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EAST YORKSHIRE
IN THE
SAGAS

by
A. L. BINNS

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IN THE
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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>	
Introduction	5	
Ragnars saga loðbrokar	8	Ragnar Loðbrok's saga
Patr af Ragnars sonum	14	The story of Ragnar's sons
Jomsvikinga saga	17	The saga of the Jomsvikings
Orkneyinga saga	17	The saga of the men of Orkney
Morkinskinna	18	Harald's saga, Morkinskinna version
Heimskringla	29	Harald's saga, Heimskringla version

INTRODUCTION

This is an attempt to make available in a small space to the English reader most of the material on which a first-hand judgement of the Old Norse sagas about events in Yorkshire can be based.

The two stories of Ragnar and his sons and the Danish attacks of 867 belong to a group of sagas recognised as less "historical" than the sagas of the kings of Norway or of Icelanders. So does the Jomsvikings' saga which follows. But it is clear that the story of Knut and Harald Gormson inserted in these (and other sagas) is a reminiscence of the events of 1066 transferred by more than a century, and from Norwegians to Danes.

The story of the foundation of a town on as much ground as a skin will cover is widely spread, and told of Rome and Carthage as well as London and York. The sagas of Ragnar probably got it from Geoffrey of Monmouth though it is odd that the Old Norse version of his *Historia Brittonum*, *Bretar Sogur*, does not include it. It is significant that in Saxo Grammaticus the story is told of York, but the skin is a horse-hide. This suggests that the Danish traditions upon which he based his work interpreted Jorvik as Jor-vik, horse-town (O.N. *jórv*) and assumed that the name reflected the origin of the town.

The earliest surviving Norse account of the events of 1066 is probably the brief passage from *Orkneyinga saga*. The four long Old Norse accounts of Stamford Bridge here compared for the first time in English are by no means independent either of each other, or of English sources. So one should not think of a single account (usually *Heimskringla*, of which many translations already exist) as 'the saga account'; and one should not regard them as contemporary sources, but rather the work of historians who had very definite views on the characters and motives of the participants and selected their material in order to express them. It is interesting for an English reader to compare these views, and the use their authors made of one another, of the verses some of which were contemporary with the events they describe, and of English sources to correct one another's mistakes.

Morkinskinna dates from the end of the thirteenth century. It covers events from 1035 to 1157, and the original collection was probably made about 1220. The extant MS has included many verses not found in other accounts.

Fagurskinna, now known only from copies made before the two MSS (one mid-thirteenth, one mid-fourteenth century) were lost by fire in 1728, seems to have based itself on an older version of *Morkinskinna* than the surviving one.

Heimskringla, written by the great Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson, used *Morkinskinna*, *Fagurskinna* and *Orkneyinga saga*. It is here translated from an edition of the oldest MS, *Kringla*.

The version presented by Hulda, a fourteenth century MS, was put together soon after 1280 from *Heimskringla* and a version of *Morkinskinna* which was neither our surviving one nor that used by Snorri.

As *Morkinskinna's* account is the earliest and richest in quotation of contemporary verses, and *Heimskringla's* the fullest and most correct, these two are translated entire. *Fagurskinna* agrees with *Morkinskinna* so closely that differences have been indicated in the *Morkinskinna* text, and the difference between the Hulda version and *Heimskringla* is similarly indicated, by the letters F, M and H.

Hemings Pattr is in many ways a fuller account than those so far mentioned: whilst *Morkinskinna* tells us only 'Thorir of Steig did not come because he had had bad dreams about the king' in *Hemings Pattr* we are given his dream, and Sweyn's prudent refusal to get involved in England is strengthened by seeing a dog lose a loaf of bread in its jaws because it attempted to add to it that in the jaws of its reflection in the water. This is a typical medieval sermon example, and many of the additions to *Hemings Pattr* are of this kind, showing an author self-conscious of the motives of his characters. He makes Tostig recommend Harald to go to St. Olaf's shrine to avert the consequences of the threatening vision of St. Olaf. Harald asks Tostig soon after their landing in England 'What is the name of that hillock to the north?' and Tostig attempts to conceal the truth by saying 'not every hillock has a name' but is eventually compelled to admit that it is called Ivar's mound. Harald says 'few are those who have conquered England who have landed near it', presumably referring to the legend in *Ragnar's saga* (p. 14), from whence the subsequent reference to 'Lundunaborg' also comes. A translation of most of the relevant parts is included in *The Northmen Talk* by Jacqueline Simpson, and for that reason, and because, though it has been regarded as an important source previously (it was included in the Rolls series), it seems to be clearly a late and literary reworking of the material of the earlier versions given here, it is omitted to save space.

Nor has there been room to treat properly the saga accounts of Egil in the York of Eric Bloodaxe (described briefly in *The Viking Century in East Yorkshire*, EYLHS) or the *Cnytinga saga* account of Canute's campaign around the Humber. But this collection includes all the Old Norse material on the first and last Scandinavian incursions into Yorkshire, and a good idea of the nature of the saga evidence can be gained from it. The relationship between different saga versions cannot of course be judged fairly from translations of comparatively short passages. But one can see how Snorri in *Heimskringla* has evidently corrected *Morkinskinna* and *Fagurskinna* by reference to William of Malmesbury (about Harold Godwinsson's coronation), and his more detailed and accurate account of Tostig's journeyings must come from English, and not Icelandic, sources. The battle of Stamford Bridge is also much more

reminiscent of Hastings in *Heimskringla* than in earlier Norse accounts.

The following editions were used in preparing these translations:

- (1) *Ragnars saga loðbrokar* and *Þáttur af Ragnars sonum, Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* Vol. 1, Guðni Jonsson, Reykjavík 1950.
- (2) *Jomsvikinga Saga*
The Saga of the Jomsvikings, N. F. Blake, Nelson's Icelandic Texts, 1962.
- (3) *Orkneyinga Saga*
Ed. Sigurður Nordal, S.U.G.N.L. 1916.
- (4) *Morkinskinna*
Ed. Finnur Jonsson, S.U.G.N.L. 1932.
- (5) *Fagurskinna*
Ed. Finnur Jonsson, S.U.G.N.L. 1903.
- (6) *Heimskringla*
Ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, I.F. 1951.
- (7) *Hulda - Hrokkinskinna*
Ed. S. Egilsson Fornmanna sögur, Vol. 7, 1831.
- (8) *Hemings Þáttur Aslakssonar*
Ed. G. Fellows Jensen, Editiones Arnarnæna, 1962.

RAGNARS SAGA LOÐBROKAR

Chapter 15 DEATH OF KING RAGNAR IN ENGLAND

Now this is to be added to the story, that Ragnar sat at home in his kingdom and he did not know where his sons were, or Randalin, his wife. And he heard each of his men saying that no-one could compare with his sons, and he thought no-one as famous as them. Now he thought what fame he could seek for himself which would last no short time. He fixed on a plan, hired workmen and felled timber for two great ships, and men saw that they were two deep-sea ships (*knorr*) so large that no similar ones had ever been built in Scandinavia, and he had great war-like preparations made all through his kingdom. From this, men understood that he was going on some campaign himself. This became widely known in neighbouring countries. And now the inhabitants and all the kings feared they would not be able to remain in their countries or kingdoms. And now each of them set watch to see if any attacker was coming.

It happened one time that Randalin asked Ragnar what expedition he intended for himself. He said to her that he intended to go to England with no more ships than his two deep-sea ships and the force they could carry. Then said Randalin, 'This trip seems rash to me that you are intending. It would seem more prudent to have smaller ships, and more of them.' 'There is no merit in that' he said, 'in conquering a country with a lot of ships. But there has never been an example of anyone conquering such a land as England with two ships. But if I am defeated, all the better that I have taken the fewer ships out of the country.'

Then Randalin answered, 'I think it will be no less expensive before these ships are finished, than if you had had many longships for the venture. But you know that it is difficult to take a ship inshore off England, and if it happens that your ship is lost, even if the men get ashore, they are finished if a native army catches them, but it is easier to get to some haven with a longship than with a deep-sea ship.'

Now Ragnar recited a verse:

No chief can keep gold if he wants men
A wise chief keeps more men than gold
In battle what use is a gold ring then?
Kings have died whilst their wealth grew old.

Now he has his ships got ready, and collects such a force that the ships are well-manned. And he recited another:

What's this I, generous, hear
That I my dragon ships shall lose?
I still unmoved stick fast, my dear,
To *my* plan whatever gods may choose.

And when his ships were ready, and the force that was to accompany him, and when the weather which he thought was

suitable arrived, Ragnar said that he must go on board. And when he was ready she took him to the ships. And before they parted, she declared she would repay him for the gown he had given her. He asked how, and she recited a verse.:

I give you with all my heart,
This long grey seamless cloak,
Sword will not bite you, nor wound smart,
In it since to the gods I spoke.

He said that he would take her advice, but when they parted it was easily seen that she was upset at their parting.

Now Ragnar sailed his ships to England as he had intended. He had a sharp wind so that he wrecked both his big ships on the English coast, but all his men got ashore and held on to their clothes and weapons. And wherever he went, towns, forts, and castles, he conquered.

The king who then ruled England was called Ella. He had had news of Ragnar's departure, and had posted men so that he would know straight away if the army should land. Now these men went to King Ella and told him the news of battle. He sent messages round his whole kingdom, calling up everyone who could carry a shield, ride a horse and dare to fight, and collected such a large army that it was to be marvelled at. Then they prepared for battle. And King Ella said to his troops, 'If we are winning in this battle and you notice Ragnar, do not strike him with your weapons, for he has such sons, that were he to fall, we should never cease to pay for it.'

Ragnar now got ready for battle, and he had the garment Randalin had given him as a mailshirt, and the spear in his hand with which he fought the serpent which lay round Þora's hall, and no-one else dared fight, and he had no protection but a helmet. When they met, the battle began. Ragnar had much the smaller force. The battle had not lasted long before many of Ragnar's army fell. But wherever he went, way was cleared before him, and he went through the battle lines, and wherever he swung or stabbed at shield, mailshirt or helmet, his blows were so strong that nothing could stand against them, but he was never shot or struck so that a single weapon harmed him, and he was unwounded, but killed many of King Ella's men. In spite of this, their battle ended in all Ragnar's men dying, and he himself was pressed in by shields and so captured.

Now he was asked who he was, but he kept quiet and would not answer. Then said King Ella, 'The man is likely to be put to a greater trial of his patience if he won't tell us who he is. Now throw him into a snake pit, and let him stay there a long time, and if he breathes a word from which we gather he is Ragnar, then take him out immediately'. Now he was taken there, and stayed there a long time, and the serpents did not molest him. Then men said, 'This is indeed an accomplished man; no weapon could wound him today

and now no serpent can injure him either.' Next, King Ella ordered the cloak which he was wearing outermost to be removed, and they did so, and the snakes hung all over him. Then said Ragnar, 'The young boars would grumble if they knew what the old one suffered'. And even though he said that, they didn't realise any the clearer that it was Ragnar rather than any other king.

Now he recited a verse:

In one and fifty famous fights,
I many men did beat;
Never thought that from snake bites
I should die; hope proves a cheat.

And furthermore, he recited:

Young boars would grumble if they knew,
What trouble the old one must endure.
Serpents destroy me through and through,
Suck too strongly; my days are few.

Now he died and they took him away. But King Ella suspected that Ragnar it was who was dead. He considered then how he could find out and protect himself and defend the kingdom against the reactions of Ragnar's sons when they learnt of it. He decided to prepare a ship, and put in charge a man both clever and resolute, give him an ample crew, so the ship was well manned, and tell him to seek Ivar and his brothers, and tell them of their father's death. But the venture seemed so unrewarding that few would go. Then the king said, "You must watch attentively how each of the brothers reacts to the news, and then go on your way the minute weather permits". He had their expedition furnished so that they wanted for nothing. They set off, and all went well.

The sons of Ragnar had been raiding in the south. Then they turned back to Scandinavia, intending to visit their kingdom, which Ragnar ruled. They did not know about his expedition, how it had prospered, and so they were very curious to find out. They journeyed north, but wherever men heard that they were coming, people deserted their towns, drove away their cattle and fled, so that they could scarcely get food for their force. One morning Bjorn Ironside woke, and recited a verse:

Dark ravens fly every day,
Over us, and starve and die.
They should fly south the sandy way
To see where blood from wounds was never dry.

and again,

First we fought with Roman folk,
I struck a greybeard a great blow,
So that blood the sword did soak,
And eagles screamed over men laid low.

Now it happened that they got to Denmark before King Ella's ambassadors, and stayed quietly with their men. But the ambassadors came home with their band to the town the sons of Ragnar were staying in, and went into the same hall they were drinking in, before the high seat Ivar was seated in. Sigurð Serpent-eye and Huitserk were playing backgammon, and Bjorn Ironside was shaving a spear-shaft on the floor. When King Ella's ambassadors came before Ivar, they greeted him respectfully. He accepted their greetings and asked them who they were, and what news they had. He who was their leader said that they were English, and sent by King Ella to tell them the news of the death of their father Ragnar.

Huitserk and Sigurð let the board drop suddenly, and listened attentively to the tidings. Bjorn stood on the hall floor, supporting himself on his spearshaft. Ivar asked them carefully in what circumstances he had lost his life. But they told everything as it had happened, from his coming to England to his death.

And when the story had got so far that he said, 'The young boars would grumble', Bjorn clenched his hands on the shaft, and gripped it so hard that the marks could be seen on it afterwards. When the ambassadors had finished their story, Bjorn snapped the spear in two. But Huitserk was holding a piece he had taken in the game, and he clenched it so tightly that blood spurted from every nail. Sigurð Serpent-eye had been paring his nails with a knife whilst the tale was told, and listened so intently that he did not notice until the knife had cut to the bone and he did not feel it. But Ivar asked about all that had happened, his hue was sometimes flushed and sometimes pale.

Now Huitserk speaks first and says that the quickest way to begin the vengeance is by killing King Ella's ambassadors. Ivar said, 'That must not be. They shall go in peace, wherever they will, and if they are short of anything they have only to tell me and I will get it for them.' As they had now completed their errand, they turned down the hall and back to their ships. And when the wind served, they put to sea and it went well with them. They came to King Ella and told him how each of them had reacted to the telling of these tidings. And when King Ella heard that, he said, 'It is to be reckoned that we must fear Ivar or none of them, from what you say of him, the others we can hold our kingdom in spite of.'

Now he had a watch set round all the kingdom so no army could attack him unawares.

When King Ella's ambassadors had gone away, the brothers had a discussion about how to take revenge for their father Ragnar. Ivar said, 'I will take no part in it and give no help to it, for Ragnar got what I expected. He was badly prepared from the beginning. He had no quarrel against King Ella, and it has often turned out that those who attempt to overcome others wrongfully end in dishonourable defeat. I will accept compensation money from Ella if he is prepared to offer it.'

When they heard that, his brothers were very angry and said that they would never be so weak-kneed, whatever he did. 'Many would say that we had the wrong end of the stick if we did not avenge our father when we have raided far and wide throughout the world, killing men against whom we had no feud. And that must not be, rather shall every seaworthy ship in Denmark be prepared. The army shall be so completely called out that every man who can carry a shield against Ella shall go.' But Ivar said that he would stay behind, and those ships that he had anything to do with 'except that one which is my own'. And when it became known that Ivar was taking no part, they got a much smaller army, but went nevertheless. When they came to England, King Ella learnt of it, had his trumpet blown straight away, and called to him all his men who would follow him. And he got so great an army that no man could number it, and went against the brothers. And when they met, Ivar was not in the battle, and the battle ended with King Ella victorious, and the sons of Ragnar in flight.

And in the flight, Ivar said that he did not intend to return to his homeland, 'and I will see whether King Ella will offer me any satisfaction or not, and it seems to me better to take what he offers than to have any more unsuccessful ventures like this.' Huitserk said he would have no part in it with him, and he could do as he liked with his share, 'but never will we take money for our father'.

Ivar said that he must leave them, and bade them rule their joint kingdom, 'but you must send me the money I am entitled to'. When he had spoken he bade them farewell, and turned back to meet King Ella. When he came before him, he greeted the king respectfully, and began like this, 'I am come to meet you to seek a settlement and such satisfaction as you will give me. And now I see that I cannot accomplish anything against you, and it seems to me wiser to take what satisfaction you will offer than to lose more of my men, or perhaps myself, to you.'

Then King Ella answered, 'Some men say that it is not good to believe you, and you often speak fair when you think foul, and we should be on our guard against you and your brothers.'

'I will not take part against you, but on the contrary swear never to resist you.'

Now the king asked what he sought as compensation. 'I should like you to give me as much of your land as an oxhide stretches over, and round that shall my boundary go, and I will ask you for nothing more, and I see that you mean to give me no satisfaction if you will not grant me that.'

'I don't see that that can hurt us, if you do have so much of my land, and I will certainly give you that, if you will swear never to fight against me, and I do not fear your brothers if you are true to me.'

Now they arranged that Ivar swore oaths to him that he would never fight against him or plot against him, and Ivar was to have as much of England as the biggest oxhide he could get would cover. Ivar got a calfskin, had it soaked and stretched three times. Then he had it cut up as thinly as possible and split the outside of the skin from the inside. And when this was done, the thong was so long that it was wonderful, and no-one thought it could be possible. Then he laid it out on a plain, and it covered so wide an expanse that it amounted to a large town, and round it he marked the foundations for great town walls. And then he got many craftsmen and had many houses built on the site, and had a great walled town built, and it is called Lundunaborg. It is the biggest and best city in all the northern countries.

And when the town was finished, he had spent all his money. But he was so generously valiant, he gave with both hands, and his wisdom was so respected, that all consulted him about plans and difficulties. And he arranged everything so that everyone thought it was to their advantage, and he became so popular that he had more friends than anyone else, and was a great help to King Ella in administration, so that the king let him decide many plans and cases and did not need to come himself.

And when Ivar had so prospered in his counsels that everything was entrusted to him, he sent men to his brothers with this errand, that they should send him as much gold and silver as he wanted. When these men met his brothers they gave their message, and said how he was placed, for people seemed not to understand what he had in mind. And so the brothers understood that he had not the disposition he formerly had. Now they sent him the money he wanted. And when they came to Ivar he gave all the money to the greatest men in the land, and so deprived King Ella of support, that all promised to sit quietly at home if he were to give battle there.

And when Ivar had thus attracted support, he sent men to his brothers to tell them that he wanted them to call out the expeditionary forces of all the lands they ruled, and take every man they could get. When the brothers got this message they recognised immediately that he must think they had a good chance of victory. They gathered an army from Denmark and West Sweden, and all the countries they ruled, and mustered a huge army, the nation in arms. They held on their voyage to England both by day and by night, and were careful no news of their coming went before them.

No news of this attack was given to King Ella. He collected his army, which was small because Ivar had drawn much away. Ivar went to meet King Ella and promised to fulfil what he had sworn. 'But I cannot be responsible for what my brothers do, but I will go to meet them and see if they will stop their army, and not do more harm than they have already done.' Ivar went to meet his brothers

and egged them on to attack as hard and as quickly as possible, 'for the king has a much smaller army.' But they answered that he did not need to egg them on, for they were of the same mind as before. Now Ivar went and told King Ella that they were far too angry and raging to listen to him, "And when I tried to arrange a truce between you, they cried out against it. Now I must fulfil my agreement that I will not fight against you, and I will stay peacefully by with my force, and may the battle go with you as it may."

Now he and King Ella saw the brothers' army, advancing so furiously that it was a great wonder. Then said Ivar, 'Now, King Ella, you had better draw up your army, and I guess they will give you a hard attack for some time.' When the armies clashed there was a great battle, and Ragnar's sons advanced valiantly through King Ella's line, and were so enraged that they thought of nothing except making the slaughter as great as possible, and the battle was long and hard. And it ended in the flight of Ella and his men, and he was captured.

And then Ivar was near, and said that he should be killed in this fashion: "We must remember what death he chose for our father; now the man who is most skilled with a blade shall carve the eagle on his back very deeply, and redden that eagle with his blood."

The man appointed to this work did as Ivar bade him, and King Ella was sorely wounded before the work was finished. He died thus and they seemed to have avenged their father Ragnar. Ivar said he would give into their hands the kingdoms that were their joint property, but he would rule in England.

Chapter 18

DEATH OF RAGNAR'S SONS

. . . . Ivar ruled England up to his death, and died of sickness. And when he lay in his fatal illness, he said that he should be borne to a place open to attack, and said he reckoned that they would not get victory who landed there. And when he died it was done as he commanded, and he was laid in a mound. And many men say that when King Harald Sigurðarson came to England, he landed where Ivar was nearby, and he fell on that expedition. And when William the Bastard came into the country he went to Ivar's mound and broke it open, and saw Ivar undecayed. He had a great fire made, and burnt Ivar on the fire, and after that he triumphed and succeeded to the country.

ÞATTR AF RAGNAR'S SONUM
THE STORY OF RAGNAR'S SONS

Chapter 3

*DEATH OF RAGNAR
AND HIS SONS' VENGEANCE*

At this time the king who ruled in Northumberland was called Ella. And when he learnt that an army was come into his kingdom, he gathered a great force and advanced to meet them with a huge army, and there was a great and hard battle. King Ragnar was wearing outermost the silk cloak Aslaug gave him at parting. Because the native army was large, so that it could not be resisted, almost all his men fell, but he himself went four times through King Ella's battle-line, and no sword cut his silken cloak. He was later captured and put in a snake pit, and the snakes would not come near him. King Ella saw that steel had not harmed him during the day, and now the serpents would not harm him. Then he had his outermost garment taken from him and the snakes hung on him all over, and he lost his life, with great courage.

And when Ragnar's sons learnt these tidings they went west to England and fought against King Ella. And because Ivar would not fight, and neither would his people, and the native army was large, they were defeated and fled to their ships, and with matters so, went home to Denmark. But Ivar remained in England, and went to meet King Ella, and asked him for compensation for the killing of his father. And because King Ella saw that Ivar would not fight alongside his brothers against him, it seemed safe enough to come to a settlement with him. Ivar bade the king give him just so much land in compensation for his father as he could cover with the largest calf's skin, because he said he was not free to go home because of his brothers. Ella thought that not unlikely, so they bound themselves to this settlement. Ivar now took a fresh moist skin and had it stretched as much as possible. Then he had it cut into the thinnest of thongs and split the outside of the skin from the inside. Then with it he enclosed a level plain and marked out foundations round it. On them he raised strong town-walls, and the stronghold is now called York. He was friendly with all the natives, and particularly the chiefs, and so it came about that all the chiefs promised their allegiance to him and his brothers.

Afterwards he sent a message to his brothers and said that there was a good chance of avenging their father if they came with an army to England. When they heard this, they called out an army and sailed to England. And when Ivar knew this, he went to King Ella and said he would not conceal such news from him, but he could not fight against his brothers, but would go to meet them and seek a truce. The king agreed. Ivar met his brothers, egged them on to avenge their father and went back to King Ella and said that they were so maddened and enraged that they would fight in spite

of anything. To the king, Ivar's conduct seemed honourable in the extreme, and he advanced against the brothers with his army.

And when they clashed, many chieftains turned from the king to Ivar. The king was then outnumbered so that the greater part of his army fell and he was captured. Ivar and the brothers recalled now how their father was tortured. They had an eagle carved on Ella's back, and then severed all the ribs from the backbone with a sword, so that the lungs were pulled out. As Sighvat the poet says, in his 'Praise of Canute':

Ivar, he in York a dweller,
Cut the eagle in the back of Ella.

After this battle, Ivar became king of that part of England his kinsmen had formerly owned. He had two illegitimate brothers, one called Yngvar, the other Husto. They tortured Edmund, king and martyr, at Ivar's command, and then he had his kingdom as well . . .

Ivar Boneless was king for a long time in England. He had no children, for he was made that way that he had no desire for love, but was not short of malice and cruelty, and he died of old age in England and was buried in a mound. Then all Loðbrok's sons were dead. After Ivar, Aðalmund succeeded to the kingdom. He was the brother of St. Edmund and converted much of England. He exacted tribute from Northumbria because it was heathen. After him, his son, called Aðalbrikt, took the kingdom. He was a good king and lived to be old.

Towards the end of his time, a Danish army came to England, and the leaders of the army were Knut and Harald, sons of King Gorm. They conquered a great kingdom in Northumberland which Ivar had had before. King Aðalbrikt went against them and they fought north of Cleveland, and many of the Danes fell there. Somewhat later the Danes landed at Scarborough, and fought there, and were victorious. Then they went south to York, and everyone submitted, and they had no concern about their safety. And one day when it was hot, people were swimming. And just as the king's sons were swimming between the ships, men ran down to the beach and shot at them, Knut was fatally wounded by an arrow, and they took his body and carried it out to the ship. And when the natives heard about this they gathered together so that the Danes could not land because of the gathering of natives, and went afterwards home to Denmark.

JOMSVIKINGA SAGA

From Chapter 5

At that time [925-939] King Athelstan was ruling England. He was a good king, and old. Towards the end of his time a Danish army came to England, led by the sons of King Gorm, Knut and Harald. They harried all over Northumberland, subjugated a large dominion and counted it as their legitimate family inheritance, as it had belonged to the sons of Ragnar Loðbrok and other ancestors of theirs. King Athelstan collected a large force and moved against them, met them north of Cleveland, and killed many Danes. Somewhat later the sons of Gorm made a landing near Scarborough and fought there, where the Danes were victorious. After this they headed south to York, and everyone submitted to them. They were not concerned for their safety. One hot summer day, both the kings and their men were swimming among the ships when men ran down to the beach and shot at them. Knut was fatally wounded by an arrow, and they took his body on board one of the ships. When the natives heard about this they collected a large army. King Athelstan came straight away, and all those who had previously submitted to Knut now turned to him, and the Danes could not land again because of the English force collected, and the Danes sailed back to Denmark.

ORKNEYINGA SAGA

Chapter 34

When the brothers Pall and Erlendr had taken over the Orkneys, King Harald Sigurðarson came west from Norway with a large army. He came first to Shetland and went thence to Orkney. There he left behind Queen Ellisif and their daughters Maria and Ingigerd. He got a great force from the Orkneys; both the earls accompanied the king. The king went thence south to England, and landed in a place called Cleveland, and won Scarborough. Afterwards he landed in Holderness, and had a battle there, which he won. The Wednesday next before St. Matthew's day he had a battle in York against earls Valbjof and Morcar. Morcar fell there. The following Sunday the city yielded to King Harald, who was at Stamford Bridge. He went ashore, leaving the ships in the care of his son Olaf and the earls Pall and Erlendr and his kinsman Eystein Moorcock. On his landing Harold Godwinsson came against him with a very large army, and Harald Sigurðarson fell in that battle. After the king's death Eystein Moorcock came from the ships with the earls and fought a hard fight; there Eystein fell, and almost all the Norse army. After the battle Harald the king allowed Olaf Haraldsson and the earls and the remnant of the army which had not taken flight to leave England peaceably. Olaf sailed out in the autumn from Spurn Head, and so to the Orkneys. And that day and that very hour that Harald fell, his daughter Maria died suddenly; and people say that they had but one life between them.

MORKINSKINNA

What follows is translated from page 109 onwards of the edition by C. R. Unger published in Christiania (now Oslo) in 1867, and page 262 onwards of that by Finnur Jonsson, Copenhagen, 1932.

PRELUDE TO KING HARALD'S WESTERN EXPEDITION

In the twentieth¹ year of King Harald Sigurðarson's reign, the good King Edward of England died on the fifth day of Christmas, and on the seventh day the English chose Harold as king, son of Godwin and Gyða, the daughter of Þorgils Sprakaleg and sister of Jarl Ulf. Harold was consecrated king on the eighth day of Christmas in St. Paul's in London. King Edward had been married to Gyða, Godwin's daughter and sister of King Harold, but died childless, so that the throne of England passed from the family of the good King Athelstan. Earl Tostig, Godwin's second son, did not think himself any less fit to rule than his brother Harold, and it seemed that Tostig wanted an election between himself and his brother by all the chieftains. He said that all the chiefs and people should choose whom they would soonest have as king, and many said that Tostig was wiser, and no less able to be king than his brother. But Harold was nearer to kingship as he had the name of king, and enthronement and consecration, though it had all been rather rushed. Harold had the palaces and exchequer and would by no means give up the kingship. He brought all power into his own hands, and on discovering his brother's intentions, so bore down on him that he fled the country.

He went east to his kinsman King Sweyn in Denmark, and asked for his help and strength and support to get an honourable settlement from his brother Harold. King Sweyn received him well, invited him to stay and accept some estates in Denmark. Earl Tostig replied ²['If you will not give us your help to get our rights, we would rather help you than that things should go on the same way; if you will take an army to conquer England] as did Knut your mother's brother you will secure it with our help and the help of the regions loyal to us in England.' King Sweyn answered, 'I am so much a lesser man than our old kinsman Knut, that I can scarcely hold my own kingdom against the Norwegians, but Knut the Old got Denmark by inheritance and added England by military power and good fortune. It nevertheless seemed at one time to be expected that he must be laid low there. Norway he got without any battles. Now we have to fashion our intent, and more in accord with our lack of enterprise than the success of our kinsman, Knut the Old.' Then said Tostig, 'Our friends become enemies, their enemies then must be my friends.'

¹ Nineteenth.—F.

² 'Will you not give us strength and force from your kingdom so that we regain our honour, and with your strength and our intelligence, conquer England.'—F.

So the earl left the Danish king with both of them angry. On his way back he went to Norway, met King Harald and explained his difficulty, offering him his service and co-operation, and afterwards the king summoned a conference of counsellors and wise men, and their discussion with the earl was friendly. The king rehearsed the earl's wrongs and how he had innocent been driven from his lands. The earl spoke in this fashion: 'That is the beginning of my tale, my lord', he said, 'that Harðacnut son of Old Knut ruled England as king after his brother Harald.' He recited next all about how it had gone, all the agreements between King Magnus the good and Harðacnut, and next that King Magnus was the true heir of Harðacnut and how merciful King Magnus was to King Edward in not seizing the dominion and honour that was his in England like that in Denmark.

'And who is the true heir of King Magnus? No one but you, King Harald, his father's brother, or whose should it have been?' King Harald answered, 'It is well said, and what is said of the agreements is just as is always said.' And King Harald often thought about this, and the earl and the king discussed it together for days, and not to conceal the finish, in the end Tostig swore fealty to King Harald, and promised him his assistance and company west against England, and King Harald promised him in return power in England. ¹[And some men say that Earl Tostig sent Guthorm Gunnhildarson to meet King Harald and offer him the allegiance of Northumberland and egg him on to an expedition westward, and then Guthorm went to Norway and Tostig south by sea to meet his kinsmen in France.] And at the end of winter, towards spring, King Harald sent a message all round the kingdom, calling up soldiers and ships from everyone, naming from every county how many were to go. All those who know anything about this all say that no better choice of men for one expedition has ever been prepared in Norway than that. The news was discussed in every man's house, and still most in the king's court, how King Harald must be attacking England. Some men counted up how many great deeds King Harald had done, far and wide and said that there was nothing he could not do. Some said that England was strong, with many men, and that was where the troops called thingmen were, and they had been collected from various countries, mostly Danish speaking. They thought a lot of themselves and were the most experienced of fighters, with such martial spirit that one thingman was no less powerful than two of the best Norsemen or King Harald's champions. ²[And when Ulf the marshal heard this talk he made up a verse:

The king's man doesn't need to fly,
Too soon from King Harald's prow,
If there's booty there to buy,
By staying, as I've done till now.
Though two should run, my girl, not I
From one thingman; I'd scorn to bow.]

¹ Not in F.

² Not in F.



(Hull University Photo)

DIAL IN THE SOUTH AISLE OF THE CHURCH,
ALDBROUGH, EAST YORKSHIRE

The inscription begins at four o'clock and reads, 'Ulf het aræran cyrice for hanum 7 for Gunwara saula.'

'Ulf ordered the church built for himself and for Gunvor's souls.'

It shows the mixture of Old English and Old Norse in the speech of the area in Ulf's day (mid XI century). The form *hanum* is Old Norse, dative of the third person singular pronoun *hann*, but Old Norse would have preferred a reflexive pronoun such as did not exist in Old English. Gunwara should have ended in *u* in Old Norse or *e* in Old English. We see a compromise language which is not simply a mixture of Old English and Old Norse, but produces forms at home in neither.

Ulf Thorvaldsson was a famous benefactor of the church in Yorkshire, and the ivory drinking-horn with which he is said to have endowed the minster with his estates (because his sons had quarrelled) is preserved in the Chapter House of York Minster.

And at the time the expedition was preparing, Ulf the marshal died, and it is said that when King Harald left the graveside he said those words which were a great testimony to Ulf, 'Here lies now the man who was fiercest and faithfullest.' After this Styrkar alone was marshal: previously they both had been. King Harald had '[two hundred] ships and innumerable supply ships and small craft. His son Magnus he left to look after the country, but his son Olaf he took with him. ²[Thorir of Steig did not come, because he had had bad dreams about the king. It happened when the king embarked, so that he was heavy hearted. Jarl Erlend went with him and prophesied the expedition would have bad luck.]

King Harald sailed first west to the Orkneys, and got help there from Pall and Erlendr, sons of Earl Porfinn, and left there his wife Pora and his daughter Maria. Then King Harald led his fleet south to England, and men say that when the king lay in the harbour a woman came down from inland onto a rocky promontory by the harbour and recited a poem:

³Enemies raise red shields high,
As the battle now draws nigh.
Witch sees the king shall die.
Nimbly champing, so can I
Feast on corpses by and by,
Red my wolf's throat inside dye.

Then she disappeared and many thought it no good omen. And another night another woman appeared where they were heading and recited a poem:

⁴The king from the east has been egged to go west.
Carrion birds pick which they like best,
Carry crew's corpses back to the nest.
Such work I like, I take no rest.

And then she hastened away. It is also said that on this expedition this verse was recited to King Harald in a dream,
Your victories have increased your fame,
I at home fell with holy name,
And fear death now comes all the same,
To feed you to the wolf with shame,
For God can't govern all the game.

⁵No one knows who recited this to the king, but most men attribute the verse to King Olaf.

King Harald first arrived so that he began his disembarkation where they call it Cleveland, and all fled. The king took tribute and hostages, went on south to Scarborough and besieged it. It was difficult to attack, with plenty of defenders, yet in the end he captured

¹ 'Many'—F.

² Not in F.

³ Dreamt by one of Harald's men in Norway in F.

⁴ Not in F.

⁵ 'The king seemed to recognise his brother King Olaf.'—F.

it with fire and subdued the north of the country. Thence he sailed on with the fleet to the Humber and so up along the river to Ouse. There came against him the earls of Northumbria, Morcar and Valbjof of Huntingdon, the sons of Godwin, and they had a huge army which had collected during the whole summer and autumn. King Harald offered battle, landed, and arranged his army on the river bank, one wing by the river, the other by the dyke, a deep swamp full of water. The earls had their army with everyone down by the river. The king's banner was near the river, the force was densest there, thinnest by the dyke and there was the least reliable force. And when the attack began, that wing gave way and the English advanced down along the river and so to the dyke, and they thought the Northmen were in flight. King Harald with his force turned to the attack and fought such a fierce battle that all was split before them and they put the English army to flight to where they could see no weapons before them, and that was out into the marsh. Morcar had gone with the standard that was near the dyke, but Valbjof fought against the king nearer to the river, and fled along the river, and the only survivors were those who fled with him. Earl Morcar fell, and others so thickly around him that the dyke was full of dead men where the greatest flight had been and they had fallen in the marsh, but some were stabbed with spears as they ran along the dyke, and it was filled with bodies. As Steinn Herdisarson says,

Men sank and drowned,
Many in the river died,
Young Morcar all around.
The king who would not be denied
There in flight victims found
Who vain escape had tried.

He made the poem in praise of Olaf Haraldsson that this verse comes in. That was the evening of St. Matthew's day, and it was on a ¹Wednesday that year. ²[And after this battle the whole force of the county submitted to King Harald, but some fled away as it says in the poem here:

All the dwellers round the Ouse,
The young prince obeyed.
A new leader did they choose,
The brave king unafraid.
A new king to England came,
Others fled in shame.

And also he said:

Blood rivers gushed a mighty flood,
Vikings waded in men's blood.
Wolves there seized their food.

¹ Thursday, Morcar and Valbjof were brothers of Harold Godwinsson—F.

² Not in F.

Arnorr also mentions how great and decisive this battle was :

Heavy on England fell the sword.
No doubt never but by Ouse,
Was greater victory ever scored,
Or had more men life to lose.

And he also says :

Battle blood ran royal warm,
Black stone flew, banners forward storm.
Thousands were compelled to die,
As spears through skulls quivering fly.
Generous lord of men of Sogn,
Fearless bright-shield, victory won.
The battle went as he desired,
The earls to the town retired.
But their force no quarter got,
A morn that ne'er can be forgot.

These judgements are all of this battle.]

TREACHERY TO KING HARALD

Now King Harald began his expedition to conquer York, and the army lay at Stamford Bridge, and because the king had won such a great victory against great chieftains and superior force, everyone was afraid, and did not think there was any hope of withstanding him. The townsfolk decided to send an offer to Harald, yielding themselves and the town to him, and on the Sunday King Harald went with his troop and all the army to York, and had a meeting outside the town, and all the great men agreed to submit to King Harald and gave him hostages, rich men's sons whom Tostig could pick out for the king, because he knew who were the worthiest men in the town. They went back in the evening to the ships with an undisputed success and were contented. It was decided that there should be a meeting 'in the morning in the town, when King Harald was to appoint governors of the place and give them offices and areas. And the same evening after sunset there came to the town from the south King Harold Godwinsson with a huge army and he rode into the town with the goodwill of all the citizens. The walls and gates were all guarded and no news of this was to come to the Norwegians. The army was in the town overnight.

And on the Monday when King Harald Sigurðarson had eaten, and all his army had breakfasted, he ordered the signal for landing to be blown. He divided up the army who was to go or stay behind, had two men from each troop ashore whilst one remained, so he had two parts of the army. Earl Tostig got ready to go ashore with his troop with King Harald. But Olaf the king's son stayed behind to

¹ 'On the Monday morning'—F.

look after the ships, so did Eystein Moorcock, son of Þorbrand Arnason, who was the best and dearest to King Harald of all his nobles. King Harald had promised him his daughter Maria when they got back to Norway. The weather was very hot and sunny, and they left their mailshirts behind and went ashore with shields and helmets and spears and wore their swords and many had bows and arrows. They were very happy, with no thought of any attack, and when they were getting near the town they saw ¹[a great cloud of dust and under it] bright shields and shining mail. They saw that a great army was riding towards them and King Harald straight away halted his army, had Earl Tostig called to him, and asked him what army that might be that was coming towards them. The earl answered that it was most likely enemy, but it might be, he said, some friends of ours, who may wish to join us with friendship and offer us their help and loyalty. The king spoke, 'We must await quietly this army which is coming'. They did so and the army got bigger and bigger as it got nearer and they saw it clearly, and it was like looking at an ice-field. Then said the earl, 'My lord, let us take some shrewd plan; it is not to be hidden that those are enemies, and the king himself must be with such an army'. Then said King Harald, 'What is your advice?' Earl Tostig answered, 'The first thing to do is to turn back as quickly as possible to our ships for our men and our armour and then after offer such battle as we can; but another plan would be to take to our ships, and then the cavalry cannot overcome us'. The king said, 'We shall do something else. Put our fastest horses under three bold fellows: let them ride as fast as they can and tell the Norwegians of the danger; they will come straight away to help us. The English must sooner expect more fight from us than flight, and we shall fight bitterly a good time before we acknowledge we are beaten.' The earl said, 'You must decide in this, my lord, as in everything, and I was no more eager to flee than anyone else, ²[but had to say what I thought was our best plan.]'

King Harald had his banner raised which they called 'Landwaster'. The standard-bearer was called Friðrek, and in another place Earl Tostig had his banner raised and they arranged the army under these banners. Then said King Harald, 'When the English ride at you, stick the bottom of the spear in the ground and do not have the point any higher than a man's waist, and those in the front row have their spears in the ground as well with the points towards the horses' chests as they come. But the archers will be our wings and rear. Let us stand fast and not lift our spears unless we advance.'³[As Arnorr says:

The fearless prince bade them fight,
Though his fighting men were few.
From Southern England came the might
To crush the king; they together flew.

¹ 'A great army riding towards them, with many handsome horses'—F.

² Not in F.

³ Not in F.

The prince's pride in cruel fight
Barred the generous lord from age
Bold feeder of the wolves that bite
Spared not himself in battle's rage.

And in this interval as they awaited the English army, Þjóðolf the poet recited a verse:

From the king's sons I'll not part,
They are men of hawk-like heart.
Though our king himself should fall
At God's will, they'll revenge it all.]

And when King Harald had arranged the army, the English army came up, and its vanguard halted and waited for the rest. King Harald Sigurðarson rode out in front of his army on a black horse with lighter patches to see how the army was arrayed, and indicate if he wanted it further forward anywhere. As he rode, the horse fell and he came off and said, 'A fall is lucky.' Then said King Harold Godwinsson to a Norwegian who was with him, 'Do you recognise that tall man who just shot off his horse, with blue cloak and fine helmet?' 'My lord,' said he, 'that was the Norwegians' king'. Then said Harold Godwinsson, 'A large man and a great one, and one assumes his luck now has left him'. Straight away twenty horsemen rode forward along the Norwegian front, fully armoured, '[horses as well]. Then one horseman cried, 'Is Earl Tostig in your army?' He answered, 'It is not to be hidden that you meet him here'. Then the horseman said, 'King Harold your brother sends you greetings and the promise of a truce and all Northumberland, and, rather than that you should not agree with him, he will give you a third of the kingdom to share with him'. Earl Tostig answered, 'This offer is somewhat different from the contempt and hostility of last autumn. If the same offer had been made then as now, many a man would still be alive who will never come back home again, and the English king's dominion would be better placed. Now if we take that choice, what will ²my brother offer King Harald of Norway for his trouble?' The horseman answered, 'The king has told you what he will give him of England. He shall have seven feet space or longer as he is taller than most.' Then the earl spoke, 'Go now and say so to King Harold ³my brother, that he should prepare for battle. Norwegians must say, if they tell the truth, something other than that Earl Tostig went from King Harald and into the party of his enemies, when he was on the point of battle in England for the kingdom. Rather shall we all go the same way, die honourably or gain England by our victory.' Then the horsemen rode back again, and after that King Harald Sigurðarson spoke to Earl Tostig. 'Who was that eloquent man who was talking to you?' The earl said, 'That was King Harold Godwinsson himself.' Then said King Harald Sigurðarson, 'This

¹ Not in F.

² 'You'—F.

³ Not in F.

was kept from me too long, for they were come so near our army that 'my namesake would never have been able to announce the death of our men'. The earl answered, 'We see that, my lord, that it was incautious of such a chieftain, and it might have been as you say; he came because he wanted to offer truce to his brother, and much authority. Certainly I would be justly called a worse chieftain ²[if I] awaited old age as the slayer of my own brother, and it is better to be killed by one's brother than to kill him.' Then said King Harald to his men, 'This was a small man, lads, and even so he was standing cockily in his stirrups.' Men say that King Harald recited this:

We go forward in the fight,
Armourless through sword blades bright,
Their helmets shine, I've none to gleam;
Ours, on the ships, are down by the stream.

Emma was the name of his mailshirt, ³it stretched halfway down his legs, and was so strong that no weapon could cut it. ⁴[but his banner was called Landwaster as I said before, and it lived up to its name far and wide.] And now said King Harald, 'That verse was not well made which we recited earlier, and now we must make another one better'. Then he spoke this verse:

We creep under no shield in fight,
As me bade my lady bright.
She, necklace ringed, bade my head high
To stand, where swords and skulls do fly.

⁴Now the English make an attack on the Norwegians and there was a hard encounter. The spears were fixed so that the horses could not get through, and now both sides fought with all their might and gradually casualties began. Now there was such difference in numbers that the English could pick out bands and surround them and go at them from all sides and now naturally there was a difference in the casualties on each side. The battle order was broken and scattered and many of King Harald's army fell, and when the king saw that the banner was hard pressed he gripped the hilt of his sword with both hands and hewed on both sides, ⁵[did not await the banner but cleared a path in front of himself and killed many men. All men say the same thing, that never did they see a more valiant advance, and fighting with such proud valour. Both his hands were bloody and he went through his enemies as if he were raging mad, and it seemed he feared neither fire nor iron], as Stufur says:

He goes glad, through battle as through breeze,
Nor flame, nor naked sword, he flees.
Better example no man sees.

¹ 'This Harald'—F.

² 'If I took that choice than if I'—F.

³ Not in F.

⁴ Bjodolf's verse 'From the king's sons', omitted earlier, is inserted by F at this point.

⁵ Not in F.

and Arnorr says this in his poem :

The valiant king had no defence,
Or fear in heart only offence,
When his army saw the chieftain's chief,
With bloody sword bring swift relief.

Now King Harald got a wound in the front of his throat so that blood straightway gushed from his mouth. That was his death-blow and he fell at once to the ground and when this happened the English attacked so strongly that all those who had stood near the king were killed. ¹[There was a great shout from the English,] and when Earl Tostig learnt that the king was dead, he turned immediately towards where he saw the banner Landwaster and encouraged the men, bidding them bear the same banner before him, and there was another fierce fight, because all the Norwegians encouraged one another, and never wished to flee.

Then King Harold Godwinsson had loud proclamation made, offered a truce to his brother Tostig and all the survivors, but they all shouted back and said they would take no truce, they said they would conquer their enemies or die round their king, as Arnorr the earl's poet says :

Ill-fated was the terrible king's fall,
Gilded swords killed his chieftains all.
The glorious king's men rather choose
Than truce, round him their lives to lose.

Now the battle began for a second time, with Earl Tostig leading the army, and in this interval before the armies clashed again, Þjóðolf recited this verse :

Men are dead, the army bled,
By Harald pressed to this voyage west.
The high-hearted king, whose death I sing,
Has left us all, backs to the wall.

This battle was hard but not long, slaughter began and many Norwegians fell. ²[The earl fought valiantly, following the banner and before it finished he fell there with glory and a good reputation.] And at the same time Eystein Moorcock arrived with the troops who had been at the ships and they were fully armed and the battle started up a third time and Eystein bore Landwaster, King Harald's banner. This battle was the bitterest of all these encounters, many English fell, and it was actually in the balance whether the English would fly. Eystein and his men were so enraged that they stormed on, and on the other hand they were tired out for they had had a very

¹ Not in F.

² Not in F.

long journey in chainmail and the weather was hot and sunny and they were almost worn out with fatigue so that they threw off their mailshirts, '[and Porkell Hamarskald mentions this in his poem on Eystein Moorcock. They fought for a time, and went into it so that they would get a quick decision, death or victory.] But the battle went as was to be expected, that those had the better part who had the bigger numbers. Eystein Moorcock fell there in that struggle which is since called 'Moorcock's attack'. There fell almost all the Norwegian leaders, and that was the ending of the day. Not all were equally zealous in battle.'²

When the chiefs were dead, and all the great men, some were fated to live longer, and thus got away. Styrkar the marshal escaped and he was the most famous man. He got away in this fashion, that he got hold of a horse and rode away in the evening. A wind got up, the heat of the sun was all over, and he was only in his shirt with helmet on his head and bright sword in his hand. He was very cold as his heat wore off. There came towards him a carter wearing a long sheepskin coat. Then said Styrkar, 'Will you give us the coat, farmer?' He said, 'Not to you, you must be a Norwegian, and I know this by your speech.' Then said Styrkar, 'If I am a Norwegian, what will you do then, farmer?' He said, 'I should kill you, but our encounter is so inconvenient that I haven't any weapon to do it with.' Styrkar said, 'If you can't kill me, farmer, I must try if I can kill you.' He struck with his sword, and caught him on the neck so that his head flew off. He took the coat, ran to his horse and rode down to the ships.³[Arnorr the earls' poet also says this about the last battle Harald and his men fought:

The prince's fame was widely spread
Who warships south from Nid river led.

and he also says:

It's dark to me, no poet can see
Who has done more with equal war.
World's greatest heart now drops apart
No other deed to tell I need.

and furthermore,

Harald hard-headed had mightier sway,
Than any other kingly clay;
Kept that fame to his dying day
And now in heaven ranks higher than they.
None more famous fell in fray.]

¹ Not in F.

² F.—'It turned out that, as people say, "There is always someone who escapes from every battle".'

³ Not in F.

OLAF HARALDSON'S VOYAGE EAST

After this great event Olaf, the son of King Harald,¹ took over command of the remnant of the army, which was still alive, and got ready to leave. They put out to sea, leaving the coast immediately and arrived that autumn in Orkney and stayed there for the winter. Men say that the same day King Harald fell, his daughter Maria died in the west in the Orkneys and people say that they only had one life between the two of them. She was the wisest of women as well, and the most beautiful and loyal. The next summer after this Olaf returned to Norway with the whole army; ²[as Steinn Herdisarson says:

The prince let swift ships leap in spray,
As autumn came, turned his prows out
By Spurn Head treads the watery way
The sea crashes over the bulwarks stout.

and he also says:

Enemy of English unafraid,
Steers East on his raid
Back comes Rømerike's lord
Olaf welcome from shipboard.]

¹ ' . . . and Skuli, son of Earl Tostig, was with him.'—F.

² Not in F.

HEIMSKRINGLA

Heimskringla was written by the great Icelandic historian Snorri Sturluson after 1220, but no complete manuscript earlier than the fourteenth century *Codex Frisianus* now survives. A much earlier manuscript of about 1260 was lost in the burning of the Copenhagen library in 1728 but various transcripts of it survive and this translation is from cap. 78 onwards of the edition of *Heimskringla* based on them by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Reykjavik 1941. There are many translations of *Heimskringla* of various reliability, based on original texts of varying reliability. The recent reprint of the nineteenth century translation by S. Laing in Everyman's Library, though not much revised, is probably the best accessible.

Chapter 78

But when Harold got to know that Tostig his brother wished to remove him from the kingship, he did not trust him, for Tostig was cunning and a great man who enjoyed the friendship of the chiefs. King Harold deprived Tostig of his military command and all the authority he had before over the other earls in the land. Earl Tostig could on no account endure being his' brother's inferior. He went away with his army, south over the sea to Flanders, stayed there briefly, went to Friesland and thence to Denmark to meet his relative King Sweyn. Earl Ulf, father of King Sweyn, and Gyða, mother of Earl Tostig, were brother and sister. The earl asked King Sweyn for his help and support. King Sweyn invited him to stay with him and said that he should have an earldom in Denmark, that he should be an honoured chieftain there. The earl said, 'I want to go back to England, to my family inheritance. If I cannot get help from you in this, king, then I will rather offer you all the support I can raise in England if you will take a Danish army to England to conquer it as Knut your mother's brother did.' The king said, 'So much am I a lesser man than my kinsman King Knut that I can scarcely hold Denmark against the Norwegians. Knut the Old inherited Denmark, but won England by war and battle, and at one time it was not unlikely that he would pay for it with his life. He got Norway without a battle. Now I model my style more after my own limitations than after the triumphs of my kinsman King Knut.' Then said the earl, 'Less has come of my visit than I thought, that you, gifted as you are, would be slow to respond to the need of me, your relative. It may now be that I shall seek the friendship of those who are less fitted, but it may be that I shall find a chieftain who can rise to the occasion much better than you, king.' Then the king and the earl parted, not very contentedly.

Chapter 79

Earl Tostig went on his way and came to Norway and went to meet King Harald. He was in the Oslo fjord. When they met the earl presented his case, told him all about his voyage since he had

¹ 'youngest brothers inferior, as he was the senior of them all.'—H.

left England, and asked the king to give him help to obtain his rightful power in England. The king replied so, that Norwegians would not be very eager to go raiding in England and have an Englishman as commander. 'People say this,' said he, 'that you English are not completely to be trusted'. The earl answered, 'Is it true, as I have heard men say in England, that King Magnus your kinsman sent men to King Edward with the message that King Magnus owned England just as he did Denmark, by inheritance from Harðacnut as their agreement was?' The king said, 'If he owned it why didn't he get it then?' The earl said, 'Why don't you have Denmark, as King Magnus had before you?' The king said, 'The Danes needn't make fun of us Norwegians. We've made them smart, those relatives of yours'. Then said the earl, 'If you won't tell me I must tell you: King Magnus got Denmark because the chiefs there supported him, and you didn't because all the inhabitants were against you. Magnus couldn't get England because the people all wanted Edward as king. If you want to get England, I can arrange that the majority of the English chiefs will be your friends and supporters. I fall short of my brother Harold in nothing but the name of king. Everyone knows that no warrior like you has ever been born in the north, and I wonder at it that you have spent fifteen years fighting for Denmark and will not take England that lies open to you.' King Harald considered carefully what the earl had said, and understood that most of what he said was true, and at last was eager to get the kingdom. Then the king and the earl talked long and often. They agreed that they would go to England in the summer and conquer the country. King Harald sent word through all Norway and called out the national army, half the people. This was much discussed. There were many guesses about where the expedition was for. Some spoke and reckoned up King Harald's triumphs, that it would not lie beyond him, but some said that England would be too difficult, too big a population, and there was that force called the thingmen. They were so fierce that one of them was better than two of Harald's best men. Then Ulf the marshal answered:

The king's man doesn't need to fly,
Too soon from King Harald's prow,
If there's booty there to buy,
By staying, as I've done till now.
Though two should run, my girl, not I
From one thingman; I'd scorn to bow.

Marshal Ulf died that spring. King Harald stood by his grave and said, as he went away, 'There lies he now who was fiercest and faithfullest.' Earl Tostig sailed west to Flanders in the spring to meet the troops that had accompanied him abroad from England, and the others that had gathered to him both from England and in Flanders.

Chapter 80

King Harald's army gathered in Solundr. But when King Harald was ready to leave Niðaros he went to the shrine of St. Olaf

and opened it and cut his hair and nails and locked the shrine again and threw the key out into the river Nið¹ and the shrine of St. Olaf the king has never been opened since. That was thirty-five years after his death. He also lived thirty-five years in this world. King Harald led the troops that were with him south to meet his army. There a great army was collected so that men say King Harald had nearly two hundred ships and supply ships and small boats as well. Whilst they lay in Solundr a man called Gyrðr on the king's ship had a dream. He seemed to be on the king's ship looking up at the island where a troll wife stood with a knife in one hand and a trough in the other. It seemed when he looked round the king's ships that there were birds sitting on the ships. They were all eagles and ravens. The troll wife said:

The king from the east has been egged to go west,
Carrión birds pick which they like best,
Carry crew's corpses back to the nest.
Such work I like, I take no rest.

Chapter 81

A man called Þorðr is also mentioned, who was on a ship which lay near the king's ship. He dreamt during the night that he saw the king's fleet landing on a coast which seemed to be England. He saw a great army on land and both sides seemed to prepare for battle, with many banners in the air, but in front of the native army rode a great troll wife seated on a wolf, and the wolf had a man's corpse in its mouth and blood dripped from its jaws, and when it had devoured that she threw another into its mouth and so one after another and he swallowed every one. She said:

Enemies raise red shields high,
As the battle now draws nigh.
Witch sees the king shall die.
Nimbly champing so can I,
Feast on corpses by and by,
Red my wolf's throat inside dye.

Chapter 82

Furthermore King Harald dreamt during the night that he was in Niðaros and met King Olaf his brother and Olaf recited this verse to him:

Your victories have increased your fame,
I at home fell with holy name,
And fear death now comes all the same,
To feed you to the wolf with shame,
For God can't govern all the game.

Many other dreams were reported, and prodigies of other kinds, and mostly gloomy. King Harald, before he left Trondheim, had

¹Some say it was off Agdanes he threw it overboard. The shrine was not opened again until King Magnus Hakonsson's day'—H. (1263-80).

had his son Magnus accepted as king, to govern Norway whilst King Harald was away. Pora Þorberg's daughter stayed as well, but Queen Ellisif went with him, and her daughters Maria and Ingigerð. Olaf, King Harald's son, journeyed abroad with him.

Chapter 83

But when King Harald was ready, and a favourable wind permitted, he sailed out to sea and made landfall in Shetland, but some of his force arrived in Orkney. King Harald waited some time before he sailed to Orkney, and there accompanied him thence a great army and Pall and Erlendr, sons of Earl Þorfinn, but he left Queen Ellisif and their daughters Maria and Ingigerð behind there. Thence he sailed south along Scotland and then along England and came to land where it is called Cleveland. He went ashore, harried and subjugated the land without resistance. Then he laid into Scarborough and fought against the townsfolk. He went up on the rock there is there [which is highest there *Frisianus*] and had a large bonfire built and set fire to it. When the fire was blazing they took large forks and threw it down into the town. Each house then caught fire from the next. The whole town went up in flames. The Norwegians killed many men and took all the booty they laid hands on. The English had no choice, if they were to live, but to submit to King Harald. He subjugated the whole country wherever he went. Then King Harald with all his army continued southwards down the coast and came in at Holderness. A concentration met him there and King Harald won another battle.

Chapter 84

Then King Harald went to the Humber, up [along the river]¹ and landed. The earls were in York, Morcar and Valþjof his brother, with a huge army. King Harald was lying in the Ouse when the army of the earls came down. King Harald went ashore and arrayed his army. One wing lay forward of the river, the other extended up inland to a dyke. It was a deep, wide marsh full of water. The earls allowed their army to concentrate down on the river with the whole body. The king's banner was near the river. He had a dense array there, but thinnest by the dyke and least reliable. The earls attacked down the dyke. The Norwegian wing that extended to the dyke gave way, but the English thought that the Norwegians were seeking flight and followed them up. The banner of Morcar advanced there.

Chapter 85

But when King Harald saw that the English formation had come down with the dyke opposite them, he had the attack signal blown and encouraged the army heartily, had the banner Landwaster borne

¹along the river Vinu to the Ouse'—H. This may suggest that the author of H thought of Brunanburh (O.N. Vinheithi in *Egils Saga*) as being near York.

forward, developed such a fierce attack that all gave way before it. There was great slaughter in the earls' army. The troops soon took to flight, some ran up along the dyke and down, but most ran out over the dyke. The slain lay so thick that the Norwegians could go dry-shod over the marsh. Morcar died there. So says Steinn Herdisarson:¹

Men sank and drowned,
Many in the river died,
Young Morcar all around.
The king who would not be denied,
There in flight victims found,
Who in vain escape had tried.

Steinn Herdisarson made this poem in praise of Olaf, King Harald's son, and says that Olaf took part in the battle with King Harald his father. This is also mentioned in Harald's lay:

Fallen lay
In the fen
Valbjof's men,
Stabbed were they.
Victors trod
All dry-shod
Over mortal clay.

Earl Valbjof and those who escaped fled to York. Casualties were very heavy. The battle was on Wednesday, the day before St. Matthew's day.

Chapter 86

Earl Tostig had come north from Flanders to King Harald when he arrived in England, and the earl was in all these battles. It went as he had said to Harald before they met, that many men joined them in England. They were Tostig's friends and relations and a great reinforcement to the king's army. After this battle told of before, all the forces of the county submitted to King Harald, but some fled. Then King Harald began his expedition to overcome the town,² and the army lay at Stamford Bridge. But because the king had won so great a victory over great generals and superior forces, everyone was afraid and despaired of resistance. The citizens decided to send a message to King Harald offering themselves and their town into his power. The offer was so made that on the Sunday King Harald went with all the army to the town and had a meeting outside the walls, the king and his men, and the citizens came to join it. Everyone agreed to obey King Harald, and they gave him hostages, great men's sons, as Earl Tostig knew by sight everyone in the

¹ H inserts here the verses of *Morkinskinna*, whose account it combines with *Heimskringla's*.

² 'Jörk'—H.

town; the king returned down to the ships in the evening with victory to his own desire and was very contented. A meeting was fixed for early Monday in the town. King Harald was then to furnish the town with governors and allot them their offices and areas. That same evening after sunset there came into the town from the south King Harold Godwinsson with a huge army. He rode into the town with the goodwill and gratitude of all the citizens. All the town walls and roads were then guarded, so that no news should come to the Norwegians. The army was in the town overnight.

Chapter 87

Monday, when Harald Sigurðarson had eaten breakfast, he had the signal for landing blown, drew up the army and divided forces who were to go or who were to remain behind. He had from each troop two men ashore whilst one stayed behind. Earl Tostig got ready to go ashore with King Harald with his troop, but there stayed behind to look after the ships Olaf the king's son, and Pall and Erlendr the Orkney earls, and Eystein Moorcock, son of Þorberg Arnason, who was the best and dearest to the king of all the nobles. King Harald had promised him Maria, his daughter. The weather was exceptionally good, with hot sunshine. People left their mail-shirts behind, but went ashore with shields and helmets and spears and girded with swords, and many had bow and arrows as well and were quite happy. But when they were getting to the neighbourhood of the town [there rode towards them a large force.] They saw a cloud of dust and beneath it bright shields and shining mail-shirts. Then the king halted the army, called Earl Tostig to him and asked what force it might be. The earl said that it was more than likely hostile, but said it might be some of his kinsmen seeking alliance and friendship, to receive from the king in return help and confidence. Then the king said that they must first keep quiet and find out about the force. They did so, and the force was bigger as it drew nearer and it was like looking at an ice-field, so the weapons shone.

Chapter 88

King Harald Sigurðarson said then, 'Let us take some shrewd plan, for it is not to be concealed that that is hostile, and it must be the king himself.' Then the earl replied, 'The first thing is to turn back as quickly as possible to our ships for our men and weapons then offer battle after our means, but for another alternative take to our ships and then the cavalry cannot overcome us.' Then answered King Harald, 'I will do something else, put our fastest horses under three bold fellows, let them ride as rapidly as possible and tell our men – then help will soon come to us – because the Englishmen can look for the bitterest battle before we are beaten.' Then the earl said that the king should decide this as other things, and that he himself

¹ Not in H.

was not keen to retreat.¹ Then King Harald had his banner Landwaster set up. The standard-bearer was called Friðrek.

Chapter 89

Then King Harald drew up his army, in a long and not very thick battle order. He curved the wings backwards so that they met. That was then a large ring, evenly thick on every hand seen from outside, shield by shield overlapping, but the king's troop was inside the circle and so was the banner. That was a picked body. In another place was Earl Tostig with his troop. He had another banner. They were so arranged because the king knew that cavalry used to ride encircling and then back. Now the king said that his troop and the earl's troop would go forward wherever they were most needed, 'but our archers shall accompany us, and those who stand furthest forward shall put the bottom of their spears in the ground and present the point to the chest of the horsemen if they ride at us, but those who stand in the next row present their spearpoints to their horses' chests.

Chapter 90

King Harold Godwinsson arrived with a huge army, both cavalry and footsoldiers. ²King Harald Sigurðarson rode round his army and inspected how it was arrayed. He sat on a black horse with lighter markings. The horse fell under him and the king off it. He got up quickly and said 'A fall is lucky.' Then said Harold, king of England, to the Norwegians who were with him, 'Did you recognise the tall man who fell from his horse, with a blue cloak and a fine helmet?' 'That is the king himself,' they said. The English king said, 'A large man and leader-like, and one assumes his luck has left him.'

Chapter 91

Twenty horsemen rode forward from the thingmen in front of the Norwegian army and they were fully armoured and their horses as well. Then one horseman cried, 'Is Earl Tostig in the army?' He answered, 'It is not to be hidden that you meet him here.' Then said one horseman, 'Harold, your brother, sends you greetings and the promise of a truce and all Northumberland, and rather than that you should not agree with him he will give you a third of the kingdom to share with him.' Then the earl said, 'That is a somewhat different offer from the hostility and contempt of last winter. Had that been offered then, many a man would be alive who now is dead, and the kingdom of England would be better off. Now if we were to take that choice, what will he offer King Harald Sigurðarson for his labour?'

¹ 'But I had to say what seemed to me the wisest plan'—H.

² Arnorr's verse, 'Fearless prince' is inserted here in H as in M, and the statement (probably based on it) that the Norse army was less than half the English.

Then said the horseman, 'He has said something before about what he will give him of England; seven foot space or longer as he is taller than other men.' Then said the earl, 'Go now and say to King Harold that he should prepare for battle. Norwegians shall say, if they tell the truth, something other than that Earl Tostig went from King Harold and into the party of his enemies when he was to fight west in England. Rather shall we all go the same way, die honourably or gain England by our victory.' Then the horsemen rode back. Then said King Harald Sigurðarson, 'Who was this eloquent man?' Said the earl, 'That was King Harold Godwinsson.' Then said King Harald Sigurðarson, 'This was kept from us too long. They were come so near our army, that this Harold would never have been able to announce the death of our men.' Then said the earl, 'That is true my lord. It was incautious of such a chieftain, and it might have been as you say. [I saw that, but he wanted to offer me truce and a great kingdom, but I would have been his death if I had revealed him.] I would rather that he were my death than I his.' Then said King Harald Sigurðarson to his men, 'This was a small man and he was standing cockily in his stirrup.' So men say that King Harald recited this verse:

We go forward in the fight
 Armourless, through sword blades bright.
 Their helmets shine, I've none to gleam,
 Ours, on the ships, are down by the stream.

His mailshirt was called Emma. It was long, so that it covered halfway down his shins, and so strong that no weapon had ever cut it. Then said King Harald Sigurðarson, 'That was badly composed, and a better must be made.' Then he recited this:

We creep under no shield in fight,
 As me bade my lady bright.
 She, necklace ringed, bade my head high
 To stand, where swords and skulls do fly.

Then Þjóðolf recited,

From the king's sons I'll not part,
 They are men of hawk-like heart.
 Though our king himself should fall,
 At God's will, for vengeance they will conquer all.

Chapter 92

²Now the battle begins, and the English make an attack on the Norwegians. There was a hard encounter. It was not easy for the English to charge the Norwegians because of their arrows, and they

¹ 'We would have been dissimilar heroes, he offering me truce and rule, and me becoming the cause of his death if I recognised him; so I acted as I did, for'—H.

² 'People say that the best and wisest plan would have been Tostig's first, that they should have returned to their ships as soon as they saw the army; but because you cannot save the doomed, they paid the price of the king's pride, that he could not bear the accusation of flight, as Arnorr says, "The prince's pride"' H.

rode round them in a ring. It was at first an arms-length battle whilst the Norwegians kept formation, the English sometimes riding up and then away and accomplishing nothing. But when the Norwegians saw that the charges seemed half-hearted they attacked them and wanted to put them to flight, but when they had thus broken their shieldwall the English rode at them from all sides and they were struck by spears and arrows. But when King Harald Sigurðarson saw that, he advanced in the battle to its heart. Then there was the fiercest of fights and many fell on both sides. Then King Harald Sigurðarson was so angry that he ran forward from the ranks and hewed with both hands. Neither helmet nor mailshirt could withstand him. All those nearest him fled. It was in the balance whether the English would turn in flight. ¹So says Arnorr, the earl's poet:

The valiant king had no defence
Or fear in heart only offence,
When his army saw the chieftains' chief
With bloody sword bring swift relief.

King Harald Sigurðarson was wounded by an arrow in the throat. That was his death-wound. He fell and all the troop who had gone forward with him except those who ran back and they preserved the banner. There was still the fiercest fighting. Then Earl Tostig moved under the king's banner. Then each side drew up its army again, and there was a very long lull in the battle. Then Þjóðolf recited:

Men are dead, the army bled,
By Harald pressed, to this voyage west.
The high-hearted king, whose death I sing,
Has left us all, backs to the wall.

But before the battle was joined again, Harold Godwinsson offered truce to Earl Tostig his brother and the other men still alive in the Norwegian army. But the Norwegians all cried out and said that each would sooner fall across the other than they would take truce from the English, and gave a battle-cry. Then the battle began a second time. So says Arnorr, the earl's poet:

Ill-fated was the terrible king's fall.
Gilded swords killed his chieftains all.
The glorious king's men rather choose,
Than truce, round him their lives to lose.

Chapter 93

Eystein Moorcock arrived at the same time from the ships with the force accompanying him. They were fully armed. Eystein then took King Harald's banner Landwaster. Now the battle started up a third time, and it was fiercest of all. Many English fell, and it was in the balance whether they would fly. That battle was called 'Moor-

¹ H. inserts Stuf's verse from M.

cock's attack'. Eystein and his men had journeyed so energetically from the ships that they were already so tired as to be almost incapable before they went into battle, but afterwards they were so wild that they did not try to protect themselves as long as they could stand. In the end they threw off their mailshirts. Then it was easy for the English to find vulnerable spots, but some ran and died unwounded. Almost all the Norwegian leaders fell. That was the ending of the day. Then it turned out, as was to be expected, that not all were alike, many fled, and many, as they were fated, escaped. It was dark at night before the killing was finished.

Chapter 94

Styrkar, King Harald Sigurðarson's marshal, an excellent man, got away. He got a horse and so rode off. In the evening a wind sprang up, rather cold, but Styrkar had no more clothes than his shirt, helmet on his head and drawn sword in his hand. He was cold as he cast off his heat. There came towards him a waggoner in a padded jacket. Then said Styrkar, 'Will you sell your coat, farmer?' 'Not to you,' he said, 'You must be a Norwegian, I recognise your speech.' Then said Styrkar, 'If I am a Norwegian, what will you do then?' The farmer answered, 'I should kill you, but now it is so unfortunate that I have no weapon to use.' Then said Styrkar, 'If you cannot kill me, farmer, then I shall see if I can kill you,' raised his sword and laid it to his neck so that the head shot off, took the skin jacket and jumped on his horse and went down to the beach.

(Chapter 95 deals with William the Conqueror).

Chapter 96

King Harold Godwinsson allowed Olaf, King Harald Sigurðarson's son, and the troops with him who had not fallen in the battle, to depart. (The remainder of this chapter and Chapter 97 deal with events in the south).

Chapter 98

Olaf, son of King Harald, led his force away from England, and sailed out from Spurn Head, and came in the autumn to Orkney, and the news was that Maria, daughter of King Harald Sigurðarson, had died suddenly, on the same day and at the same time as King Harald her father fell. Olaf stayed there for the winter. Afterwards in the summer Olaf went east to Norway.

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