



TRACES OF THE NORSE MYTHOLOGY IN THE ISLE OF MAN

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**BY
P. M. C. KERMODE**

**(READ BEFORE THE ISLE OF MAN NATURAL HISTORY AND
ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY, RAMSEY, DECEMBER 18TH, 1903).**

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TRACES OF THE NORSE MYTHOLOGY IN THE ISLE OF MAN

(Read before the Isle of Man Natural History and Antiquarian Society, Ramsey, December 18th, 1903.)

P. M. C. KERMODE, F.S.A.SCOT., &c.

CARLYLE ("Heroes and Hero Worship ") has given us three good reasons for taking an interest in Scandinavian Paganism. It is the latest, having continued till the eleventh century; it was the creed of our fathers, the men whose blood still runs in our veins; and, it has been so well preserved. It might be added as a further reason for very special interest in the later Viking Mythology, that it was developed by the Scandinavian settlers *in the British Isles*, and took its final form under the hands of a few gifted poets of mixed Scandinavian and Celtic descent, and, most recent discovery of all, that it is here and here only--in Man and in the district of Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire--that one finds scenes and stories from this Viking faith depicted on our Christian sculptured stones of the eleventh, or twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The Vikings¹ appeared here first as pagans and plunderers, their earliest recorded attack being in 798, when they "burned Inis Patrick, broke the shrine of Dachonna, and took the spoils of the sea."--"Ann. Ult."

When Harold Haarfager was engaged in bringing all Norway under his sway, many of his countrymen, rather than submit, sailed westwards, greatly increasing the number of emigrants. Having succeeded in establishing his kingdom, Harold followed in 883, seeking to drive them out of the western islands. From Caithness, Hebrides, and the Orkneys, many made for the

¹ The Vikings, Wick-folk, supposed to be so called as "men of the bays" from their infesting Wicks, creeks, and fiords; but, I prefer Vigfusson's later suggestion ("Corp. Poet. Bor.", I., Intro. lxiii.) that it was rather because they came to us from the Wick (Scage Rack), "the centre and natural outlet of the dales of South Norwegian tribes, of Gauts, of Jutes, the land whence Godfred and Ragnar and Guthrum, aye, and Harold Fairhair and his sons, and Cnut also, sailed West whence certainly came the leaders of the greatest kingdoms the Northern Emigrants raised in these islands."

Faroës and Iceland, which owe their population to this circumstance, and it was among the latter that the epic prose compositions--the Sagas--originated. Others sought refuge in the isles--the Sudreys--whither Harold chased them as far south as the Isle of Man.

It appears to have been about the end of this ninth century that they came finally to settle in our island, these settlers being closely connected with the founders of the Scandinavian kingdoms in York and in Dublin. It was the descendants of these northern fathers and Celtic mothers, whose passionate eloquence, fluency, and vivid imagination, inspired the "Eddic Poems," weaving into the older myths weird legends and fantastic tales founded on faint echoes of Celtic heathendom and distorted views of the Christian religion! Their previous contact with our Celtic cousins in the Sudreys,² and familiarity with their language, habits, and customs, and the connection of many of them by marriage ties, explain how they came to be received when they settled in our poor and sparsely-peopled island, not as foes, but as friends and powerful allies.

By the end of the tenth century Man and the Sudreys were united with the Nordreys and Caithness under Sigurd Earl of the Orkneys. Sigurd was captured by Olaf Tryggvason in the year 1000, and only released upon his undertaking that the Orkneys should accept the Christian religion, as all Norway had already done. The same year the Icelandic Althing formally legalized Christianity, and there can be no doubt that within the next few years the Scandinavian settlers generally had become at all events nominal Christians, and so we find that in our own island, before the last quarter of the century, we had a Norwegian--Roolwer (Hrolfr)--as Bishop in Man.

After the Battle of Largs, in 1263, and the destruction by storm of the Norwegian fleet, and after the death, in 1265, of our own king--Magnus, the Norwegian claims in Man were made over by treaty to Alexander III. of Scotland. Norse influence declined, and Norse traditions speedily died out or

² The Vikings named the Orkneys and Shetlands the Nordreys or Northern Isles, and the Hebrides and islands off the West of Scotland, the Sudreys, Southern Isles, a term which has come down to us in the name of our ecclesiastical diocese, Latinized as "Sodorensis et Manniæ" which was contracted into "Sodor: et Man:" and finally corrupted into Sodor and Man!

became overgrown and lost in the spread of our original Celtic folklore and the power of the incoming English civilization and culture.

MYTHOLOGY

I draw this sketch from Snorri's "Prose Edda" (G. W. Dasent, Trans.); Grimm's "Teutonic Mythology"; Cleasby and Vigfusson's "Icelandic Dictionary"; and Vigfusson and York Powell's "Corpus Poeticum Boreale."

As pointed out in the Corp. Poet. Bor., the old Norse mythology, with its very primitive conceptions of the origin of the universe--the earth the flesh of a mighty giant,³ ocean his blood, the rocks his bones, heaven made out of his skull, clouds out of his brains, and so on; its gods the personifications of natural forces or deified heroes; its belief in ghosts living in barrows--ancestor worship; all this gave way to the more complex ideas of the Viking period, due to contact with the Celtic folk and a smattering acquaintance with the Christian religion.

"In this system Odin became King of the Slain in Battle, head of a royal race of Anses, a Charlemain of the Empyrean, with a splendid Hall, a host of Hand-maidens, a chosen guard of the fallen kings and heroes of all generations, who feast on (boiled) pork and mead, and spend the day in war-like sport, just as their earthly types did. Then there is a great Last Battle to be fought by the Warrior-Angels and the Elect against the Beast and the Dragon, and the Demons of Fire, an eschatology the origin of which is very plain."⁴

As the authors point out, however, this Wicking religion was never the accepted faith of the Norsemen, Danes, and Swedes. Some of its most famous myths, such as that which transformed the gallows-tree--Yggdrasil (lit., Odin's Steed) to a Tree of Life, may never have travelled beyond the single poem in which it was wrought out by a master mind!

Besides the remarkable illustrations carved on stone, showing the hold their ancient myths and legends had on the sculptors of these Christian monuments in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, we are able to trace

³ Vafthrudnis-mal.

⁴ "Corp. Poet. Bor." II. 459. But the Authors say "roast" pork!

them in many of the usages, rites, and customs which have come down to our own day, in sayings, and proverbs, and names--in a word, in our Folklore.

Now, as to the High Gods, or Anses, we are met with the curious fact, which our familiarity with it alone accounts for our regarding as a matter of course, that of the seven days of the week all but the first two are called after Scandinavian Gods.

The third day, *Dies Martis*, was assigned to Ty, Tiu, a god of war, the most daring of the gods. It was he who placed his right hand in the jaws of the Fenri Wolf when that monster demanded such a pledge of good faith before suffering the gods to bind him in the charmed fetters (*gleipnir*). His hand was bitten off, and he feels the loss when in the last great battle he meets the hound Garm and each slays the other. As we have no figure of Tiu, nor do I recognize him in our folklore, except that Tuesday was considered lucky, I pass on to the next.

Dies Mercurii, becomes the day of Odin, Woden, the supreme god, god of Heaven, the Heaven itself (*Ouranos*); the fountain-head of wisdom and founder of poetry, writing, and culture; lord of battle and giver of the highest blessings, especially of victory; later, of magic and sorcery. His is the creative power: out of Ash and Elm he made man and woman. The later tales of his wonderful travels, his many names and disguises, his eloquence and magical power, may have suggested to the Romans a resemblance to Mercury (Hermes).

He is represented as old, long-bearded, one-eyed. A myth of the earliest type relates how his eye was given in pledge to Mimi, Giant of the Abyss, for a single draught of the deep Well of Wisdom. He is clad in a blue cloak (invisibility) and, like Hermes, a broad-brimmed hat or a Hood, whence one of his many names--Grim, which became a favourite man's name, and, as such occurs in two of our runic inscriptions. Another name, Gautr, Father (as in *Vsp*:--"*Upp reiss Odin alderen Gautr*"--Up rose Odin, the ancient sire), was also a favourite, and occurs as that of our greatest Scandinavian sculptor, who, on a cross at Michael, claims to have "made this and all in Man"! He is "wielder of *Gungrnir*," the spear, which, as he hurls it over the battlefield, all those over whom it passes are doomed to fall, and "fare to Odin."

He is accompanied by two wolves, Geri and Freki--Greed and Fierceness. Two Ravens, Hugin and Munnin--Mind and Memory, fly through all the worlds and return to rest on his shoulders bringing him tidings of all that is being done.

The word Oðin appears to be related to Óðr (A.S., wod; Eng., wood), mad, wild, furious, and with his tall white horse, Sleipnir, the slipper, which, by way of implying its exceeding swiftness, is represented as eight-footed, he appears in folklore throughout the north of Europe as the "Wild Huntsman," of which we still meet with faint echoes in the Isle of Man, reduced to stories of Fairy hunters, hounds, and horn. Again we trace him in our harvest customs, such as that of the last sheaf, and, of the *Laare-vane* (white horse),⁵ as may be seen by comparison with similar customs in the North of England and in Europe; for example, in Saxony, the last clump of standing corn is dedicated to Woden for his horse.

In one or two Manks stories a *Hair rope* figures conspicuously.⁶ Can this in any way refer to Odin? In *Ynglinga-tal* the *halter* is described as "Hagbard's goat-hair rope," and, elsewhere we read of Odin's horse-hair beard."

From his name, Ygg (Awe), comes that of the World--Ash, *Ygg-drasil*, Odin's steed, because he hanged on the tree "himself to himself a sacrifice," when he sought wisdom at Mimi's burn.⁷ (So, in English poetry, the Cross is "Christ's palfry.") As lord of the gallows, all who die by hanging are thereby dedicated to Odin!

Under his name Hnikar, he is a water-god, and as such we commemorate him in the Nickey, a favourite rig of fishing boats. The term "Old Nick" of course refers to him. Mr. Quine points out an ancient place-name--"Nikkesson," a pool in Glen Roy, and another at Groudle, both having legends of a water sprite.⁸

⁵ "Folklore of the Isle of Man."--A. W. Moore, pp. 104, 122, 144.

⁶ Thus Train relates how a felon was cut down by the angry populace, and hanged again in a *hair halter*! There is also a story both at Ballaugh and S. John's of a lost skeleton of the Irish Elk, which the workmen endeavoured to haul out by a hair rope.

⁷ "I mind me hanging on the gallows-tree nine whole nights, wounded with the spear, offered to Odin, myself to myself; on the Tree whose roots no man knoweth."--*Hava-mal*.

⁸ "Lioar Manninagh," III., p. 445.

In the oldest myths we hear of him in his "high-seat," looking out of the *Litho-skialf*--window in Heaven--whence all things can be seen. In later Viking times Valhall, his dwelling, is a great and magnificent abode, with 540 doors, through any one of which 800 champions can ride abreast. It is thatched with golden shields, rafted with shafts, and has the "wall-panelling all covered with fair shields "; for torches, when required, Odin sends for swords! Hither come the kings of the earth and the champions slain in battle, *einherja*, conducted and welcomed by the Valkyrie or shield-maidens, to spend their days in sport, their nights in feasting, till, at Ragnarök--the great Day of Doom--they ride forth with the gods to meet in deadly combat the monsters, giants, and demons led to the attack by the treacherous Loki.

The fifth day, *Dies Jovis*, we call after Thor, son of Odin and Frigga (mother earth), husband of Sif, the golden-haired goddess. (Cornfield, Ceres.) He is called Okuthor--Wagon Thor--as he never rides like the other gods, but always walks or drives the car drawn by two he-goats, Tann-gniotr and Tann-grisnir--Tooth-gnasher and Tooth-tearer. He is the husbandman's god (Goffar--good-father), whose wrath and anger are ever directed against the evil powers that injure mortals and their possessions. He is the special god of the Norwegians, and I think we may explain a phrase in S. Olaf's Saga--"Thor Engels-manna god, ok Odin Saxa god . . . ok Frey Svia god"--concerning which Vigfusson asks, "Why the poet should describe him as the Englishman's god," in this way, that the reference was to the western settlers--Norwegians--now one with the English!

Thor is represented as in the prime of life, red-bearded. When he blows in anger in his beard, men say it is lightning; when they hear the rumbling of his car across the heavens, it thunders. He is lord of the "Hammer of Might"--*Mjolnir*, the mauler (Thunderbolt)--which returns to him when he has thrown it; he owns the "Belt of Strength" *Medingarde*. Brides and the bodies of the dead are consecrated by his Hammer. He is a constant foe to the giants, and the deadly enemy of Loki and his fearful brood. In Doomsday he slays the world-dragon--*Jörmundgandr*.

His dwelling--*Bilskirnir* (Bright-Time)--is in the south-west corner of the sky, whence summer lightnings come.

He enters largely into the medieval conception of the Devil!

We find traces of him in the Isle of Man in holding Thursday as a lucky day and favourite for weddings, also in our regard for the Rowan, which enters into one of his myths, where it is called "Thor's rescue." His following is further attested in our runic inscriptions by the many names compounded with his:--Thor-biaurn, at Baldwin, Braddan (?) and Michael (?); Thor-fiak and Thor-libr, Braddan; Thor-waltr, Andreas; Thor-ulfr, Michael; and Thurith at Conchan. So also two of our existing names:--Corkill, from Mac Thor-Ketill, and Corlett, from Mac Thor-leod.

The next day, *Dies Veneris*, is dedicated to Frigga, wife of Odin, who, however, seems rather to resemble Juno than Venus. As Odin's consort she "knows the fates of men," and sometimes crosses his intentions in regard to them. For example, a tale is told in medieval times to explain the origin of the Lombards. By Frigga's advice they set their women in the ranks, their hair so done as to resemble beards. Odin, looking out of his window, exclaimed, "Who are these Long-beards?" Thereupon Frigga confessed the trick, and claimed the customary forfeit for having bestowed upon them a new name--in this case victory for her friends! To this legend we may trace our story of the Battle of Santwat, when the women of the north (or of the south, for I have heard it told both ways, according as the narrator hailed from south or north) appeared in the ranks, and the battle was won.

We have no illustration of Frigga, but I think one may recognize her in a usage now dying out. On our Fair-days we would have cakes of ginger-bread (fairings), moulded in the figures of a man, a woman, man and woman conjoined, a horse, a man on horseback, and a cock.

The man was probably Thor, the woman Frigga, the man and woman Odin and Frigga, the man on horseback Odin, and the horse his steed Sleipnir. The cock might be *Giollan-kambi*--Gold-comb--which crows in Valhalla, or possibly intended to represent Heimdall, who summons the gods by a blast on the Gialla-horn at the dawn of Ragnarök. I have not seen this idea suggested by any Folklorist, but, that it is not a mere guess appears by the fact that in Sweden cakes were baked in the form of Frey's Boar on Yule eve. In *Fridthiof's Saga*, also, we read of *baked images of gods*, smeared with oil. By

Fridthiof's fault a baked Baldr falls into the fire, blazes up, and burns down the house.

But Frigga-tag is also Fria-tag, and this arises from a confusion of Freya with the former, whose handmaid she was, and mistress of the Valkyrie. She was one of the Vanir--gods of a lower caste than the Anses, merging into the Elves. She was deserted by her husband Od, whom she seeks through the nine worlds, weeping tears of gold. Her car is drawn by two cats, which animals are sacred to her. The unluckiness of meeting a cat on New Year's morning, and the popular association of the animal with witches may be due to a dim recollection of Freya.

Her brother Frey, son of Niördr, the special god of the Swedes, who again is confused with Freya, and so with, Frigga, is lord of love and fruitfulness, of fertility and peace.⁹ His car is drawn by the boar *Gullinbursti*, whose "golden bristles" light up the night like day, who runs with the speed of a horse. His sword, which could put itself into motion against the brood of giants, he gave up for the fair Gerðr, which was held to be the cause of his death, when, at Ragnarökr, he had to stand single combat with Surtr.

The seventh day was known in old Norse as Laugardagr (Dan., Löverdag), and though the popular idea connected it with the "bath" (tub-night), Grimm suggests a reference to Loki, son of giant Farbauti, a Fire god.

In the "Edda" we read of Utgarðaloki, son of Giant Forniot; from early times these two have become merged. Grimm thinks they may be compared to the Prometheus and the Hephaestus (Vulcan) of the Greeks.

In Viking days Loki was regarded as one of the Anses. Fair of form, he is the only god of an evil disposition. He is described as guileful, cunning, crafty, "Back-biter of the Anses." "Full oft hath he brought the Asa into great straits, and oft set them free by cunning redes." It was only on account of the constant amusement he afforded them that he was tolerated. He is the mischief-maker, mocker, seducer, tempter; and as such enters largely into our conception of the Devil.

⁹ In fact, Frigga, Frey, and Freya were originally one deity, and their joint names survive in the word Friday; Freya as goddess of Love accounts for this assignment of the Day of Venus!

In Jötunheim (Giants' home) he got with the witch Angrbotha, a family of dread monsters--a daughter, Hel, and two sons, Fenris wolf and Jörmundgand or Miðgardsworm. When they grew up, Odin cast Hel into Nifleheim, and all who die of sickness or old age go to her. A lost song, quoted by Snorri, gives a grim description of her surroundings in language worthy of the author of the "Faerie Queen." Sleet-den hight her hall, Hunger her dish, Famine her knife, Starvation her spoon. Despair is the porch, Stumbling-stone the threshold, Pale Woe the door, Care-bed the couch, and so on. The Wolf a mighty monster, meets Odin at Ragnarök. The Serpent, "Earth's girdle," he cast into the sea, where it grew so that it coiled itself round all the earth and bit its tail with its teeth.

Loki's worst deed was the death of Baldr. When at last the gods were as wroth with him as was to be weened, they chased and captured him. They then turned his son Vali into a wolf's likeness, and he tore his brother Nan, with whose entrails they bound Loki over three great stones. Then took Skadi, daughter of the giant Thiassi and wife of Njörd, an adder-worm and fastened it over him, so that the venom should drop on his face; but Sigyn, his wife, stands by him and holds a dish under the venom drops, which, when full, she empties; but while the venom drops on his face he is so racked that the whole earth shakes; "that call ye earthquake. There lieth he till the Doomsday of the gods." (*Pr. Ed. 77.*)¹⁰ In the end he breaks loose and steers the ship *Naglfar* (Nail-board), made of dead men's nails, at Ragnarök, when he meets Heimdal, and they are each other's bane. Our folklore notion that all nail-cuttings should be carefully destroyed may have reference to this, the idea being to delay the building of the Ship and so postpone the Day of Doom!

Besides the gods of the week, we have in our sculpturings a figure of Heimdall, and in our folklore faint traces of Balder.

Heimdall is the warder of the gods' dwelling and set in Himinbiorg at the foot of the Rainbow, Bifrost--"quaking bridge," which leads from Earth to

¹⁰ Loki bound, with his faithful wife Sigyn catching the venom in a basin, is carved on the beautiful cross at Gosforth, near Whitehaven. Rev. W. S. Calverley, Crosses, &c., in the Diocese of Carlisle. I thought I recognised this subject carved on a stone at Andreas (Saga Book, 1895-6), but now consider that it is intended for Gunnar in the Snake-pit! Our only other illustration of the bound Loki is that at Kirkby Stephen.

Asgarth. He is "the whitest of the Anses," a god of Day, and has the peculiarity of being born of nine mothers.

"I am nine Mothers' child, nine Sisters' son am I"

so he sings in a fragment of a lost poem.

It was he who created the three classes of men--Earls, Churls, and Thralls. From his name Rig is derived that of *Ericksgata*, the Milky Way, the gods' highroad across the skies. This is evidently the origin of our story of King Orry and the Milky Way.

Heimdall, the "wind-listening god," hears the grass grow, and the wool on the back of the sheep. As warder of the gods he has charge of the Gjallarhorn, kept at the roots of the sacred Tree, the blast of which rings through the nine worlds when he summons the gods for the last great battle, in which he meets and slays Loki, by whom he himself is slain.

Finally, so far as the Isle of Man is concerned, we have Balder, son of Odin and Frigga, a divinity of Light and Fire, in many respects resembling the Celtic Beal. He was done to death through the treachery of Loki, who, learning that he was invulnerable to everything except the Mistletoe, maliciously placed a wand of that plant in the hands of Hoðr (Hood), Balder's blind brother, and, giving him the direction, urged him to throw it for sport. So Balder fell dead. Hermodr, his twin brother, galloped away on Sleipnir to treat with Hel for his release, and finally she agreed that if indeed Balder were so beloved that every-thing quick and dead should weep for him, he might fare back to the Anses. But when all things were willing to do so, the returning messengers passed a cave, where was an Ogress called Thokk, who replied, "Thokk will bewail with dry tears Balder's balefire. . . . Let Hel hold what she has." After Ragnarök, the Sibyl in Voluspa tells--Balder shall come back and "all sorrows shall be healed."

In the Hibbert Lectures, "Celtic Heathendom," 1886, Professor Rhys compares this story with the old Celtic myths of "The Sun Hero." He points out that Balder was not simply the sun, but the summer sun, whose return is witnessed in the north only after protracted waiting. His dwelling-place in

the heavens (*Breiðablik*, Broad-gleam) seems to refer to the arctic summer, when the sun prolongs his stay above the horizon.

Only one incident connected with Balder is figured in our sculpturings--the dwarf Lit, who ns across Thor's path when he is going to hallow the funeral pyre.

We trace him in our folk-lore. Kelly, in the "Manx Society's Dictionary," s.v. "Baaltinn," refers to the local custom of kindling fires on the summits of the highest hills, "but the modern practice is for each balla or town to kindle a fire, so that the wind may drive the smoke over their corn fields, cattle, and habitations. . . . It is also the usage to put out the culinary fires on that day, and to re-kindle them with some of the sacred fire." He then refers to the mock engagements between Summer and Winter on May-day, *Laaboaldyn*;¹¹ also to the strewing of "primroses" and the crosses of mountain ash.

Now the Midsummer fires obtained almost all over Europe in early Christian times, but there is little doubt they were of Heathen origin. The authors of "Corp. Poet. Bor." ask:--"Do the fires of John commemorate the burning of Balder's body?" The northern Easter fires too were certainly heathen, and sacrificial in origin. Grimm points out that the Celtic Belfires and the Teutonic Phol-days (Balder) were nearly midway betwixt Easter and Midsummer, but nearer Easter when it falls late. The battle of Summer and Winter, as Mr. Moore says in his "Folklore," is undoubtedly of Scandinavian origin, but it is rather Swedish and Gothic than Norwegian.

Besides the Anses and the Vanir and the Elves (light and dark), we have the Giants, generally hostile to the gods, but sometimes friendly. They are the "hill-folk" or "cave-men," and live at Jötunheim, on the edge of the Earth, which is imagined flat, and surrounded by the Ocean.¹² Some of these appear in our carvings, and our folk-tales refer to others.

¹¹ See "Folklore of the Isle of Man."--A. W. Moore, pp. 112, 118, 146.

¹² As Carlyle puts it:--"The dark, hostile Powers of Nature they figure to themselves as Jötun's Giants--huge, shaggy beings of a demoniac character. Frost, Fire, Sea-tempest--these are Jötuns. The friendly Powers again--as Summer-heat, the Sun--are Gods. The Empire of this Universe is divided between these two; they dwell apart, in perennial internecine feud."--*Heroes and Hero Worship*.

Then we have the Dwarves--"not always baneful." The firmament is upheld by four of these, named after the cardinal points of the compass. They live chiefly in rocks and caves underground, hence are gatherers and hoarders of precious stones and metals. Trolls, from which we get a place-name--Trollaby--seem to be between Giants and Monsters.¹³ Our *Phynnodderee* and *Glashtin*, if of Celtic origin, as seems likely, partake of the nature of Trolls, showing the Scandinavian influence on our Folklore.

Loki's brood of monsters has already been referred to; there were others also, as the Wolves of the Eclipse, "the gripper and tearer of the Moon, the swallower of the loaf of the heavens, the destroyer of the sky's light "; also the wicked, venomous "tearer of corpses "--*Nidhogg*, and, lastly, the fire-fiends, *Mu-spilli*, sons of treason, sons of destruction, etc.

Finally, we have to do with the semi-divine beings--the Heroes--who were human, but of divine descent. The greatest of these, and the favourite from earliest times, was Sigurd the Volsung, whose slaying of the dragon Fafni and capture of the gold-hoard, with the effects of the baneful curse accompanying it, are vividly portrayed on at the least four of our sculptured stones.

¹³ "Troll Kalla mik:"--"They call me Troll; Gnawer of the Moon, Giant of the Gale-blasts, Curse of the rain-hall, Companion of the Sibyl, Night-roaming hag, Swallower of the loaf of heaven. What is a Troll but that?" From a 10th Century ditty.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. ORIGIN OF POETRY



ODIN'S BOOTY. THEFT OF THE HOLY MEAD.
($\frac{1}{4}$ actual size.)

ODIN'S BOOTY. THEFT OF THE HOLY MEAD.
($\frac{1}{4}$ actual size.)

My first illustration¹⁴ (fig. 1, p. 16) is from the handsome cross on the steps at Michael Church gates. The inscription recites that "Joalf, son of Thorulf the Red, raised this cross after Fritha, his mother." On one face, above the head of the cross, we find the figures of two birds flying--an eagle chasing a falcon; referring, I suggest, to Odin's adventure in the recovery of the Holy Mead--the Soma-draught, source of Inspiration and Poetry.

Once, in order to commemorate a treaty between the Anses and the Vanir, a being was formed by them in the shape of a man called Quasi, who was so wise there was nothing he could not unfold. Certain Dwarves--Fealar and

¹⁴ In describing the carvings, I feel bound to follow the usual custom of speaking of "right" and "left," as viewed by the spectator, not as it really is on the stone. I think it wrong, but to do otherwise in a small pamphlet dealing only with local sculptures would but cause needless confusion!

Galar--treacherously slew him and let his blood run into a kettle or cauldron--*Odrearer* (spirit raiser)--and two cups--*Soma* and *Bodn*. They mixed honey with it, and so brewed the sacred drink--origin of Poetry and of Wisdom. Long afterwards these Dwarfs, by way of sport, drowned a Giant named Gilling by upsetting a boat, and afterwards let fall a millstone on the head of his wife because, they said, "her shrieking was most horrible to hear! "When their son, Suftung, heard these tidings, he caught the Dwarves and set them on a reef the tide ran over. Then, for weregild, they offered the precious mead, which was accepted, and the Giants kept it for ages in the centre of a mountain. At last, Odin, under the name of Bale-work, in order to procure the precious drink, took service under the Giant Baugi, Suftung's brother, asking only for one draught of the mead as his wage. At the end of the term they sought Suftung, who denied them even a drop. So Odin gave Baugi an auger, and told him to bore through the hill, and so he did. Then Balework turned himself into a serpent and crept through, but Baugi treacherously stabbed at him with the auger, missing him, however. Now Gundfled, Suftung's daughter, kept the mead in the centre of the hill. Odin made friends and persuaded her to let him have three draughts of it. He drank it all up, and, returning to the surface took on him his falcon's coat and flew away as hard as he could. But Suftung spied him and, taking his eagle skin, flew after him. When the Anses saw Odin coming, they set vessels out in the court, and, as soon as he got to Asgard he threw up the mead into the vessels. So Poesy is called Odin's booty or find, his drink or gift.

2. ODIN CARRIES THE HERO TO VALHALL

We are now able, by means of the old Norse Mythology, to explain a strange figure on an uninscribed fragment from Jurby.



**PLATE I. UNINScribed CROSS-SLAB, JURBY.
ODIN CARRIES THE HERO TO VALHALL**

To understand it aright we must bear in mind that Odin is ever eager to bring the greatest champions to Valhall to share in the joyous lives of the gods, and to be ready at the great Day of Doom to sally forth with them and

do battle with the monsters and the demons. We must remember, too, that it is by *hanging* a man is dedicated to Odin.

At the left of the lower part of the shaft of a cross we see a man with a pole over his shoulder, from the end of which a smaller being is hanging.¹⁵ (pl. I.).

Now there is in the Norse heroic Sagas an old story of the sacrifice of King Wiker by Starkad, Odin's foster-son, who *marked him with the spear*, and dedicated him to Odin.¹⁶ But, as Professor Sophus Bugge points out,¹⁷ the motives from the Volsunga Saga are those most frequently represented on the Manks stones, and it seems altogether more likely that the reference here is to Randver, Jormanrek's son, whom Odin, under the guise of Bikke, the evil counsellor, persuaded his aged father to sacrifice by hanging, as related in the "Prose Edda, Gudrúnarhvot."

There are other instances of Odin's intervention to secure the death of heroes, and so bring them to Valhalla. That it is meant for Odin is confirmed by the fact that it has a bird's head, and Arnhofði (Eagle-headed) is one of Odin's names.

The bearded figure above in a long robe, armed with a trident, may possibly be intended for the aged Jormanrek.

On the other side of the cross Valhall is signified by the figures of the Boar and the sacred Hart--

"Eikthyrnir the hart is called
that stands o'er Odin's hall,
and bites from Lærad's branches;
from his horns fall
drops into Hvirgelmir,
whence all waters rise."--Grimnis-mal.

Above is the Boar Sæhrimner, food of the heroes in Valhall, who hunt and slay and feast upon him, and afterwards Thor waves his hammer over the

¹⁵ In a paper on Saga Illustrations on Manks Monuments, Viking Club Saga Book, 1895-6, I took this to be the capture of Loki, but the above seems a more likely explanation.

¹⁶ Gautreks S., ch. 7--"Corp. Poet. Bor.", I, 466-7.

¹⁷ Nordiske Runeindskifter, &c., Særtryk of Aarb. for Nord Oldkynd og Hist., 1899, p. 253.

bones and restores him to life. An interesting point to us is that the Boar is of Celtic origin. The great Irish Sea-god, after whom our island is supposed to be named--Mannu--owned the pig which was killed and eaten and again restored to life!

Above the Boar we see remains of a design which may be intended for a shield, as suggested by Dr. S. Bugge, representing the shield-panelling of Valhall.

On the other face of the stone (pl. II.) is a curious circular design of agglomerated flat pellets within a border of step-pattern. Can this be a reference to the roof of golden shields?



UNINSCRIBED CROSS-SLAB, JURBY. (obverse)

3. VIEW OF VALHALLA

Two fragments of a cross at Michael (pl. III.) erected by Grim to Rumund (Hrómund), give us a view of Odin in Valhall, and of the sports and pastimes there of the champions, *Einherja*.



FIG. 1. FIG. 2.
RUMUND CROSS, MICHAEL.

At the right of the shaft of the cross, on one face (fig. 1), is the figure of a man with a long spear in his right hand, his left on the hilt of a short, pointed sword, and clothed in a kirtle or tunic; he is bird-headed. Above is the figure of a Wolf, and the smaller fragment shows the forepaws of another similar figure above it. This is undoubtedly Odin with his spear Gungnir, accompanied by his wolves Geri and Freki.

Below may be seen a large fish--the great Fish in the stream which runs through Valhalla.

At the other side (left) of the shaft is the figure of a Boar (Sæhrimner), who affords the champions sport by day and food at night. Above are two bird-headed figures, one feet uppermost, having in his hand a pointed sword, the other in the act of sheathing his. These represent the noted champions, bird-headed as being now one with the gods, the grim delights of battle being greater than the pleasures of the chase. The one, head down, has been slain, but will rise at even to banquet with his victor and the gods and fight again another day.

But what is this figure immediately under the head of the cross? Long-robed, his hands clasping in front of him a crutch-headed or tau-shaped Staff, under his left arm a Book, around his head a Nimbus of peculiar design, with fringes, as in the case of the Christ on Grim's cross, Michael, and upon one of the Virgin Mary on Roolwer's cross, Maughold. Like these also it bears three small crosslets, reminding one of the nimbus in the Book of Kells. This, I think, is intended for Christ, and signifies that now He and not Odin is King of Heaven, the material joys of which are depicted at either side of the Tree of Life, Odin's steed, Christ's palfry!

4. VALKYRIE

A very beautiful cross at the Church gates, Michael (pl. V.), erected by Mal-Lomchon to Malworrey, his foster-mother, daughter of Dugald and wife of Athisl, bears the figure of a Harper seated, and approached by a long-robed figure offering a drinking horn.



PLATE V.
MAL LOMCHON CROSS, MICHAEL

Significance lies in the fact that the harp was unknown among the Norsemen until their intercourse with the Irish. There is, however, a lost story of Viking age concerning a Harper, known only by one or two references, as, for example, in Voluspa--"There Eggtheow the gladsome, the Giantesses Harper, sat on a mound tuning his Harp!" By that time, therefore, not only was the instrument known to the Scandinavians, but they themselves became players, "Eggtheow the Glad-some"--what a charm lies in the epithet--being a Scandinavian name. And, if they enjoyed the harp at their earthly feasts we may be sure they would expect their heroes to be entertained by it in Valhall.

Here, then, to the right of the cross, just below the circle, we have a figure of Eggtheow the gladsome.

The long-robed figure is one of the Valkyrie offering welcome to the musician as she would to a great hero.

5. ODIN, THOR, GIANTS, DEMONS, DWARVES

A remarkable uninscribed stone at Kirk Bride, never yet figured nor fully described (pl. VI.), exhibits a wealth of mythological carvings equal to that on the shield given by Thorleif the Wise to Thiodwolf.



FIG. 1. FIG. 2.
CROSS-SLAB, KIRK BRIDE

On one face (fig. 1), below the head of the cross, on the right, is the figure of a man resting on his spear. It is almost obliterated, but can still be traced, and is probably intended for Odin.

On the other face (fig. 2), below the circle, on the left, the figure with a spear, having a raven or other bird behind it, might be taken for Odin also, but it is attacking a stag, and there is no story of Odin and a stag, nor would there be, for that beast was not introduced into Scandinavia till the sixteenth century.

Below the first figure (fig. 1), separated by a panel of plaitwork, we find human forms among the feet of horses. This, I think, must be intended for the trampling to death of Swanhild beneath the hoofs of Jormanrek's horses; a deed suggested to the Gothic king by Odin in his capacity of Bikke, the evil counsellor, on the ground of her sympathy with his enemies the Huns--"For he was moved to wrath by the treacherous desertion of her husband"--(A lost Jormanrek lay). In the lay known as Gudrun's "Chain of Woe," we read:--"She was like a glorious sunbeam in my bower. I endowed her with gold and goodly raiment or ever I married her into Gothland. That was the hardest of all my sorrows when they trod Swanhild's fair hair in the dust under the hoofs of the horses."

On the other face of the stone (fig. 2) we find a reference to one of Thor's most famous adventures.¹⁸ The slayer of giants and monsters was destined in the end to meet with the dread dragon Jormungandr; he tried to anticipate matters, and we are told that once upon a time he went in the guise of a young man to the house of the Giant Hymi, where he tarried as guest for the night. At dawn Hymi made ready to go a-fishing, and Thor would go too. He asked what they should have for bait, but the giant, who did not want him, answered surlily that he might go look for bait for himself. Thor noticed on the hillside Hymi's herd of oxen; he went up to the biggest, a coal-black one called *Himinbriotr* (Heavenly Bull), "wrung" off its head and ran back to the strand. The giant had then shoved off his skiff, but Thor got on board and began to row. At last the giant, who had thought to tire and frighten him by the distance they would pull, himself objected to go further,

¹⁸ Hymis-kvida, 70.

as, he said, they were already in mid-ocean and were likely to be over the Midgardsorm. Then, we are told, "the sturdy Hymi kept pulling up whales, two at once, on his hook." Thor baited his angle with the ox's head and cast it overboard. The God-aborred Serpent gulped down the bait, and tugged so hard that both Thor's fists were dashed against the gunwale. Then he put forth his god's strength and hauled with such force that he drove both his feet through the bottom of the boat. He grasped his hammer, but the giant, quaking with fear, fumbled at his fishing knife and cut the line. Back sank the dragon into the deep. Thor flung his Hammer after him, then, with his fist, tumbled Hymi overboard, and waded to land.

In our figure, below the circle on the right, we see Thor, bearded, with his strength-belt on, carrying in one hand the ox-head, and hastening with great strides to reach the strand before the giant will have put off.

On the fragment of a stone at Gosforth, Cumberland,¹⁹ of the same period, and carved by the same people, we have the figure of a boat with the Giant hauling in the whales, and Thor in the stern casting his line. On another we see Thor with his two feet dashed through the bottom of the boat.

Hymi was the first of the Hrímrthursar, or Giants, formed by the heat from Muspell meeting the rime of Ginnúnga gap. Another adventure of Thor's with him is related in Hymiskvidar as one with the last, but, in the "Prose Edda" (Gylfi's Mocking) that is treated as a separate incident, as indeed it must have been. This is the recovery of the *Caldron*, a myth derived possibly from the Celtic one of Cúchulainn (the Sun Hero) and the Caldron of Mider, King of Falga (the Isle of Man). ("Celtic Heathendom," 261, 476.)

The giant Eager, a sea-god (Oceanos), set Thor the task of procuring the famous Caldron, which was a mile deep, promising if he did so to make a Brew for the gods. None of the blessed gods knew how this could be accomplished, but Tew offered to accompany Thor and try what could be done. They came to Hymi's Hall, at the end of Heaven; the giantess hid them behind the pillar. Then Hymi came home from hunting. He looked towards them and the pillar flew asunder, the beam broke in twain, and the caldrons which were set upon it came down, and all except one broke. Then the giant

¹⁹ "Crosses, &c., in the Diocese of Carlisle." Rev. W. S. Calverley, p. 168.

challenged them to break the caldron. Thor dashed it at the pillars, but in vain; but the giantess whispered to throw it at Hymi's skull, which was harder even than the caldron; so he sprang up and hurled it at his head, and it was cracked all across. As a last task the giant required him to carry the caldron out of his court. Tew tried twice, but could not lift it, but Thor clapped it on his head and the chains rattled about his heels. "So he came to the Gods Thing bringing the Caldron that Hymi had owned."

Now we see, in front of Thor (fig. 1), and above another strange-looking giant, a very curious figure which must have some meaning. I suggest that it is meant to represent this Caldron.

Just below it is a monstrous figure, arms a-kimbo, legs outspread. This may well be the Lord of the Giants, Rungnir, of whom we read in Thiodwolf's "Shield Song" and in the "Edda." Once, having been allowed by Odin to enter Asgard, and treated with hospitality, he grew boastful, and--an unheard of thing--challenged Thor to combat! A date being fixed, and a battle-place (Rockgarth) pitched, Rungnir took up his position. He was very huge, his head was of stone--his heart also was of hard stone--pointed into three horns. He stood with his great stone shield set before him, and, for weapon, had a hone, which he bore on his shoulders. Thor's arrival is finely described. He came down "in a ring of flame"; the heavens thundered beneath him; "the earth was rent asunder as the goats drew the chariot-god on to his tryst with Rungnir." Thor's man Delvr ran before, and, seeing the giant's safe position, gave him to understand that Thor had seen him and was going down into the earth to come up against him from below. Thereupon Rungnir thrust the shield under his feet and stood upon it, and took hold of the hone with both hands. Thor cast his hammer at him from afar; Rungnir threw the hone, which met the hammer in its flight and broke asunder, one half falling to earth, whence come all rocks of hone, the other crashing into Thor's head, so that he fell forward. But the Hammer broke Rungnir's skull into little bits, and he fell over Thor, so that his foot lay athwart his neck.

Here, then, we may see Rungnir, Lord of the Giants, standing on his shield awaiting Thor's attack.

The figure just above--a bearded man, belted, attacking a serpent, is undoubtedly intended for Thor, who at Ragnarök slays Jörmungandr, the Midgardsorm. He retreats nine steps, when he is so overcome by the venomous fumes from the monster that he himself succumbs. The step-pattern border of the slab on one face ends ingeniously in the head of a great Serpent, evidently another figure of Jörmungandr; it is close by Thor with the Ox head, an anticipation of his further adventures!

At the feet of Thor, between the coils of the Serpent and the Giant, is a small figure, intended probably for the Dwarf Lit, which, at Balder's funeral, when Thor stood up and hallowed the pyre with his Hammer, ran before him, but Thor "spurned at him with his foot and dashed him into the fire, and he was burned."

Among numerous other Dwarves, we are told of four at the cardinal points of the compass, which support the firmament (Hymi's skull) at the four corners, namely, Austri, Vestri, Nordri, and Sudri. Two of these may be seen on this face of the stone, one on either side above the head of the cross, the curved border of the stone suggesting the firmament.²⁰

On the other face of the stone (fig. 2) their places are taken by figures of a Cock, which, though an early Christian symbol of the Resurrection, appears on our Manks monuments only on Scandinavian pieces, and may have reference to the cock Gollin-Kambi (Gold-comb):--"The cock Gold-comb is crowing to the Anses, waking the warriors of the Father of Hosts. Another cock, Sooty-red, crows under the earth in the halls of Hell." ("Sh. Volu-spa," 122-5.)

Just below the figure of Thor in the fishing adventure is that of a large bird--possibly the Eagle which dwells in the branches of Ygg-drasil. The tree itself would be suggested by the line of "vertebral" pattern down the middle of the stone.

Lastly, in a panel below, at the right corner, we find two great hounds or wolves; doubtless Garm, who at Ragnarök is to swallow the moon, and that

²⁰ So on a Hog-hacked stone at Heysham. See "Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society," Vol. V., Pl. VI., and Vol. IX., Pl. IX., X., XI. Note also the use of the Chevron as on the Bride Stone!

other that takes the sun. "Fiercely bays Garm before the cave of the rock,
the chain shall snap and the Wolf range free." ("Volu-spa," II.)

6. THE WIND-GIANT, HRÆ-SVELGR, CARRION-SWALLOWER

Before taking leave of the Giants I submit an illustration (pl. VII.) which puzzled me much.



PLATE VII.
GRIM", CROSS, MICHAEL.
THE WIND-GIANT, HRÆ-SVELGR, CARRION-SWALLOWER

A cross-slab at Michael has on one face, and above the right arm of the cross, the figure of a man and a great bird. At first I thought of Loki seized by the giant Thiazzi in eagle form in the story of the Rape of Idwyn,²¹ but as was pointed out to me at the time by Dr. York Powell, the man is not holding on either to a stick or to the bird, but seems rather to be attacked by it. I think now there can be little doubt it refers to the fall of some hero unknown, such, for example, as Ottar the Doughty, of whom we read in "Ynlinga-Tal," 93-96: "Ottarr the Doughty fell by the weapons of the Danes, under the talons of the Eagle, when the war-vulture spurned him, the reason-endowed, with its brute carrion feet at Wendle."

Is not this Hræ-svelgr? As in Vafthruðnis-mal--"Hræ-svelgr (Carrion-gulper) is he called, a giant in eagle's shape,. that sits at the end of heaven; from under his wings the wind that blows over all men is said to come." So in the Edda (Gylfi's mocking). And in "Volu-spa"--"But the Eagle screams. Pale-beak tear corpses."

The other face of this stone is shown on pl. IV.

²¹ Saga Book, 1895-6.



PLATE IV. GRIM'S CROSS, MICHAEL

7. HEIMDALL.--THE SYBIL HYNDLA

A fragment at Jurby (pl. VIII.) shows on one face,. above the right arm of the cross, a figure of a Man in a tunic with a row of large buttons; in his left hand a short, pointed sword, his right holding to his mouth a long Alpine horn (Lur). On his head is a curious helmet, above the horn a flying raven.



PLATE VIII.
INSCRIBED CROSS, JURBY.
HEIMDALL, WARDER OF THE GODS

Evidently this is intended for Heimdall, Warder of the Gods, who is stationed at the foot of the rainbow *Bif-rost*, "quaking bridge," leading from earth to Asgard. At Ragnarök he summons the gods to the last great battle by a blast on the Gjallar horn, which rings through all the nine worlds:--



PLATE IX.
INSCRIBED CROSS, JURBY.
THE SYBIL, HYNDLA

"Loud blows Heimdall,
his horn is up-lift."

The Raven flies before him carrying the tidings to Odin. On the other face (pl. IX.), in like position, is a female figure, dog-headed, with long, braided hair.

As suggested by Professor S. Bugge, this may be the Sibyl Hyndla, "little Hound," who prophesies of Heimdall and of Ragnarök.

8. ODIN AND THE FENRI MONSTER

Lastly (pl. X.), I show a very interesting little piece from Andreas. Unfortunately, like so many others, it is but a fragment.

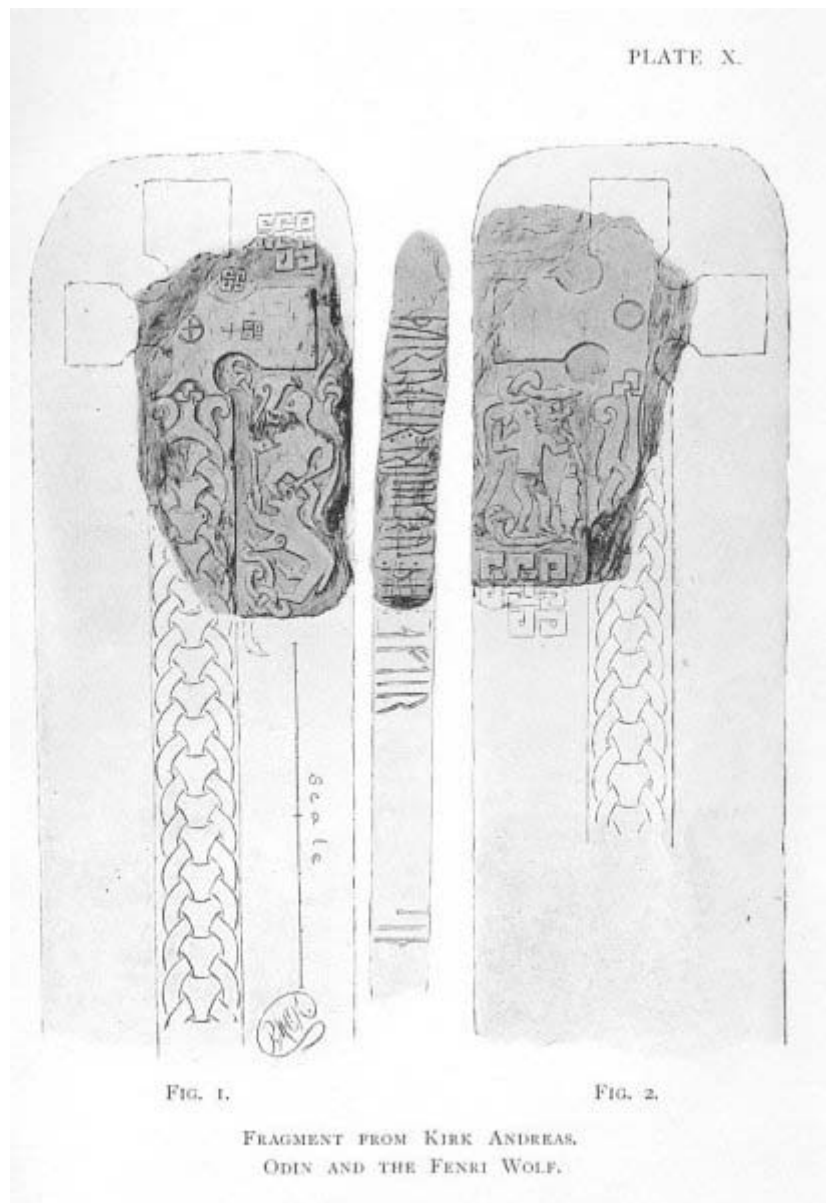


PLATE X.

FIG. 1. FIG. 2.
FRAGMENT FROM KIRK ANDREAS.
ODIN AND THE FENRI WOLF.

One face (fig. 1) bears, below the right arm of the cross, a figure of a Man with a Spear attacked by a Wolf; above his shoulder a Raven.

Undoubtedly this is Odin,²² who meets the monstrous Fenri Wolf in the dreadful Day of Doom, of which we are told by the Sybils in "Volu-spa":--
 "The Ash of the Steed of the Hanged One shall quiver, and there shall be no part of heaven and earth that shall not then tremble for fear. The Anses shall put on their harness, and all the host of the Elect (*Einherjarnir*), and go forth to the field. Odin shall ride first with his golden helm and his fair mail-coat, and his spear that is called *Gungnir* (Tusker). He shall challenge the Wolf Fenri. . . . The Wolf shall swallow Odin, and that shall be his bane." Then she relates how "straightway Widar (the silent) shall dash forward and rend the Wolf's jaws asunder, and that shall be its death. . . . Thereupon Swart shall cast fire over the earth and burn the whole World. And every living thing shall suffer death . . . and the Powers shall perish!"

Not only have we here the end of Odin but the end of the old gods, of the old beliefs! Turn we now to the other face of the stone (fig. 2), and what do we behold?

"Then there shall come One yet mightier; Though Him I dare not name."

So far the Sibyl; and, our Sculptor figures a Man, belted, in his right hand a Cross, in his left a Book. He treads upon adders and knotted worms. In front is a Fish, without doubt the Christian symbol--ἰχθῦς. Christ has over-come the powers of Evil, and He now reigns in Odin's stead!

²² Odin on Sleipner, the Wolf, Heimdall, and Widar rending the Wolf's jaws appear on the Gosforth Cross, that wonderful monument, the deciphering of which, by Mr. Calverley, led the Rev. G. F. Browne, lecturing at Cambridge in November, 1882, to remark--"It is not too much to say that this year has seen a *revelation* of the language of these stones, which no one had dreamed of before."