

The Tale of Frithiof, the Norman Knight

Introduction

A thousand years and more ago, when in the south of Europe the sciences and arts had already reached a fairly high level of development, when the bright light of Christianity spread ever further north,—in the far north, in Scandinavia (then called Normandy), the people still wandered in the darkness of primeval ignorance and idolatry. To the Franks and Romans, the wild inhabitants of the north, called Normans (from the words Nord and Mann), were known only by their audacious raids: a horde of northern barbarians would swoop down upon the flourishing southern coast in their light longships, with a battle cry, seize everything of value, and vanish from sight once more. It is no wonder that to the well-bred, effeminate southerners these uninvited guests appeared as robbers, monsters, almost offspring of the dark force. But were they truly so?

The surviving folk tales of the Scandinavians depict them in an entirely different light.

Of the three present-day Scandinavian states—Norway, Sweden, and Denmark—the foremost place at that time belonged to Norway. There the mountains were higher and steeper, the forests denser and richer in all kinds of beasts, the rivers swifter and more abundant in every sort of fish. With its entire western side it bordered the open sea, where it was indented by countless rocky bays. The harshness of polar winds was tempered there by the warm currents of the Gulf Stream washing its shores. To this stern yet majestic nature corresponded the tribe that grew up within it. Hunting, fishing, cattle-breeding, and, in part, agriculture constituted the occupations of the Normans in peacetime. But the proximity of the open sea naturally fostered in them a spirit of daring and enterprise, while the inspired songs of the skalds (folk singers, gusli players) could not fail to inflame the younger generation toward similar feats upon the boundless sea. And so, swift-flying longships were equipped, manned by crews armed from head to toe, fearless—and woe to the foreigners upon whose shores this formidable fleet landed!

Yet these were not mere pirates, hardened plunderers of others' goods. They were valiant warriors who, at any cost, needed to unfold their heroic might, to display their youthful prowess. To the southerners, understandably, these daredevils could

be nothing but enemies, robbers; but for the Normans themselves, the blessed south was by no means a hostile land, merely a desired arena for martial strength. Among themselves they were bound by the closest friendship, by unwavering loyalty; for the common cause they shed their blood without hesitation, surrendering their lives without complaint. Having returned from their wanderings beneath their native roof, each of them became once again a peaceful citizen, a good family man.

The land of the Normans was divided into several small, mutually independent states. The bulk of the population consisted of bonders, peasants, free tillers of the soil.

The konung, or king, was elected by them at the thing, the popular assembly. The setting of the Norman royal court bore considerable resemblance to that familiar to us from our native byliny concerning the princely court of Vladimir-Solnyshko. Just as the Kievan prince was always surrounded by his princes and boyars, so too did the Norman kings have their retinue of jarls, counts. In the royal dining hall, exactly as in the prince's gridnitsa, merry feasts of mighty heroes took place, and the songs of the skald-gusli players resounded. Of all games, both there and here, the most beloved was checkers-chess. Among the good young fellows, both there and here, blood-brotherhoods were formed for life and death, with only this difference in ritual: the Kievan heroes, being already Christians, exchanged breast crosses, whereas the Norman knights, faithful to the ancient pagan custom, mingled their blood by letting it flow from their palms onto the earth into one common pit. A similar likeness existed also in the fabulously intricate shape of the ships of both peoples, with only this difference again: among the pagan Normans, this form was directly dictated by their fantastical beliefs. The father of gods was regarded by them as the all-wise Odin, the source of spiritual power, whereas the thunderer Thor represented the source of physical strength. But their most beloved god was Odin's son, Balder, god of goodness and light, equally beautiful in spirit and body. The most splendid temples were erected to him, the most abundant sacrifices offered to him. A deep, childlike-simple faith in the ultimate triumph of good forces over evil, guiding all actions of the Normans, permeates thoroughly all their folk tales as well, illuminating them with a mystically magical light.

Just as our native Kievan byliny have long been forgotten in the place of their origin and are remembered only in the distant outskirts of our homeland—in the provinces of Olonets, Arkhangelsk, Perm, and Siberia—so too the sagas, the tales of the Scandinavians, have survived solely on the remote island of Iceland. They were written there some 800 years ago under the title Edda. Of all these sagas, the

most poetic is "Frithiofsaga," first recorded likewise in Iceland at the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century. The hero of this saga, Frithiof (from two Icelandic words: Frid and Thiofr, meaning together "peace-thief"), lived, according to scholars, at the end of the seventh or beginning of the eighth century. The saga is told partly in prose, partly in verse. Despite, however, all its merits, it would hardly have attained worldwide fame had not the most renowned of Swedish poets, Tegnér (born 1782, died 1846), rendered it into modern Swedish, reworking it from beginning to end and thereby creating, as it were, an entirely new poem. Each of the twenty-four songs of Tegnér's poem is composed in its own distinctive metrical form, best suited to its content, and, owing to their musicality, most of these songs have even been set to music. First printed in 1825, the poem underwent six editions in Sweden within the first fifteen years alone. But its circle of admirers was not confined to Sweden: it was soon translated into nearly all European languages, including German no fewer than fifteen times. Into Russian it was translated in 1841 by our academician Ya. K. Groth, and he accomplished this so masterfully that our foremost critic Belinsky, so strict toward mediocre works, spoke of it in the most enthusiastic terms:

"What majestic figures, what power, what energy of feeling, what freshness of colors, what wonderfully poetic coloring! This is a completely new, original world, full of infinity, grand and gloomy like the distance of the ocean, like the eternally stern sky of the north resting upon gigantic pines..."

In the present prose retelling we were inevitably compelled to limit ourselves to a condensed transmission of the poem's content, omitting a significant portion of the delightful mythological comparisons and pictures of Norman daily life. But in order to give our readers at least some notion of the poem's versified beauties, we have allowed ourselves to include almost entirely, in Academician Groth's verse translation, one song ("Frithiof's Temptation").

I. Frithiof and Ingeborg

Upon the land of Hilding, a free "bonde," grew side by side a little tree and a little flower: a slender young oak and a tender rose. That young oak was Frithiof, that rose—Ingeborg.

How happy was Frithiof when he learned the runes! [runes—ancient Scandinavian letters] He could teach them to Ingeborg.

How delightful it was for him, having set the sail, to glide with her across the water's surface! At every turn she clapped her hands so merrily.

From hundred-year-old trees he would take down birds' nests for her, from inaccessible cliffs live eaglets. And the first strawberry, and the first ear of grain—he brought them all to her, the companion of his childhood games.

Did a turbulent stream bar their way? He would take her in his arms and, encircled by her dear little hand, laughing, carry her across the abyss.

But childhood flitted by, and the boy became a youth, the girl a maiden. By day Frithiof vanished into the forest depths; without spear, without sword, he went alone against the bear. Chest to chest he fought the terrible beast until he overcame it. Wounded, he returned home with his bloody prey and laid it silently at Ingeborg's feet. And she would sing glorious songs of olden times and with skillful hand weave upon a tapestry a picture of his bold combat.

Who then were they, these fosterlings of peasants?

Ingeborg was the daughter of King Beli himself; Frithiof the son of a free peasant, the king's nearest counselor and comrade-in-arms, Thorsten Vikingsson. Old Hilding, known by

to the entire kingdom by his profound honesty and wisdom, better than anyone else he could raise both the king's daughter and the peasant's son; therefore two inseparable friends: the king and the peasant, entrusted to his experience their own two inseparable children.

II. The Death of the Fathers

King Bel grew old, and so did his friend Thorsten. Foreseeing their approaching death, they summoned their sons. Bel had two: Helge and Halfdan. Dark-haired Helge was a diligent priest of the gods, but treacherous in soul and fierce in temper. Fair-haired Halfdan, on the contrary, was excessively soft, frivolous, and wore sword and armor like a maiden disguised as a warrior.

"My friends!" said Bel to them, "my days are numbered; you shall rule the kingdom. But rule it in brotherly concord, live in peace with neighbors, take up the sword only to defend the country. Do not oppress the people, render righteous judgment. You, my son Helge, be not cruel: the sharper the sword, the easier it bends. And you, Halfdan, be ashamed of empty amusements: honey though sweet, yet intoxicates."

After the king rose his faithful companion Thorsten:

"All our life, O my king, we walked hand in hand. Permit me then even in death to go with you."

And turning to his son Frithiof, he instructed him to seek glory but not become arrogant, to fear the gods and honor earthly power.

The foreboding did not deceive the elders: soon they were no more. And they were buried on both sides of their native fjord, beneath high burial mounds. Helge and Halfdan ascended the throne. Frithiof inherited his father's estate: vast meadows and fields, countless herds, "twice twelve" horses. But dearest of all the inheritance to him were three objects: the magic sword, "brother of lightning," named Angurvadel; a golden bracelet forged by the northern Vulcan, lame Volund; and the magical ship Ellida with a dragon's head and a scaly silver tail.

And fame spread about Frithiof throughout the kingdom, not so much for his immeasurable wealth, as for the nobility of spirit inherited from his father. He was brave and free from malice, magnanimous and generous, and surrounded himself with twelve wise counselors, gray-haired warriors, companions of his deceased father. Among them, "like a rose among faded leaves," sat only one youthful peer of his, Bjorn [Bjorn in Swedish means bear], with whom, according to Norman custom, they sealed their brotherly alliance with blood (see in the introduction).

III. Frithiof's Suit

Frithiof feasts with his good retinue. Skalds-harpists on resonant strings glorify his ancestors. But Frithiof himself is cheerless, silent.

"What has happened to our young eagle?" asked his sworn brother Bjorn. "Is he wounded in the breast, or shot in the wing? We have plenty of everything: both mead and fat; skalds beyond counting, songs without end. The horse scrapes the earth, the falcon calls to the hunt, Ellida strains at her anchor. Yet Frithiof desires neither battle nor booty. And awaits him upon straw an inglorious death!"

Frithiof answered nothing to the mockery. He went out to the shore, untied Ellida, unfurled the sail and flew over the waves.

Meanwhile, the brother-kings sat upon their father's burial mound administering popular justice and judgment. Suddenly Frithiof appeared before them with a bold speech:

"I am no king by birth, not even an earl. But the graves of my ancestors speak of their glorious deeds, and as long as skalds exist, memory of them shall not fade. I too could win myself a kingdom; but dearer to me is to live in my native land, dearer to guard my kings, my brothers. We stand upon the mound of deceased Bel. He hears every word we speak. Not in vain did he raise Ingiborg together with me: like two saplings we have grown together in heart. Fulfill now his secret will: give me your sister, give me Ingiborg!"

Kind-hearted Halfdan might perhaps have yielded to his persistent request; but proud Helge rejected it with contempt.

"What!" he cried, "give the king's daughter and sister to you, a peasant's son? Be first among your own, but to Ingiborg you are as far as a star in heaven! And we need not your protection: we can protect ourselves."

Soon Helge had cause to repent, but it was too late.

IV. King Ring's Suit

Many kingdoms existed in Nordland; but no people was mightier, happier, than the people of the wise and good King Ring. The people prospered; but Ring himself had long known neither joy nor peace. Thirty years, thirty winters he lived with his beloved wife; but she died, and solitude became unbearable to the widower. Hearing then of the beautiful daughter of King Bel, Ingiborg, he sent suitors to her with rich gifts.

Knowing Ring's power, Ingiborg's brothers dared not oppose. But first they needed to learn the will of the gods. In the sacred grove they offered them a rich sacrifice of horses and falcons. But the sacrifice was rejected, and Helge, without hesitation, refused the envoys. Frivolous Helge even mocked them at parting.

"Pity your king Ring is not with you!" he said: "I would hold his stirrup, the old fellow, lest he fall and break himself."

Old King Ring flared with anger at the refusal, and even more at the wicked mockery; he equipped a large army and marched against the offenders to war.

V. Frithiof at Chess

King Helge was insolent, but far from brave. He remembered then that he had quarreled with his foremost champion Frithiof, and consequently with all his valiant retinue. Who then would protect him now from formidable King Ring?

So he sent as mediator to Frithiof his tutor, old Hilding. He found him with Bjorn over a chessboard.

"The sons of Bel send you greetings," began Hilding: "King Ring marches against them to war, and all their hope rests upon you."

Frithiof, as if not hearing, continued conversing with Bjorn about the chess game:

"Beware, Bjorn! Your king fares badly: all his hope rests on a pawn [Here a play on words: bond in Swedish means both pawn and peasant]."

"Do not jest with them!" urged Hilding: "though they are weaker than Ring, they are far stronger than you."

"Bjorn! Are you aiming at my rook? Nay, my pawns will defend it."

"And do you not even pity Ingiborg, who drowns in inconsolable tears?" persisted Hilding.

"Hey, Bjorn! Worry not about my queen: in her lies all my strength, and nothing shall separate us."

With such an indefinite, enigmatic answer, sorrowful Hilding returned to his kings.

VI. Frithiof's Departure

And Frithiof's queen, Ingiborg, at that very time, indeed drowned in tears far from her native home: lest King Ring find her, brother Helge took her with her maidens to Balder's Grove and hid her there in the temple of the radiant god Balder. The recluses of this temple, maidens, were absolutely forbidden to see men. Violation of the prohibition would inevitably draw down upon the violators the terrible wrath of the gods. But, after Hilding's visit, Frithiof by any means necessary had to meet Ingiborg. Ignoring Bjorn's warnings, he equipped Ellida and sailed to Balder's Grove.

Ingiborg, at sight of him, became greatly alarmed.

"The gods will never forgive you this!" were her first words.

In vain he tried to calm her.

"Return immediately and make peace at least with my brothers," she insisted.

He had to fulfill her wish. He found the brother-kings, as before, upon their father's grave.

"Heavy is it for me to be at odds with Ingiborg's brothers," he said to Helge: "I am ready to reconcile, ready to offer you help, only give me Ingiborg: thereby you will save both her and your own crown from King Ring."

And all the surrounding people, in token of approval, struck their shields and exclaimed:

"Give him Ingiborg!"

And old Hilding, and even young Halfdan joined the general entreaty.

"He who dared defile the sanctuary is unworthy of the daughter of gods!" said Helge.

"Answer me: did you meet Ingiborg in Balder's temple, or not?"

"Say 'No!'" echoed the crowd, "and we will believe you on your word."

"My happiness now depends on one word of mine," said Frithiof, "but I need no happiness bought by base deceit. Yes, I met your sister in the temple, but thereby broke not the peace of the gods."

He did not finish. A murmur of horror ran through the crowd; all recoiled from him as from a deadly plague. No one uttered another word in his defense: inveterate superstition bound all tongues.

"By the laws of our ancestors I could now execute you with death or condemn you to eternal exile," spoke Helge again, "but I will be merciful. In the distant west lie islands [The Orkney Islands or Orcades]—the possession

of Earl Angantir. While Beli lived, the earl duly paid us tribute, but now he has ceased. Sail therefore to him and demand the tribute. Perhaps thereby you may yet atone for your guilt.

And Frithiof submitted. Having taken leave of Ingeborg and left her as a memento his precious paternal armlet, he gathered his retinue and put out to sea.

But for the treacherous Helgi it was not enough to remove his hated foe: he wished to utterly destroy him. Knowing, as a priest, all secret incantations, he stirred up the sea, drove forth cold with hail and snow, and summoned from the depths of the ocean terrible monsters. Yet, thanks to Frithiof's seamanship and fearlessness, his Ellida withstood the hostile elements, though she lost her sails and rudder.

VII. Frithiof at Angantir's

At Earl Angantir's a feast was in full swing, while beneath his window stood old Halfward as a faithful guard, strengthening himself likewise with mead from a bull's horn and scanning the wide sea with a keen eye. Suddenly on the horizon appeared a wondrous dragon-ship. Wondrous it was to behold, yet it barely moved, as if both it and all the men aboard were utterly exhausted. And indeed, when the ship was driven ashore, two giant strongmen had to carry their weakened comrades thither in their arms. Kindling a fire on the sand, they settled around it to warm themselves and rest.

But Halfward had already run to the earl with news of the unknown newcomers. Angantir pressed his face to the window and immediately recognized the guests:

"Why, this is Frithiof's famous Ellida! And he himself, Frithiof, is here too. Never in all my life have I seen him, yet by his appearance, by his bearing, this is Thorsten's son."

"Well, we shall soon learn whether this truly is Frithiof!" exclaimed one of the earl's berserks [berserks among the ancient Normans formed a special honored guard, similar, in their inhuman fury, to the oprichniki of Tsar Ivan the Terrible], the fierce Atli. "Follow me, brothers!"

And the whole wild band rushed out of the hall, brandishing swords and maces.

"Beg for mercy!" Atli shouted to Frithiof from afar.

"Though I am worn out," Frithiof replied sternly, "I have never yet begged mercy from anyone, nor shall I beg it from you."

Two fighters hurled themselves upon each other. Deadly blows rained down like hail. Both shields flew to pieces, and the berserk's sword snapped in half against Angurvadel, the enchanted blade.

"I do not strike the unarmed," said Frithiof then, and flung his sword far from him. "Let us test our strength thus."

And hand-to-hand combat ensued, breast against breast, as if their steel armors had grown together. The earth and stones beneath their feet were torn up, the bushes trampled flat. Companions on both sides dared neither breathe nor stir. Finally, Frithiof prevailed and pressed the berserk to the ground with his knee.

"Pity I have no sword with me now!" he said, "else I would finish you off at once."

"Go fetch your sword; I shall not move," answered Atli proudly: "for it is destined that we both shall be in Valhalla [Valhalla—the dwelling of the gods], only I today, and you perhaps tomorrow."

And he did not stir from his place while Frithiof retrieved his discarded sword. Such fearlessness disarmed our hero, and he extended his hand to the enemy.

Then old Halfward approached, inviting the victor to a feast at his earl's. Angantir descended from his silver throne to meet the young guest, took him by the hand, and seated him beside himself.

"More than once," he said, "have we feasted here with my best friend, Thorsten Vikingsson. Let now his son occupy his place."

And, filling a goblet with sparkling "Sicilian" wine, he drained it in memory of the departed. Then Frithiof conveyed to him the purpose of his arrival.

"Never have I paid tribute, nor shall I ever pay!" exclaimed the earl. "But you, son of my friend, I shall reward as I wish."

He beckoned with his hand to his little daughter. She ran out and returned with a purse stuffed with gold coins.

"Accept this purse," said the earl, "and do with it as you will. But give me your word that you will stay with me until spring."

Frithiof gave his word and kept it, little dreaming what awaited him at home.

VIII. Frithiof's Return

Spring came, and Frithiof prepared for his homeward journey. On the seventh day he again saw before him his native shore. But he looked and looked, unable to believe his eyes: where once stood his father's rich halls lay only heaps of stone and ash, with only scorched chimneys rising upward.

He went ashore and sadly walked around the site of the fire. With joyful barking ran up to him then his old companion, a shaggy dog that had accompanied him hunting bear; with a welcoming neigh galloped up also his white horse, and, caressing, lowered its muzzle toward him, expecting the usual piece of bread. Ah, poor horse! Your master is even poorer than you and can give you nothing!

Finally, old Hilding approached and told his foster-son how King Ring with his mighty host had smashed Helgi's retinue; how Helgi, fleeing for his life, in powerless rage against Frithiof, had burned his halls to the ground; how Ring had again sued for Ingeborg's hand, and how this time Helgi, no longer daring to oppose, had given her to Ring.

"Oh, Ingeborg!" exclaimed Frithiof, "is this how you have kept your oath!"

"Do not blame Ingeborg," said Hilding, "she wasted away with grief, yet suffered silently, like a wounded seagull that seeks death in the ocean waves. 'I would gladly die this very moment,' she told me, 'but the god Balder requires a sacrifice; so let that sacrifice be me.' And they led her to the altar as if for slaughter, and I lifted her from her horse, pale as a shadow. And they wedded her, young as she was, to old Ring. All wept; she alone shed not a single tear, only praying fervently. Then Helgi saw upon his sister's hand your armlet. Beside himself, he tore it from her arm and placed it upon the arm of Balder's idol. I had already drawn my sword, but Ingeborg restrained me: 'Leave it! Let the gods settle accounts between us...'"

"Yes!" interrupted Frithiof the storyteller, "and that account is near, that account shall be settled this very day!"

IX. Frithiof's Revenge

It was midnight, yet a summer midnight, polar; the sun, setting not for a moment, illuminated the mountain peaks with crimson light. Within Balder's temple a sacred rite was being performed: King Helgi himself, as high priest, was offering sacrifices to the gods.

Suddenly the sacred grove surrounding the temple came alive: the clash of swords was heard, a threatening voice rang out:

"Bjorn! Take your stand at the doors and let no one leave the temple. And whoever tries to force their way through, split their skull!"

Helgi turned pale and froze: it was Frithiof's voice! And there himself stood the grim avenger already upon the threshold.

"You sent me for tribute—so take it then! And afterward we shall settle matters in honest combat..."

And the heavy purse filled with gold coins flew straight into Helgi's face.

Bathed in blood, Helgi fell dead at the foot of the altar.

"He could not even endure his own gold!" said Frithiof with contempt. "It would have shamed my sword to be stained with your blood..."

Then his gaze fell upon the cherished armlet, once gifted by him to Ingeborg, now fitted upon the arm of the idol. His vision blurred. He tore the armlet with such force that he overturned the wooden idol; it fell directly into the sacred flame burning before it. Fire instantly engulfed it and leapt up to the roof. Only now did Frithiof come to his senses.

"Open the doors wide! Let everyone out!" he shouted to his faithful retinue.

The priests confined within the temple rushed out headlong. The unconscious Helgi was carried out in their arms.

"Water, quickly!" Frithiof continued shouting. "Bring all the sea hither! Flood the vaults!"

Between the shore and the temple formed a living chain of people: water was passed from hand to hand and, hissing, quenched the fire.

But all efforts were already in vain. The rising wind blew the flames stronger and stronger, and by morning from the temple and the sacred grove remained only smoking ash. Frithiof's revenge fell upon himself; his native gods turned their

bright faces from him, and in tears he returned with his retinue to the Ellida: there was no longer place for him in his homeland; he became a Temple Wolf, he became a viking—a sea-daring warrior, a homeless wanderer.

X. Frithiof at King Ring's

Year followed year, while Frithiof still roamed the waves, striking fear and terror into all coastal lands, from Nordlandia even unto Greece. Silently he usually steered the helm, fixing a gloomy gaze upon the dark abyss. But before battle his spirit took wing, his brow cleared, his eyes flashed lightning, and his voice thundered like the voice of Thor the Thunderer.

Meanwhile King Ring lived in peace and harmony with his young wife Ingeborg. Like "spring beside autumn," she sat beside him at his merry feasts.

But once an uninvited guest entered to them,

An unknown elder, covered from head to toe with a bear's hide. Though he walked bent over a beggar's staff, he was still a full head taller than everyone else. As befitted a poor man, he sat on the edge of the bench, right by the doors. But his shaggy attire was so amusing that the courtiers exchanged smirks and pointed fingers at him. The stranger's eyes flashed. Unexpectedly, he grabbed the first young fellow who came his way by the chest and flipped him over. Everyone instantly fell silent, while King Ring angrily shouted at the newcomer:

"Who are you? Why and from where have you been brought?"

"Difficult questions," said the old man. "But very well, I will answer you. Thief [Thiofr (the second part of the name Frithiof) means thief in Icelandic] they call me, Need is my homeland, Sorrow nursed me, and Wolf gave me shelter. I used to fly upon a Dragon, but now it is frozen to the earth, and I myself have grown frail. A fool mocked me, and I could not endure it. But he, as you see, is unharmed; so forgive me my fault as well."

"You speak eloquently," remarked Ring, "and I honor old age. Be then my guest and sit at the table. But first, appear in your true form."

As soon as the guest cast off his shaggy hide, there stood before the king a fine young man in rich battle gear. Like snow under the aurora borealis, Ingeborg's cheeks flushed; but she lowered her eyes and did not utter a word. Ring smiled gently and ordered his wife to pour the best wine for the guest into an aurochs horn.

Thus, seemingly unrecognized, Frithiof remained for a long time as a guest of his royal hosts.

XI. A Ride Upon the Ice

King Ring and Queen Ingeborg gathered to go to a feast. Their path lay across the ice, but the ice was thin, and Frithiof warned his hosts against the journey. But Ring did not listen to him, and in a light sleigh, on a storm-swift horse, he sped with his young wife across the mirror-like ice.

Then Frithiof too fastened skates to his feet and flew after them. Sometimes overtaking them, sometimes falling behind, he carved skillful runes upon the ice, so that in some places Ingeborg rode over her own name. But Rán, the goddess of the sea, was already lying in wait for them; she pierced the icy crust from below, the ice cracked, and before the sleigh yawned a gaping hole in the ice. Ingeborg turned deathly pale and clutched her aged husband. But Frithiof's mighty hand seized the royal horse by the mane and moved the sleigh onto solid ice.

"I thank you," said Ring, "Frithiof himself would envy you. I shall not forget your service."

But a new temptation was being prepared for Frithiof.

XIII. The Temptation of Frithiof[*]

[*] — This episode, particularly successful in the poetic rendering by Academician Grot, is presented by us in the original, albeit in a somewhat abbreviated form.

Now spring: birds chirp, the day shines bright, the meadows bloom;
Rivers, breaking free, run singing to the sea.
The rose, red as Freya [1], peers anew from its bud;
Joy has awakened in mortals, and courage, and love.

Old King Ring with Ingeborg set out for hunting in the forest,
And in colorful attire the court crowds around him.
Noise: quivers rattle, bows hum; horses neigh, raising dust;
Falcons scream and struggle, with hoods upon their eyes.

Behold the queen of the hunt herself! Poor Frithiof, do not look!
Like a star she shines atop a richly caparisoned horse.
This is Freya, this is Röhta [2], yet more beautiful than they.
Upon her head a purple headdress, with a bunch of blue feathers.

The band gathers: together! Over mountains, through the dale!
The horn blows; toward Odin's [3] walls the falcon rises.

The children of the forest startle; the beast runs to its lair,
And a Valkyrie pursues the beast, brandishing her spear.

Old Ring cannot keep pace with the band of daring men.
Beside him on a horse rides Frithiof, gloomy and quiet.
In his daring breast crowd many sad, dark thoughts:
Their merriment cannot scatter them, nor can the noise silence them.

"Oh, why did I leave the sea, blindly walking toward misfortune?
The sea tolerates no black thoughts: let the wind blow—and they are gone.
I see only Balder's temple, I am troubled by the vow
Given by the maiden: it was not broken by her, but by the gods!"

Thus he complained. Now the road leads them into a deep hollow,
Gloomy, hemmed in by mountains shaded by pine trees.
Ring dismounted from his horse and said: "Here is a sheltered nook.
I am weary, I need rest: let us lie down for an hour."

"You cannot sleep here, King! Here the bed is hard and damp...
Let us return: the hall is not far from this place..."
Gods come to us unexpectedly; so too does sleep, interrupted the old man:
"Would a host dare not to sleep even for a moment before his guest?"

Frithiof then removes his cloak, spreads it upon the grass,
And the King bows his white head to Frithiof's knee.
He sleeps quietly, as heroes sleep on shields after battle,
Peacefully, as an infant in its mother's arms.

Hark! A song of a black bird sounds from behind the branches:
"Frithiof! End the ancient strife: kill the sleeping elder!
You shall take the widow; the bride shall embrace her groom again.
People do not see you here, and the shadow of graves is silent..."

Frithiof listens: hark! A song of a white bird sounds:
"People do not see you here, but Odin's eye is everywhere!
Would you slaughter one who sleeps? Would you kill one unarmed?
Whatever you might gain by villainy, you would gain no glory!"

Silence fell in the thicket. Then Frithiof lifts his battle sword,
And in his turmoil hurls it far into the dark forest.
The black bird silently flies away to dreadful Náströnd [4],
While the other, with a loud song, flies toward the sun, like the sound of harps.

And the old King no longer sleeps: "How beautiful was my dream!
Sweetly sleeps he who is guarded by heroic weapons.
But tell me, O stranger: where is your sword, brother of lightning?
Who separated the inseparable? Who stole your steel?"

"What matter?" said the warrior, "Darkness reigns in the north of swords;
Gold is the tongue of the sword, it knows no words of peace.
Spirits dwell in the steel, spirits of gloomy lands:
They do not honor sleep; their lure is the gleam of silver hair."

"Know then, youth, I did not sleep: it was a test!
No one trusts either a man or a sword untested.
You are Frithiof: I recognized you the moment you entered my hall."
Old Ring had long known what the cunning guest concealed.

"Why do you lower your gaze? Not always was I old.
Our life is a battle; youth is the berserker's warlike fire.
I am gray, you see: soon, very soon, I shall be beneath the mound!
Then you take both my realm and my wife: she is yours!"

"Not as a thief have I come!" gloomily spoke Frithiof:
"Had I wished to take Ingeborg, who could have hindered me?
Ah, I desired only to look upon my bride one last time!"
Oh, madman! Again the dying flame burst into fire...

"King, it is time to depart: long enough have I guested in your land.
The wrath of implacable gods weighs upon my head.
Fair-haired, gentle Balder is protector to all living things;
He alone hates me, I am the one rejected by him!
Yes, I burned his sanctuary! Wolf of the temple I am called.
When my name is spoken, a lively child weeps.
The merry feast falls silent... Cursed am I in my native land;
There is no peace for me in the land of my fathers, no peace within myself.
Away, away to my native waves!
Rise, Dragon, my good one! To the path!
Swiftly bathe your steep breast again in the salty moisture;
Let me hear the voice of thunder, let me hear the howl of the storm!
Only amidst turmoil and noise is there peace in my soul..."

[1] — Freya — goddess of beauty.

[2] — Röhta — one of the Valkyries, the shield-maidens of Odin.

[3] — Odin — father of the gods, and at the same time, especially, the god of war

and hunting.

[4] — Náströnd — dwelling of the dead.

XIII. The Death of Ring and the Choice of a New King

He had only to bid farewell to Ingeborg. When he entered her chamber, he found old Ring with her.

"It is time for me! I have overstayed my welcome with you," he said. "But as a farewell, Ingeborg, accept from me the former bracelet and never remove it, so that at least in memory you may not be parted."

"So this is how you reward her for her winter hospitality!" remarked Ring playfully, "And nothing for me, as if I had been less kind to you!"

"Oh, Ring!" exclaimed Frithiof: "Do not go with her to the sea on a starry night! Lest the wave bring Frithiof's corpse to you..."

"No, my friend," said Ring, "it is not your time, but mine. Death already watches for me behind the door. But it is shameful for a king to die in a peaceful bed..."

And, faithful to the ancient covenant of ancestors, Ring carved sacred runes upon his chest and arms with the point of a spear, and, bleeding, in his final moment himself joined the hands of Frithiof and Ingeborg.

With the death of Ring, the people faced the task at the thing (assembly) of choosing a new leader. Under the open sky, the electors—the bonders—gathered. Frithiof also appeared, leading Ring's little son by the hand, and ascended the stone with him. A murmur passed through the crowd:

"But he is still an unreasonable child? Is he to judge us? Is he to lead us into mortal battle?"

But Frithiof lifted the boy onto his shield and declared that it would be better to choose him as their king: Odin's blood clearly shines in the child's beauty, while he himself, Frithiof, swears to guard the land with his sword until the child grows up.

Meanwhile, the royal little son, sitting on the shield like an eaglet above a crag, grew weary of waiting, leaped down from the height, and, as if nothing had happened, stood beside the stone.

Then all the people, as one man, proclaimed him their king, and Frithiof their jarl (earl), begging him to rule the country for a time and to marry the young queen mother.

"You have gathered here to choose a king, not to woo a bride," said Frithiof. "The god Balder has not yet forgiven my guilt, and only he alone can restore my bride to me."

With this he bent down to the little king, kissed him, and departed without looking back.

XIV. Reconciliation

And now he is again in his homeland, upon the burial mound of his father. There appeared before him a wondrous vision: a new temple of Balder, more beautiful than the former one. He understood that this vision was a sign from above, and on the site of the burned temple he erected a new sanctuary of unseen beauty.

The day of the temple's consecration arrived. Twelve maidens in "silver veils," entering there in pairs, began before Balder's altar a sacred dance. It seemed that not mortal maidens danced, but airy elves upon a forest meadow sprinkled with diamonds of morning dew. And they sang a sacred hymn about the radiant Balder, about how he fell as a victim of his brother, and how all wept: both sky, and sea, and earth...

Frithiof watched and listened, leaning upon his sword; and once more arose before him the bright days of his childhood, of his youth, and his hardened spirit was troubled.

Then entered silently the high priest, not a youth like the beautiful god Balder, but a stately elder, with a beard white to his waist.

"I have been waiting for you, my son," began the elder. "Two weights have been placed by the gods upon the scales of life: earthly strength and heavenly meekness. Do you wish to be reconciled? But do you know what true reconciliation is? There is a sacrifice more pleasing to the gods even than the smoke of shed blood: this sacrifice is the sacrifice of your vengeance, your enmity! If you are not yet ready to forgive, then why are you here, why have you raised this temple? With stones you will not appease the gods!

You bear ill will toward the sons of Beli. For what, tell me? Because they did not immediately give you, their peasant, their royal sister? But Odin's blood flows in her! Do not condemn them for pride, lest you yourself be condemned... Helgi has perished..."

"Perished!" cried Frithiof.

"Yes, perished. He waged war against the Finnish people. Upon a cliff there stood an ancient temple, erected in honor of their god Jumala. Since time immemorial it had been locked and abandoned: among the Finnish people lived a belief that whoever dared to open that temple to see Jumala, Jumala would strike down on the spot. Helgi heard of this and, in his malice, resolved to destroy the enemy temple. He went to it and shook its rotten pillars. The temple collapsed, but the idol of Jumala crushed Helgi himself beneath it. Thus did the unfortunate man behold Jumala! A messenger brought us this news last night. Upon Beli's throne now sits only the good Halfdan. Stretch out to him a brotherly hand and sacrifice your vengeance to the gods!"

At the threshold of the temple appeared Halfdan himself and timidly stood apart from the formidable foe. Frithiof unbuckled his sword, set it against the altar, and with outstretched hand approached Halfdan. The latter, blushing, removed his iron gauntlet, and hands long separated by years were joined again in a firm brotherly clasp!

Only now did the high priest lift from the exile's head the curse that had weighed upon him.

Again the doors opened, and Ingeborg entered in somber attire, in an ermine cloak, and behind her, "like stars behind the moon," her maidens. In tears she threw herself into the arms of her brother Halfdan, and he, moved, handed her over to Frithiof. Thus for all her life she gave her hand to him who had been dear to her since early childhood...