

EARLY KINGS
OF NORWAY

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Thomas Carlyle

Early Kings of Norway

by Thomas Carlyle

The Icelanders, in their long winter, had a great habit of writing; and were, and still are, excellent in penmanship, says Dahlmann. It is to this fact, that any little history there is of the Norse Kings and their old tragedies, crimes and heroisms, is almost all due. The Icelanders, it seems, not only made beautiful letters on their paper or parchment, but were laudably observant and desirous of accuracy; and have left us such a collection of narratives (*Sagas*, literally "Says") as, for quantity and quality, is unexampled among rude nations. Snorro Sturleson's History of the Norse Kings is built out of these old Sagas; and has in it a great deal of poetic fire, not a little faithful sagacity applied in sifting and adjusting these old Sagas; and, in a word, deserves, were it once well edited, furnished with accurate maps, chronological summaries, &c., to be reckoned among the great history-books of the world. It is from these sources, greatly aided by accurate, learned and unwearied Dahlmann,¹ the German Professor, that the following rough notes of the early Norway Kings are hastily thrown together. In Histories

¹ J. G. Dahlmann, *Geschichte von Dannemark*, 3 vols. 8vo. Hamburg, 1840-1843.

of England (Rapin's excepted) next to nothing has been shown of the many and strong threads of connection between English affairs and Norse.

CHAPTER I. HARALD HAARFAGR

Till about the Year of Grace 860 there were no kings in Norway, nothing but numerous jarls,—essentially kinglets, each presiding over a kind of republican or parliamentary little territory; generally striving each to be on some terms of human neighborhood with those about him, but,—in spite of "*Fylke Things*" (Folk Things, little parish parliaments), and small combinations of these, which had gradually formed themselves,—often reduced to the unhappy state of quarrel with them. Harald Haarfagr was the first to put an end to this state of things, and become memorable and profitable to his country by uniting it under one head and making a kingdom of it; which it has continued to be ever since. His father, Halfdan the Black, had already begun this rough but salutary process,—inspired by the cupidities and instincts, by the faculties and opportunities, which the good genius of this world, beneficent often enough under savage forms, and diligent at all times to diminish anarchy as the world's worst savagery, usually appoints in such cases,—conquest, hard fighting, followed by wise guidance of the conquered;—but it was Harald the Fairhaired, his son, who conspicuously carried it on and completed it. Harald's birth-year, death-year, and chronology in general, are known only by inference and computation; but, by the latest reckoning, he died about the year 933 of our era, a man of eighty-three.

The business of conquest lasted Harald about twelve years (A.D. 860-872?), in which he subdued also the vikings of the out-islands, Orkneys, Shetlands, Hebrides, and Man. Sixty more years were given him to consolidate and regulate what he had conquered, which he did with great judgment, industry and success. His reign altogether is counted to have been of over seventy years.

The beginning of his great adventure was of a romantic character.—youthful love for the beautiful Gyda, a then glorious and famous young lady of those regions, whom the young Harald aspired to marry. Gyda answered his embassy and prayer in a distant, lofty manner: "Her it would not beseem to wed any Jarl or poor creature of that kind; let him do as Gorm of Denmark, Eric of Sweden, Egbert of England, and others had done,—subdue into peace and regulation the confused, contentious bits of jarls round him, and become a king; then, perhaps, she might think of his proposal: till then, not." Harald was struck with this proud answer, which rendered Gyda tenfold more desirable to him. He vowed to let his hair grow, never to cut or even to comb it till this feat were done, and the peerless Gyda his own. He proceeded accordingly to conquer, in fierce battle, a Jarl or two every year, and, at the end of twelve years, had his unkempt (and almost unimaginable) head of hair clipt off,—Jarl Rognwald (*Reginald*) of More, the most valued and valuable of all his subject-jarls, being promoted to this sublime barber function;—after which King Harald, with head thoroughly cleaned, and hair grown, or

growing again to the luxuriant beauty that had no equal in his day, brought home his Gyda, and made her the brightest queen in all the north. He had after her, in succession, or perhaps even simultaneously in some cases, at least six other wives; and by Gyda herself one daughter and four sons.

Harald was not to be considered a strict-living man, and he had a great deal of trouble, as we shall see, with the tumultuous ambition of his sons; but he managed his government, aided by Jarl Rognwald and others, in a large, quietly potent, and successful manner; and it lasted in this royal form till his death, after sixty years of it.

These were the times of Norse colonization; proud Norsemen flying into other lands, to freer scenes,—to Iceland, to the Faroe Islands, which were hitherto quite vacant (tenanted only by some mournful hermit, Irish Christian *fakir*, or so); still more copiously to the Orkney and Shetland Isles, the Hebrides and other countries where Norse squatters and settlers already were. Settlement of Iceland, we say; settlement of the Faroe Islands, and, by far the notablist of all, settlement of Normandy by Rolf the Ganger (A.D. 876?).²

Rolf, son of Rognwald,³ was lord of three little islets far north, near the Fjord of Folden, called the Three Vigten Islands; but his chief means of living was that of sea robbery; which, or at least

² "Settlement," dated 912, by Munch, Henault, &c. The Saxon Chronicle says (anno 876): "In this year Rolf overran Normandy with his army, and he reigned fifty winters."

³ Dahlmann, ii. 87.

Rolf's conduct in which, Harald did not approve of. In the Court of Harald, sea-robbery was strictly forbidden as between Harald's own countries, but as against foreign countries it continued to be the one profession for a gentleman; thus, I read, Harald's own chief son, King Eric that afterwards was, had been at sea in such employments ever since his twelfth year. Rolf's crime, however, was that in coming home from one of these expeditions, his crew having fallen short of victual, Rolf landed with them on the shore of Norway, and in his strait, drove in some cattle there (a crime by law) and proceeded to kill and eat; which, in a little while, he heard that King Harald was on foot to inquire into and punish; whereupon Rolf the Ganger speedily got into his ships again, got to the coast of France with his sea-robbers, got infestment by the poor King of France in the fruitful, shaggy desert which is since called Normandy, land of the Northmen; and there, gradually felling the forests, banking the rivers, tilling the fields, became, during the next two centuries, Wilhelmus Conquaestor, the man famous to England, and momentous at this day, not to England alone, but to all speakers of the English tongue, now spread from side to side of the world in a wonderful degree. Tancred of Hauteville and his Italian Normans, though important too, in Italy, are not worth naming in comparison. This is a feracious earth, and the grain of mustard-seed will grow to miraculous extent in some cases.

Harald's chief helper, counsellor, and lieutenant was the above-mentioned Jarl Rognwald of More, who had the honor to

cut Harald's dreadful head of hair. This Rognwald was father of Turf-Einar, who first invented peat in the Orkneys, finding the wood all gone there; and is remembered to this day. Einar, being come to these islands by King Harald's permission, to see what he could do in them,—islands inhabited by what miscellany of Picts, Scots, Norse squatters we do not know,—found the indispensable fuel all wasted. Turf-Einar too may be regarded as a benefactor to his kind. He was, it appears, a bastard; and got no coddling from his father, who disliked him, partly perhaps, because "he was ugly and blind of an eye,"—got no flattering even on his conquest of the Orkneys and invention of peat. Here is the parting speech his father made to him on fitting him out with a "long-ship" (ship of war, "dragon-ship," ancient seventy-four), and sending him forth to make a living for himself in the world: "It were best if thou never camest back, for I have small hope that thy people will have honor by thee; thy mother's kin throughout is slavish."

Harald Haarfagr had a good many sons and daughters; the daughters he married mostly to jarls of due merit who were loyal to him; with the sons, as remarked above, he had a great deal of trouble. They were ambitious, stirring fellows, and grudged at their finding so little promotion from a father so kind to his jarls; sea-robbery by no means an adequate career for the sons of a great king, two of them, Halfdan Haaleg (Long-leg), and Gudrod Ljome (Gleam), jealous of the favors won by the great Jarl Rognwald, surrounded him in his house one night,

and burnt him and sixty men to death there. That was the end of Rognwald, the invaluable jarl, always true to Haarfagr; and distinguished in world history by producing Rolf the Ganger, author of the Norman Conquest of England, and Turf-Einar, who invented peat in the Orkneys. Whether Rolf had left Norway at this time there is no chronology to tell me. As to Rolf's surname, "Ganger," there are various hypotheses; the likeliest, perhaps, that Rolf was so weighty a man no horse (small Norwegian horses, big ponies rather) could carry him, and that he usually walked, having a mighty stride withal, and great velocity on foot.

One of these murderers of Jarl Rognwald quietly set himself in Rognwald's place, the other making for Orkney to serve Turf-Einar in like fashion. Turf-Einar, taken by surprise, fled to the mainland; but returned, days or perhaps weeks after, ready for battle, fought with Halfdan, put his party to flight, and at next morning's light searched the island and slew all the men he found. As to Halfdan Long-leg himself, in fierce memory of his own murdered father, Turf-Einar "cut an eagle on his back," that is to say, hewed the ribs from each side of the spine and turned them out like the wings of a spread-eagle: a mode of Norse vengeance fashionable at that time in extremely aggravated cases!

Harald Haarfagr, in the mean time, had descended upon the Rognwald scene, not in mild mood towards the new jarl there; indignantly dismissed said jarl, and appointed a brother of Rognwald (brother, notes Dahlmann), though Rognwald had left other sons. Which done, Haarfagr sailed with all speed to the

Orkneys, there to avenge that cutting of an eagle on the human back on Turf-Einar's part. Turf-Einar did not resist; submissively met the angry Haarfagr, said he left it all, what had been done, what provocation there had been, to Haarfagr's own equity and greatness of mind. Magnanimous Haarfagr inflicted a fine of sixty marks in gold, which was paid in ready money by Turf-Einar, and so the matter ended.

CHAPTER II. ERIC BLOOD-AXE AND BROTHERS

In such violent courses Haarfagr's sons, I know not how many of them, had come to an untimely end; only Eric, the accomplished sea-rover, and three others remained to him. Among these four sons, rather impatient for property and authority of their own, King Harald, in his old days, tried to part his kingdom in some eligible and equitable way, and retire from the constant press of business, now becoming burdensome to him. To each of them he gave a kind of kingdom; Eric, his eldest son, to be head king, and the others to be feudatory under him, and pay a certain yearly contribution; an arrangement which did not answer well at all. Head-King Eric insisted on his tribute; quarrels arose as to the payment, considerable fighting and disturbance, bringing fierce destruction from King Eric upon many valiant but too stubborn Norse spirits, and among the rest upon all his three brothers, which got him from the Norse populations the surname of *Blod-axe*, "Eric Blood-axe," his title in history. One of his brothers he had killed in battle before his old father's life ended; this brother was Bjorn, a peaceable, improving, trading economic Under-king, whom the others mockingly called "Bjorn the Chapman." The great-grandson of this Bjorn became extremely distinguished by and by as *Saint*

Olaf. Head-King Eric seems to have had a violent wife, too. She was thought to have poisoned one of her other brothers-in-law. Eric Blood-axe had by no means a gentle life of it in this world, trained to sea-robbery on the coasts of England, Scotland, Ireland and France, since his twelfth year.

Old King Fairhair, at the age of seventy, had another son, to whom was given the name of Hakon. His mother was a slave in Fairhair's house; slave by ill-luck of war, though nobly enough born. A strange adventure connects this Hakon with England and King Athelstan, who was then entering upon his great career there. Short while after this Hakon came into the world, there entered Fairhair's palace, one evening as Fairhair sat Feasting, an English ambassador or messenger, bearing in his hand, as gift from King Athelstan, a magnificent sword, with gold hilt and other fine trimmings, to the great Harald, King of Norway. Harald took the sword, drew it, or was half drawing it, admiringly from the scabbard, when the English excellency broke into a scornful laugh, "Ha, ha; thou art now the feudatory of my English king; thou hast accepted the sword from him, and art now his man!" (acceptance of a sword in that manner being the symbol of investiture in those days.) Harald looked a trifle flurried, it is probable; but held in his wrath, and did no damage to the tricky Englishman. He kept the matter in his mind, however, and next summer little Hakon, having got his weaning done,—one of the prettiest, healthiest little creatures,—Harald sent him off, under charge of "Hauk" (Hawk so called), one of his Principal,

warriors, with order, "Take him to England," and instructions what to do with him there. And accordingly, one evening, Hauk, with thirty men escorting, strode into Athelstan's high dwelling (where situated, how built, whether with logs like Harald's, I cannot specifically say), into Athelstan's high presence, and silently set the wild little cherub upon Athelstan's knee. "What is this?" asked Athelstan, looking at the little cherub. "This is King Harald's son, whom a serving-maid bore to him, and whom he now gives thee as foster-child!" Indignant Athelstan drew his sword, as if to do the gift a mischief; but Hauk said, "Thou hast taken him on thy knee [common symbol of adoption]; thou canst kill him if thou wilt; but thou dost not thereby kill all the sons of Harald." Athelstan straightway took milder thoughts; brought up, and carefully educated Hakon; from whom, and this singular adventure, came, before very long, the first tidings of Christianity into Norway.

Harald Haarfagr, latterly withdrawn from all kinds of business, died at the age of eighty-three—about A.D. 933, as is computed; nearly contemporary in death with the first Danish King, Gorm the Old, who had done a corresponding feat in reducing Denmark under one head. Remarkable old men, these two first kings; and possessed of gifts for bringing Chaos a little nearer to the form of Cosmos; possessed, in fact, of loyalties to Cosmos, that is to say, of authentic virtues in the savage state, such as have been needed in all societies at their incipience in this world; a kind of "virtues" hugely in discredit at present, but

not unlikely to be needed again, to the astonishment of careless persons, before all is done!

CHAPTER III. HAKON THE GOOD

Eric Blood-axe, whose practical reign is counted to have begun about A.D. 930, had by this time, or within a year or so of this time, pretty much extinguished all his brother kings, and crushed down recalcitrant spirits, in his violent way; but had naturally become entirely unpopular in Norway, and filled it with silent discontent and even rage against him. Hakon Fairhair's last son, the little foster-child of Athelstan in England, who had been baptized and carefully educated, was come to his fourteenth or fifteenth year at his father's death; a very shining youth, as Athelstan saw with just pleasure. So soon as the few preliminary preparations had been settled, Hakon, furnished with a ship or two by Athelstan, suddenly appeared in Norway got acknowledged by the Peasant Thing in Trondhjem "the news of which flew over Norway, like fire through dried grass," says an old chronicler. So that Eric, with his Queen Gunhild, and seven small children, had to run; no other shift for Eric. They went to the Orkneys first of all, then to England, and he "got Northumberland as earldom," I vaguely hear, from Athelstan. But Eric soon died, and his queen, with her children, went back to the Orkneys in search of refuge or help; to little purpose there or elsewhere. From Orkney she went to Denmark, where Harald Blue-tooth took her poor eldest boy as foster-child; but I fear did not very faithfully keep that promise. The Danes had been

robbing extensively during the late tumults in Norway; this the Christian Hakon, now established there, paid in kind, and the two countries were at war; so that Gunhild's little boy was a welcome card in the hand of Blue-tooth.

Hakon proved a brilliant and successful king; regulated many things, public law among others (*Gule-Thing* Law, *Frost-Thing* Law: these are little codes of his accepted by their respective Things, and had a salutary effect in their time); with prompt dexterity he drove back the Blue-tooth foster-son invasions every time they came; and on the whole gained for himself the name of Hakon the Good. These Danish invasions were a frequent source of trouble to him, but his greatest and continual trouble was that of extirpating heathen idolatry from Norway, and introducing the Christian Evangel in its stead. His transcendent anxiety to achieve this salutary enterprise was all along his grand difficulty and stumbling-block; the heathen opposition to it being also rooted and great. Bishops and priests from England Hakon had, preaching and baptizing what they could, but making only slow progress; much too slow for Hakon's zeal. On the other hand, every Yule-tide, when the chief heathen were assembled in his own palace on their grand sacrificial festival, there was great pressure put upon Hakon, as to sprinkling with horse-blood, drinking Yule-beer, eating horse-flesh, and the other distressing rites; the whole of which Hakon abhorred, and with all his steadfastness strove to reject utterly. Sigurd, Jarl of Lade (Trondhjem), a liberal heathen, not openly a Christian, was ever

a wise counsellor and conciliator in such affairs; and proved of great help to Hakon. Once, for example, there having risen at a Yule-feast, loud, almost stormful demand that Hakon, like a true man and brother, should drink Yule-beer with them in their sacred hightide, Sigurd persuaded him to comply, for peace's sake, at least, in form. Hakon took the cup in his left hand (excellent hot *beer*), and with his right cut the sign of the cross above it, then drank a draught. "Yes; but what is this with the king's right hand?" cried the company. "Don't you see?" answered shifty Sigurd; "he makes the sign of Thor's hammer before drinking!" which quenched the matter for the time.

Horse-flesh, horse-broth, and the horse ingredient generally, Hakon all but inexorably declined. By Sigurd's pressing exhortation and entreaty, he did once take a kettle of horsebroth by the handle, with a good deal of linen-quilt or towel interposed, and did open his lips for what of steam could insinuate itself. At another time he consented to a particle of horse-liver, intending privately, I guess, to keep it outside the gullet, and smuggle it away without swallowing; but farther than this not even Sigurd could persuade him to go. At the Things held in regard to this matter Hakon's success was always incomplete; now and then it was plain failure, and Hakon had to draw back till a better time. Here is one specimen of the response he got on such an occasion; curious specimen, withal, of antique parliamentary eloquence from an Anti-Christian Thing.

At a Thing of all the Fylkes of Trondhjem, Thing held at

Froste in that region, King Hakon, with all the eloquence he had, signified that it was imperatively necessary that all Bonders and sub-Bonders should become Christians, and believe in one God, Christ the Son of Mary; renouncing entirely blood sacrifices and heathen idols; should keep every seventh day holy, abstain from labor that day, and even from food, devoting the day to fasting and sacred meditation. Whereupon, by way of universal answer, arose a confused universal murmur of entire dissent. "Take away from us our old belief, and also our time for labor!" murmured they in angry astonishment; "how can even the land be got tilled in that way?" "We cannot work if we don't get food," said the hand laborers and slaves. "It lies in King Hakon's blood," remarked others; "his father and all his kindred were apt to be stingy about food, though liberal enough with money." At length, one Osbjorn (or Bear of the Asen or Gods, what we now call Osborne), one Osbjorn of Medalhusin Gulathal, stepped forward, and said, in a distinct manner, "We Bonders (peasant proprietors) thought, King Hakon, when thou heldest thy first Thing-day here in Trondhjem, and we took thee for our king, and received our hereditary lands from thee again that we had got heaven itself. But now we know not how it is, whether we have won freedom, or whether thou intendest anew to make us slaves, with this wonderful proposal that we should renounce our faith, which our fathers before us have held, and all our ancestors as well, first in the age of burial by burning, and now in that of earth burial; and yet these departed ones were much our superiors, and

their faith, too, has brought prosperity to us. Thee, at the same time, we have loved so much that we raised thee to manage all the laws of the land, and speak as their voice to us all. And even now it is our will and the vote of all Bonders to keep that paction which thou gavest us here on the Thing at Froste, and to maintain thee as king so long as any of us Bonders who are here upon the Thing has life left, provided thou, king, wilt go fairly to work, and demand of us only such things as are not impossible. But if thou wilt fix upon this thing with so great obstinacy, and employ force and power, in that case, we Bonders have taken the resolution, all of us, to fall away from thee, and to take for ourselves another head, who will so behave that we may enjoy in freedom the belief which is agreeable to us. Now shalt thou, king, choose one of these two courses before the Thing disperse." "Whereupon," adds the Chronicle, "all the Bonders raised a mighty shout, 'Yes, we will have it so, as has been said.'" So that Jarl Sigurd had to intervene, and King Hakon to choose for the moment the milder branch of the alternative.⁴ At other Things Hakon was more or less successful. All his days, by such methods as there were, he kept pressing forward with this great enterprise; and on the whole did thoroughly shake asunder the old edifice of heathendom, and fairly introduce some foundation for the new and better rule of faith and life among his people. Sigurd, Jarl of Lade, his wise counsellor in all these matters, is also a man worthy of notice.

Hakon's arrangements against the continual invasions of Eric's

⁴ Dahlmann, ii. 93.

sons, with Danish Blue-tooth backing them, were manifold, and for a long time successful. He appointed, after consultation and consent in the various Things, so many war-ships, fully manned and ready, to be furnished instantly on the King's demand by each province or fjord; watch-fires, on fit places, from hill to hill all along the coast, were to be carefully set up, carefully maintained in readiness, and kindled on any alarm of war. By such methods Blue-tooth and Co.'s invasions were for a long while triumphantly, and even rapidly, one and all of them, beaten back, till at length they seemed as if intending to cease altogether, and leave Hakon alone of them. But such was not their issue after all. The sons of Eric had only abated under constant discouragement, had not finally left off from what seemed their one great feasibility in life. Gunhild, their mother, was still with them: a most contriving, fierce-minded, irreconcilable woman, diligent and urgent on them, in season and out of season; and as for King Blue-tooth, he was at all times ready to help, with his good-will at least.

That of the alarm-fires on Hakon's part was found troublesome by his people; sometimes it was even hurtful and provoking (lighting your alarm-fires and rousing the whole coast and population, when it was nothing but some paltry viking with a couple of ships); in short, the alarm-signal system fell into disuse, and good King Hakon himself, in the first place, paid the penalty. It is counted, by the latest commentators, to have been about A.D. 961, sixteenth or seventeenth year of

Hakon's pious, valiant, and worthy reign. Being at a feast one day, with many guests, on the Island of Stord, sudden announcement came to him that ships from the south were approaching in quantity, and evidently ships of war. This was the biggest of all the Blue-tooth foster-son invasions; and it was fatal to Hakon the Good that night. Eyvind the Skaldaspillir (annihilator of all other Skalds), in his famed *Hakon's Song*, gives account, and, still more pertinently, the always practical Snorro. Danes in great multitude, six to one, as people afterwards computed, springing swiftly to land, and ranking themselves; Hakon, nevertheless, at once deciding not to take to his ships and run, but to fight there, one to six; fighting, accordingly, in his most splendid manner, and at last gloriously prevailing; routing and scattering back to their ships and flight homeward these six-to-one Danes. "During the struggle of the fight," says Snorro, "he was very conspicuous among other men; and while the sun shone, his bright gilded helmet glanced, and thereby many weapons were directed at him. One of his henchmen, Eyvind Finnson (*i.e.* Skaldaspillir, the poet), took a hat, and put it over the king's helmet. Now, among the hostile first leaders were two uncles of the Ericsons, brothers of Gunhild, great champions both; Skreya, the elder of them, on the disappearance of the glittering helmet, shouted boastfully, 'Does the king of the Norsemen hide himself, then, or has he fled? Where now is the golden helmet?' And so saying, Skreya, and his brother Alf with him, pushed on like fools or madmen. The king said, 'Come on in that way, and you shall find the king

of the Norsemen.'" And in a short space of time braggart Skreya did come up, swinging his sword, and made a cut at the king; but Thoralf the Strong, an Iclander, who fought at the king's side, dashed his shield so hard against Skreya, that he tottered with the shock. On the same instant the king takes his sword "quernbiter" (able to cut *querns* or millstones) with both hands, and hews Skreya through helm and head, cleaving him down to the shoulders. Thoralf also slew Alf. That was what they got by such over-hasty search for the king of the Norsemen.⁵

Snorro considers the fall of these two champion uncles as the crisis of the fight; the Danish force being much disheartened by such a sight, and King Hakon now pressing on so hard that all men gave way before him, the battle on the Ericson part became a whirl of recoil; and in a few minutes more a torrent of mere flight and haste to get on board their ships, and put to sea again; in which operation many of them were drowned, says Snorro; survivors making instant sail for Denmark in that sad condition.

This seems to have been King Hakon's finest battle, and the most conspicuous of his victories, due not a little to his own grand qualities shown on the occasion. But, alas! it was his last also. He was still zealously directing the chase of that mad Danish flight, or whirl of recoil towards their ships, when an arrow, shot Most likely at a venture, hit him under the left armpit; and this proved his death.

He was helped into his ship, and made sail for Alrekstad,

⁵ *Laing's Snorro*, i. 344.

where his chief residence in those parts was; but had to stop at a smaller place of his (which had been his mother's, and where he himself was born)—a place called Hella (the Flat Rock), still known as "Hakon's Hella," faint from loss of blood, and crushed down as he had never before felt. Having no son and only one daughter, he appointed these invasive sons of Eric to be sent for, and if he died to become king; but to "spare his friends and kindred." "If a longer life be granted me," he said, "I will go out of this land to Christian men, and do penance for what I have committed against God. But if I die in the country of the heathen, let me have such burial as you yourselves think fittest." These are his last recorded words. And in heathen fashion he was buried, and besung by Eyvind and the Skalds, though himself a zealously Christian king. Hakon the *Good*; so one still finds him worthy of being called. The sorrow on Hakon's death, Snorro tells us, was so great and universal, "that he was lamented both by friends and enemies; and they said that never again would Norway see such a king."

CHAPTER IV. HARALD GREYFELL AND BROTHERS

Eric's sons, four or five of them, with a Harald at the top, now at once got Norway in hand, all of it but Trondhjem, as king and under-kings; and made a severe time of it for those who had been, or seemed to be, their enemies. Excellent Jarl Sigurd, always so useful to Hakon and his country, was killed by them; and they came to repent that before very long. The slain Sigurd left a son, Hakon, as Jarl, who became famous in the northern world by and by. This Hakon, and him only, would the Trondhjemers accept as sovereign. "Death to him, then," said the sons of Eric, but only in secret, till they had got their hands free and were ready; which was not yet for some years. Nay, Hakon, when actually attacked, made good resistance, and threatened to cause trouble. Nor did he by any means get his death from these sons of Eric at this time, or till long afterwards at all, from one of their kin, as it chanced. On the contrary, he fled to Denmark now, and by and by managed to come back, to their cost.

Among their other chief victims were two cousins of their own, Tryggve and Gudrod, who had been honest under-kings to the late head-king, Hakon the Good; but were now become suspect, and had to fight for their lives, and lose them in a tragic manner. Tryggve had a son, whom we shall hear of.

Gudrod, son of worthy Bjorn the Chapman, was grandfather of Saint Olaf, whom all men have heard of,—who has a church in Southwark even, and another in Old Jewry, to this hour. In all these violences, Gunhild, widow of the late king Eric, was understood to have a principal hand. She had come back to Norway with her sons; and naturally passed for the secret adviser and Maternal President in whatever of violence went on; always reckoned a fell, vehement, relentless personage where her own interests were concerned. Probably as things settled, her influence on affairs grew less. At least one hopes so; and, in the Sagas, hears less and less of her, and before long nothing.

Harald, the head-king in this Eric fraternity, does not seem to have been a bad man,—the contrary indeed; but his position was untowardly, full of difficulty and contradictions. Whatever Harald could accomplish for behoof of Christianity, or real benefit to Norway, in these cross circumstances, he seems to have done in a modest and honest manner. He got the name of *Greyfell* from his people on a very trivial account, but seemingly with perfect good humor on their part. Some Iceland trader had brought a cargo of furs to Trondhjem (Lade) for sale; sale being slacker than the Icelanders wished, he presented a chosen specimen, cloak, doublet, or whatever it was, to Harald; who wore it with acceptance in public, and rapidly brought disposal of the Icelanders' stock, and the surname of *Greyfell* to himself. His under-kings and he were certainly not popular, though I almost think Greyfell himself, in absence of his mother and the

under-kings, might have been so. But here they all were, and had wrought great trouble in Norway. "Too many of them," said everybody; "too many of these courts and court people, eating up any substance that there is." For the seasons withal, two or three of them in succession, were bad for grass, much more for grain; no *herring* came either; very cleanness of teeth was like to come in Eyvind Skaldaspillir's opinion. This scarcity became at last their share of the great Famine Of A.D. 975, which desolated Western Europe (see the poem in the Saxon Chronicle). And all this by Eyvind Skaldaspillir, and the heathen Norse in general, was ascribed to anger of the heathen gods. Discontent in Norway, and especially in Eyvind Skaldaspillir, seems to have been very great.

Whereupon exile Hakon, Jarl Sigurd's son, bestirs himself in Denmark, backed by old King Blue-tooth, and begins invading and encroaching in a miscellaneous way; especially intriguing and contriving plots all round him. An unfathomably cunning kind of fellow, as well as an audacious and strong-handed! Intriguing in Trondhjem, where he gets the under-king, Greyfell's brother, fallen upon and murdered; intriguing with Gold Harald, a distinguished cousin or nephew of King Blue-tooth's, who had done fine viking work, and gained, such wealth that he got the epithet of "Gold," and who now was infinitely desirous of a share in Blue-tooth's kingdom as the proper finish to these sea-rovings. He even ventured one day to make publicly a distinct proposal that way to King Harald Blue-tooth himself;

who flew into thunder and lightning at the mere mention of it; so that none durst speak to him for several days afterwards. Of both these Haralds Hakon was confidential friend; and needed all his skill to walk without immediate annihilation between such a pair of dragons, and work out Norway for himself withal. In the end he found he must take solidly to Blue-tooth's side of the question; and that they two must provide a recipe for Gold Harald and Norway both at once.

"It is as much as your life is worth to speak again of sharing this Danish kingdom," said Hakon very privately to Gold Harald; "but could not you, my golden friend, be content with Norway for a kingdom, if one helped you to it?"

"That could I well," answered Harald.

"Then keep me those nine war-ships you have just been rigging for a new viking cruise; have these in readiness when I lift my finger!"

That was the recipe contrived for Gold Harald; recipe for King Greyfell goes into the same vial, and is also ready.

Hitherto the Hakon-Blue-tooth disturbances in Norway had amounted to but little. King Greyfell, a very active and valiant man, has constantly, without much difficulty, repelled these sporadic bits of troubles; but Greyfell, all the same, would willingly have peace with dangerous old Blue-tooth (ever anxious to get his clutches over Norway on any terms) if peace with him could be had. Blue-tooth, too, professes every willingness; inveigles Greyfell, he and Hakon do; to have a friendly meeting

on the Danish borders, and not only settle all these quarrels, but generously settle Greyfell in certain fiefs which he claimed in Denmark itself; and so swear everlasting friendship. Greyfell joyfully complies, punctually appears at the appointed day in Lymfjord Sound, the appointed place. Whereupon Hakon gives signal to Gold Harald, "To Lymfjord with these nine ships of yours, swift!" Gold Harald flies to Lymfjord with his ships, challenges King Harald Greyfell to land and fight; which the undaunted Greyfell, though so far outnumbered, does; and, fighting his very best, perishes there, he and almost all his people. Which done, Jarl Hakon, who is in readiness, attacks Gold Harald, the victorious but the wearied; easily beats Gold Harald, takes him prisoner, and instantly hangs and ends him, to the huge joy of King Blue-tooth and Hakon; who now make instant voyage to Norway; drive all the brother under-kings into rapid flight to the Orkneys, to any readiest shelter; and so, under the patronage of Blue-tooth, Hakon, with the title of Jarl, becomes ruler of Norway. This foul treachery done on the brave and honest Harald Greyfell is by some dated about A.D. 969, by Munch, 965, by others, computing out of Snorro only, A.D. 975. For there is always an uncertainty in these Icelandic dates (say rather, rare and rude attempts at dating, without even an "A.D." or other fixed "year one" to go upon in Iceland), though seldom, I think, so large a discrepancy as here.

CHAPTER V. HAKON JARL

Hakon Jarl, such the style he took, had engaged to pay some kind of tribute to King Blue-tooth, "if he could;" but he never did pay any, pleading always the necessity of his own affairs; with which excuse, joined to Hakon's readiness in things less important, King Blue-tooth managed to content himself, Hakon being always his good neighbor, at least, and the two mutually dependent. In Norway, Hakon, without the title of king, did in a strong-handed, steadfast, and at length, successful way, the office of one; governed Norway (some count) for above twenty years; and, both at home and abroad, had much consideration through most of that time; specially amongst the heathen orthodox, for Hakon Jarl himself was a zealous heathen, fixed in his mind against these chimerical Christian innovations and unsalutary changes of creed, and would have gladly trampled out all traces of what the last two kings (for Greyfell, also, was an English Christian after his sort) had done in this respect. But he wisely discerned that it was not possible, and that, for peace's sake, he must not even attempt it, but must strike preferably into "perfect toleration," and that of "every one getting to heaven or even to the other goal in his own way." He himself, it is well known, repaired many heathen temples (a great "church builder" in his way!), manufactured many splendid idols, with much gilding and such artistic ornament as there was,—in particular, one huge image

of Thor, not forgetting the hammer and appendages, and such a collar (supposed of solid gold, which it was not quite, as we shall hear in time) round the neck of him as was never seen in all the North. How he did his own Yule festivals, with what magnificent solemnity, the horse-eatings, blood-sprinklings, and other sacred rites, need not be told. Something of a "Ritualist," one may perceive; perhaps had Scandinavian Puseyisms in him, and other desperate heathen notions. He was universally believed to have gone into magic, for one thing, and to have dangerous potencies derived from the Devil himself. The dark heathen mind of him struggling vehemently in that strange element, not altogether so unlike our own in some points.

For the rest, he was evidently, in practical matters, a man of sharp, clear insight, of steadfast resolution, diligence, promptitude; and managed his secular matters uncommonly well. Had sixteen Jarls under him, though himself only Hakon Jarl by title; and got obedience from them stricter than any king since Haarfagr had done. Add to which that the country had years excellent for grass and crop, and that the herrings came in exuberance; tokens, to the thinking mind, that Hakon Jarl was a favorite of Heaven.

His fight with the far-famed Jomsvikings was his grandest exploit in public rumor. Jomsburg, a locality not now known, except that it was near the mouth of the River Oder, denoted in those ages the impregnable castle of a certain hotly corporate, or "Sea Robbery Association (limited)," which, for some

generations, held the Baltic in terror, and plundered far beyond the Belt,—in the ocean itself, in Flanders and the opulent trading havens there,—above all, in opulent anarchic England, which, for forty years from about this time, was the pirates' Goshen; and yielded, regularly every summer, slaves, Danegelt, and miscellaneous plunder, like no other country Jomsburg or the viking-world had ever known. *Palnatoke*, Bue, and the other quasi-heroic heads of this establishment are still remembered in the northern parts. *Palnatoke* is the title of a tragedy by Oehlenschläger, which had its run of immortality in Copenhagen some sixty or seventy years ago.

I judge the institution to have been in its floweriest state, probably now in Hakon Jarl's time. Hakon Jarl and these pirates, robbing Hakon's subjects and merchants that frequented him, were naturally in quarrel; and frequent fightings had fallen out, not generally to the profit of the Jomsburgers, who at last determined on revenge, and the rooting out of this obstructive Hakon Jarl. They assembled in force at the Cape of Stad,—in the Firda Fylke; and the fight was dreadful in the extreme, noise of it filling all the north for long afterwards. Hakon, fighting like a lion, could scarcely hold his own,—Death or Victory, the word on both sides; when suddenly, the heavens grew black, and there broke out a terrific storm of thunder and hail, appalling to the human mind,—universe swallowed wholly in black night; only the momentary forked-blazes, the thunder-pealing as of Ragnarok, and the battering hail-torrents, hailstones about the

size of an egg. Thor with his hammer evidently acting; but in behalf of whom? The Jomsburgers in the hideous darkness, broken only by flashing thunder-bolts, had a dismal apprehension that it was probably not on their behalf (Thor having a sense of justice in him); and before the storm ended, thirty-five of their seventy ships sheered away, leaving gallant Bue, with the other thirty-five, to follow as they liked, who reproachfully hailed these fugitives, and continued the now hopeless battle. Bue's nose and lips were smashed or cut away; Bue managed, half-articulate, to exclaim, "Ha! the maids ('mays') of Funen will never kiss me more. Overboard, all ye Bue's men!" And taking his two sea-chests, with all the gold he had gained in such life-struggle from of old, sprang overboard accordingly, and finished the affair. Hakon Jarl's renown rose naturally to the transcendent pitch after this exploit. His people, I suppose chiefly the Christian part of them, whispered one to another, with a shudder, "That in the blackest of the thunder-storm, he had taken his youngest little boy, and made away with him; sacrificed him to Thor or some devil, and gained his victory by art-magic, or something worse." Jarl Eric, Hakon's eldest son, without suspicion of art-magic, but already a distinguished viking, became thrice distinguished by his style of sea-fighting in this battle; and awakened great expectations in the viking public; of him we shall hear again.

The Jomsburgers, one might fancy, after this sad clap went visibly down in the world; but the fact is not altogether so. Old King Blue-tooth was now dead, died of a wound got in battle with

his unnatural (so-called "natural") son and successor, Otto Svein of the Forked Beard, afterwards king and conqueror of England for a little while; and seldom, perhaps never, had vikingism been in such flower as now. This man's name is Sven in Swedish, Svend in German, and means boy or lad,—the English "swain." It was at old "Father Bluetooth's funeral-ale" (drunken burial-feast), that Svein, carousing with his Jomsburg chiefs and other choice spirits, generally of the robber class, all risen into height of highest robber enthusiasm, pledged the vow to one another; Svein that he would conquer England (which, in a sense, he, after long struggling, did); and the Jomsburgers that they would ruin and root out Hakon Jarl (which, as we have just seen, they could by no means do), and other guests other foolish things which proved equally unfeasible. Sea-robber volunteers so especially abounding in that time, one perceives how easily the Jomsburgers could recruit themselves, build or refit new robber fleets, man them with the pick of crews, and steer for opulent, fruitful England; where, under Ethelred the Unready, was such a field for profitable enterprise as the viking public never had before or since.

An idle question sometimes rises on me,—idle enough, for it never can be answered in the affirmative or the negative, Whether it was not these same refitted Jomsburgers who appeared some while after this at Red Head Point, on the shore of Angus, and sustained a new severe beating, in what the Scotch still faintly remember as their "Battle of Loncarty"? Beyond

doubt a powerful Norse-pirate armament dropt anchor at the Red Head, to the alarm of peaceable mortals, about that time. It was thought and hoped to be on its way for England, but it visibly hung on for several days, deliberating (as was thought) whether they would do this poorer coast the honor to land on it before going farther. Did land, and vigorously plunder and burn south-westward as far as Perth; laid siege to Perth; but brought out King Kenneth on them, and produced that "Battle of Loncarty" which still dwells in vague memory among the Scots. Perhaps it might be the Jomsburgers; perhaps also not; for there were many pirate associations, lasting not from century to century like the Jomsburgers, but only for very limited periods, or from year to year; indeed, it was mainly by such that the splendid thief-harvest of England was reaped in this disastrous time. No Scottish chronicler gives the least of exact date to their famed victory of Loncarty, only that it was achieved by Kenneth III., which will mean some time between A.D. 975 and 994; and, by the order they put it in, probably soon after A.D. 975, or the beginning of this Kenneth's reign. Buchanan's narrative, carefully distilled from all the ancient Scottish sources, is of admirable quality for style and otherwise quiet, brief, with perfect clearness, perfect credibility even, except that semi-miraculous appendage of the Ploughmen, Hay and Sons, always hanging to the tail of it; the grain of possible truth in which can now never be extracted by man's art!⁶ In brief, what we know is, fragments of ancient

⁶ G. Buchanani *Opera Omnia*, i. 103, 104 (Curante Ruddimano, Edinburgi, 1715).

human bones and armor have occasionally been ploughed up in this locality, proof positive of ancient fighting here; and the fight fell out not long after Hakon's beating of the Jomsburgers at the Cape of Stad. And in such dim glimmer of wavering twilight, the question whether these of Loncarty were refitted Jomsburgers or not, must be left hanging. Loncarty is now the biggest bleach-field in Queen Victoria's dominions; no village or hamlet there, only the huge bleaching-house and a beautiful field, some six or seven miles northwest of Perth, bordered by the beautiful Tay river on the one side, and by its beautiful tributary Almond on the other; a Loncarty fitted either for bleaching linen, or for a bit of fair duel between nations, in those simple times.

Whether our refitted Jomsburgers had the least thing to do with it is only matter of fancy, but if it were they who here again got a good beating, fancy would be glad to find herself fact. The old piratical kings of Denmark had been at the founding of Jomsburg, and to Svein of the Forked Beard it was still vitally important, but not so to the great Knut, or any king that followed; all of whom had better business than mere thieving; and it was Magnus the Good, of Norway, a man of still higher anti-anarchic qualities, that annihilated it, about a century later.

Hakon Jarl, his chief labors in the world being over, is said to have become very dissolute in his elder days, especially in the matter of women; the wretched old fool, led away by idleness and fulness of bread, which to all of us are well said to be the parents of mischief. Having absolute power, he got into the habit

of openly plundering men's pretty daughters and wives from them, and, after a few weeks, sending them back; greatly to the rage of the fierce Norse heart, had there been any means of resisting or revenging. It did, after a little while, prove the ruin and destruction of Hakon the Rich, as he was then called. It opened the door, namely, for entry of Olaf Tryggveson upon the scene,—a very much grander man; in regard to whom the wiles and traps of Hakon proved to be a recipe, not on Tryggveson, but on the wily Hakon himself, as shall now be seen straightway.

CHAPTER VI. OLAF TRYGGVESON

Hakon, in late times, had heard of a famous stirring person, victorious in various lands and seas, latterly united in sea-robbery with Svein, Prince Royal of Denmark, afterwards King Svein of the Double-beard ("*Zvae Skiaeg*", *Twa Shag*) or fork-beard, both of whom had already done transcendent feats in the viking way during this copartnery. The fame of Svein, and this stirring personage, whose name was "Ole," and, recently, their stupendous feats in plunder of England, siege of London, and other wonders and splendors of viking glory and success, had gone over all the North, awakening the attention of Hakon and everybody there. The name of "Ole" was enigmatic, mysterious, and even dangerous-looking to Hakon Jarl; who at length sent out a confidential spy to investigate this "Ole;" a feat which the confidential spy did completely accomplish,—by no means to Hakon's profit! The mysterious "Ole" proved to be no other than Olaf, son of Tryggve, destined to blow Hakon Jarl suddenly into destruction, and become famous among the heroes of the Norse world.

Of Olaf Tryggveson one always hopes there might, one day, some real outline of a biography be written; fished from the abysses where (as usual) it welters deep in foul neighborhood for

the present. Farther on we intend a few words more upon the matter. But in this place all that concerns us in it limits itself to the two following facts first, that Hakon's confidential spy "found Ole in Dublin;" picked acquaintance with him, got him to confess that he was actually Olaf, son of Tryggve (the Tryggve, whom Blood-axe's fierce widow and her sons had murdered); got him gradually to own that perhaps an expedition into Norway might have its chances; and finally that, under such a wise and loyal guidance as his (the confidential spy's, whose friendship for Tryggveson was so indubitable), he (Tryggveson) would actually try it upon Hakon Jarl, the dissolute old scoundrel. Fact second is, that about the time they two set sail from Dublin on their Norway expedition, Hakon Jarl removed to Trondhjem, then called Lade; intending to pass some months there.

Now just about the time when Tryggveson, spy, and party had landed in Norway, and were advancing upon Lade, with what support from the public could be got, dissolute old Hakon Jarl had heard of one Gudrun, a Bonder's wife, unparalleled in beauty, who was called in those parts, "Sunbeam of the Grove" (so inexpressibly lovely); and sent off a couple of thralls to bring her to him. "Never," answered Gudrun; "never," her indignant husband; in a tone dangerous and displeasing to these Court thralls; who had to leave rapidly, but threatened to return in better strength before long. Whereupon, instantly, the indignant Bonder and his Sunbeam of the Grove sent out their war-arrow, rousing all the country into angry promptitude, and more than

one perhaps into greedy hope of revenge for their own injuries. The rest of Hakon's history now rushes on with extreme rapidity.

Sunbeam of the Grove, when next demanded of her Bonder, has the whole neighborhood assembled in arms round her; rumor of Tryggveson is fast making it the whole country. Hakon's insolent messengers are cut in pieces; Hakon finds he cannot fly under cover too soon. With a single slave he flies that same night;—but whitherward? Can think of no safe place, except to some old mistress of his, who lives retired in that neighborhood, and has some pity or regard for the wicked old Hakon. Old mistress does receive him, pities him, will do all she can to protect and hide him. But how, by what uttermost stretch of female artifice hide him here; every one will search here first of all! Old mistress, by the slave's help, extemporizes a cellar under the floor of her pig-house; sticks Hakon and slave into that, as the one safe seclusion she can contrive. Hakon and slave, begrunted by the pigs above them, tortured by the devils within and about them, passed two days in circumstances more and more horrible. For they heard, through their light-slit and breathing-slit, the triumph of Tryggveson proclaiming itself by Tryggveson's own lips, who had mounted a big boulder near by and was victoriously speaking to the people, winding up with a promise of honors and rewards to whoever should bring him wicked old Hakon's head. Wretched Hakon, justly suspecting his slave, tried to at least keep himself awake. Slave did keep himself awake till Hakon dozed or slept, then swiftly cut off Hakon's head, and plunged out

with it to the presence of Tryggveson. Tryggveson, detesting the traitor, useful as the treachery was, cut off the slave's head too, had it hung up along with Hakon's on the pinnacle of the Lade Gallows, where the populace pelted both heads with stones and many curses, especially the more important of the two. "Hakon the Bad" ever henceforth, instead of Hakon the Rich.

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