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# Scandinavian folk-lore

THE  
WEBSTER COLLECTION  
OF  
SOCIAL  
ANTHROPOLOGY

—  
Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto  
—

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WEBSTER  
CLASS OF 1876



WINIFRED FRY  
WEBSTER  
CLASS OF 1878





SCANDINAVIAN FOLK-LORE



# Scandinavian Folk-Lore

Illustrations of the Traditional Beliefs

of the

Northern Peoples

SELECTED AND TRANSLATED

BY

WILLIAM A. CRAIGIE, M.A.

B.A. OXON., F.S.A. SCOT.

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## P R E F A C E .

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FROM the oldest times down to the present day the Scandinavian countries have been rich in tradition and folk-lore. The memories of the Northern peoples were long, and their beliefs inclined to the mysterious and the marvellous. When saga-writing began in Iceland in the 12th century, it rested upon a mass of traditional lore, which comprised not merely genealogy and history, but also an element of the supernatural. This had often permeated the original fact to such an extent as to render its historic basis doubtful, but at the same time it made the legend more impressive, more picturesque, and less easily forgotten. The same spirit is manifest throughout all the centuries. Scandinavian folk-lore covers a period of fully a thousand years, changing to some extent with the rise of a new faith and the growth of new ideas, yet remaining the same in its inmost nature. For this reason it is one that must always be of great interest and value to the student of popular beliefs.

When we consider that the science of folk-lore owes more to Great Britain than to any other country, it is remarkable that so little has yet been done to bring the traditional beliefs of Scandinavia before the professed student or the more general reader. Even the few works

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that have appeared on the subject are now both scarce and dear. It is in the hope of making a wider knowledge possible, that I have gathered together the materials contained in the following pages. The book is, in fact, an attempt to repeat, with fuller resources, the design of Thorpe in the second volume of his *Northern Mythology*. When Thorpe published his work in 1851, the material at his disposal was very scanty. Modern Icelandic folk-lore remained untouched, editions of the sagas were less accessible than now, and several valuable collections (especially in Danish) were then non-existent. So much new matter has become accessible in this way since then, that a new and fuller work on the same lines is both possible and desirable. But while the intention is the same, the plan of the present volume is slightly different from Thorpe's. The pieces contained in it have been selected with a view to cover the whole range of Scandinavian folk-lore, both in point of time and of content. They are intended to supply concrete instances of each separate conception in popular belief, as well as its leading variations. Hence the tales are grouped according to their subjects, and not (as in Thorpe) according to their place of origin. The details in the design, however, have been affected by considerations of space, and its divisions are not all equally full and adequate. Especially is this the case in the sections on Ghosts and Witches, where the wealth of the material prevented full justice from being done to it. Still, each section gives a

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fair view of the kind of lore current on that head, and indicates the period over which the belief is known to extend. The passages from the sagas prove its existence in early times, the later anecdotes show the form in which it has been familiar down to the present day. The work is thus a constant alternation of the new and old, but the two are seldom greatly at variance, and both together bear witness to a unity of faith that underlies them.

Wherever possible, the belief has been brought out by a narrative embodying it, not by a mere statement of its existence. The story is the soul of folk-lore, by which the general concept is made living and interesting. There is naturally much in popular belief and practice which is not thus clothed in anecdote—all the thousand and one observances with regard to man and woman, beast and bird, weather and seasons—but this belongs to another branch of folk-lore than the one here illustrated. How the story in many cases preserved the belief we may see in our oldest sources, the sagas, and the same is true even now. These tales were part of the unwritten literature of a people which read little or not at all, and as such they were handed down from parent to child. They served both for instruction and amusement, often under circumstances where the interest they excited, and the imagination they called forth, were a salutary relief from the pressure of real life. The beliefs of folk-lore are not necessarily dark and degrading superstitions, as well-meaning persons have often hastily supposed. The good

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that might lie in them, the honest purposes for which they might be used, are well brought out in the following incident, told by a Danish collector of the present day. " Iver Skade's wife told me, in a most affecting manner, how she, when a child, stood till far on in the night, blowing the bellows for her father, who was known as an excellent scythe-maker. During the day he fished in the firth ; in the evening and by night he worked in his smithy. He seldom got more than four hours' sleep, as he had a large family and was very poor. As soon as the children were strong enough for the task, they took turns of blowing the bellows or working the hammer, while their father told them stories to keep their eyes open." Another woman learned them from her mother, who took her along with her while she went about and begged, and told the tales in order to make the long wanderings lighter for the child. Under these and similar conditions, of poverty or loneliness, has much of the Northern folk-lore been preserved, and it has had a value of its own as an educative force for minds cut off by circumstances from other mental interests.

This fact is often brought out by the tone of the modern tales, compared with their grander counterparts in the sagas, where the spirit of a great age still lingers in the thoughts, and an artist's power over language is manifest in the words. The newer forms are poorer in thought, and barer in language, but this, of course, is partly due to the fact that they are given as taken down

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from the mouths of the people, without any literary adornment. This difference in the character of the tales themselves has necessarily produced a difference in the style of the translations, although in both cases my aim has been to make the English as natural as was consistent with the form of the originals. To improve the narrative would often have meant rewriting the tale, and if the story does not always run smoothly, this is perhaps not entirely the fault of the translation. It is not always easy to avoid a childish simplicity in translating from Danish, or a stilted archaism in the rendering of a saga. In various instances, particularly in passages from the sagas, some condensation of the narrative was necessary to prevent the tale from being too long, but the abridged passages are always unessential for the folk-lore, and are faithfully recorded in the notes. In translating the few modern Icelandic verses which occur, I have been careful to retain both alliteration and rhyme, where these appear in the originals: only thus can one do full justice to the technique of Icelandic poetry.

In every instance the contents of this volume have been translated from the language of the country to which they belong—Icelandic, Færöese, Danish (Norwegian), and Swedish. The only exceptions to this rule are a few passages of Swedish origin, which were translated from Danish versions in *Nordiske Sagn*, a small collection published at Copenhagen in 1868. The present work was indeed begun as a translation of that volume, but has

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so far outgrown it, that the pieces taken exclusively from that source form a very small proportion of the whole (some 30 out of 311). In a few instances, where no better version presented itself, passages have been taken which were already included in Thorpe, or still earlier in Keightley's *Fairy Mythology*, but in all cases these have been translated afresh. For the most part the bearing of the stories is clear enough in itself, or may be gathered by comparison, but a few additional particulars are added to many of them in the notes. These, however, are mainly intended to give the sources for each passage, and make no pretensions to completeness in other respects. As the names of persons and places in the tales will be strange to the majority of readers, I have often simplified the forms of the latter by dividing them into their component parts. Some hints as to their pronunciation will also be found at the beginning of the notes.

I have to record my sincerest thanks to Herr E. T. Kristensen for his ready permission to make full use of his valuable collections of Danish folk-lore, as well as for several manuscript contributions; and to cand. phil. Olaf Davidsson for similar kindness with regard to his small volume of Icelandic tales. To Fröken Th. Rambusch in Copenhagen I am indebted for several researches after necessary books, a service always willingly and conscientiously rendered.

WILLIAM A. CRAIGIE.

ST. ANDREWS,  
Nov., 1896.

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## VI. — WATER-BEINGS.

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### Mermen and Mermaids.

THE mermaid is described as being golden-haired, and possessed of human shape down to the waist ; below that she is like a fish, tail and all. Icelandic fishermen believe that they sometimes see her, for the most part north about Gríms-ey. She especially has her eye on young men, and comes on board the boat to them, if they happen to be nodding, but the 'Credo' in the old Graduale is a good defence against her.

The merman (*marbendil*) lives at the bottom of the sea, and never appears above the surface, unless when fished up. In *Landnáma-bók* it is told that *Grím*, one of the early colonists, went out fishing one winter with his thralls, taking with him his little son. The boy began to grow cold, so they put him into a seal-skin bag, which was drawn tight round his neck. *Grím* caught a merman, and said to him, "Tell us all our fortunes, and how long we have to live, otherwise you shall not get home again." "It matters little for you to know," said the merman, "for you will be dead before spring ; but your son will take land and settle, where your mare *Skalm* lies down under her load." More than this they could not get out of him.

Mermen have been caught in this way not unfrequently, and have also been found driven dead on shore, or in the

stomachs of sharks. When they are caught alive, they always want to get back to the same spot as they were taken at; they are of few words, and give little heed to men. Once some fishermen from Höfdi on Latra-strönd caught a woman on one of their hooks, and took her home with them. She said she lived in the sea, and was busy screening her mother's kitchen chimney when they caught her. She continually entreated them to take her out to sea again, and let her down at the same place as they got her, but they would not. She remained there for a year, and sewed the vestments that have been in Lauf-ás ever since. At the end of the year she was taken out to sea again, for they saw that she would never be happy on land. She promised to send some cows up on shore, and told them to be ready to receive them whenever they appeared, and burst the bladder between their nostrils, otherwise they would immediately run back into the sea. Not long after this, twelve heifers came up out of the sea, and proceeded to Höfdi. They were all sea-grey in colour; six of them were caught and greatly prized, the other six escaped.

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“Then Laughed the Merman.”

THERE is an old Icelandic saying, frequently made use of, “Then laughed the merman,” the origin of which is said to be as follows. Once a fisherman caught a sea-creature, which called itself a “marbendil”; it had a big head and long arms, but resembled a seal from the waist downwards. The merman would give the fisher no information of any kind, so he took him ashore with him, sorely against the merman's will. His young wife came down

to the sea to meet him, and kissed and caressed him, at which the man was delighted and gave her great praise, while at the same time he struck his dog for fawning on him. Then laughed the merman, and the fisherman asked the reason why he did so. "At folly," said the merman. As the man went homewards, he stumbled and fell over a little mound, whereupon he cursed it, and wondered why it had ever been made upon his land. Then laughed the merman, who was being taken along against his will, and said, "Unwise is the man." The man kept him prisoner for three nights, and during that time some packmen came with their wares. The man had never been able to get shoes with soles as thick as he wished them, and although these merchants thought they had them of the best, yet of all their stock the man said they were too thin, and would soon wear through. Then laughed the merman, and said, "Many a man is mistaken that thinks himself wise." Neither by fair means nor foul could the man get any more out of him, except on the condition that he should be taken out again to the same fishing bank where he was caught; there he would squat on the blade of an out-stretched oar, and answer all his questions, but not otherwise. The man took him out there, and after the merman had got out on the oar-blade, he asked him first what tackle fishermen should use, if they wished to have good catches. The merman answered, "Bitten iron and trodden shall they have for hooks, and make them where stream and sea can be heard, and harden them in horses' tire; have a grey bull's line and raw horseskin cord. For bait they shall have bird's crop and flounder bait, and man's flesh in the middle bight, and fey are you unless you fish. Froward shall the fisher's hook be."

The man then asked him what the folly was that he laughed at, when he praised his wife and struck his dog. "At *your* folly, man," said the merman, "for your dog loves you as its own life, but your wife wishes you were dead. The knoll that you cursed is your treasure-mound, with wealth in plenty under it ; so you were unwise in that, and therefore I laughed. The shoes will serve you all your life, for you have but three days to live."

With that the merman dived off the oar-blade, and so they parted, but everything turned out true that he had said.

" Well I mind that morning  
The merman laughed so low ;  
The wife to wait her husband  
To water's edge did go ;  
She kissed him there so kindly,  
Though cold her heart as snow ;  
He beat his dog so blindly,  
That barked its joy to show."

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## The Merman and the Mermaid in the Færöes.

THE merman (marmennil) is like a human being, but considerably smaller in growth, and with very long fingers. He lives at the bottom of the sea, and annoys fishers by biting the bait off the hooks and fixing these in the bottom, so that they have to cut the line. If he is caught, he is so dexterous that he can loose the thread that ties the hooks to the line, and so escape from being brought up, and taken on board like any other fish. One time when he tried to play his tricks at the bottom of the sea, he was rather unlucky, for just as he was about to lay

hold of the line of Anfinn from Eldu-vík, with intent to make it fast, Anfinn gave a pull, and caught the merman by the right hand. With one hand he could not free himself from the line, and so was drawn up; a cross was made upon him, and he was taken home. Anfinn kept him in his house on the hearth-stone, but had to remember every evening to make a cross on the four corners of this. He would eat nothing but fish-bait. When they went out to fish, they took the merman with them, and had to recollect to make the mark of the cross on him, when they took him on board the boat. When they rowed over a shoal of fish, he began to laugh and play in the boat, and they were sure of a good catch, if they put out their lines then, especially if he dipped his finger into the sea. Anfinn had the merman with him for a long time, but one day the sea was pretty stormy when they launched the boat, and they forgot to make the cross on him. When they had got out from land, he slipped overboard, and was never seen again.

The mermaid is like a human being above the waist, and has long brown hair like a woman, which floats round about her on the sea, but her arms are shorter. Below the waist she is like a fish, with a scaly tail. If she turns towards the boat when she comes up out of the water, a storm is sure to come, and then it is a case of rowing home as fast as possible, and so try to escape being drowned. But if the merman comes up beside her, it will be good weather. The mermaid sings so sweetly that men lose their senses with listening to her song, and so they must thrust the thumbs of their gloves into their ears, else in their madness and frenzy they will leap out of the boat into the sea to her.

### The Merman and Mermaid in Norway.

WHEN the weather is calm, sailors and fishermen sometimes see mermen and mermaids rise up out of the sea. The former are of a dusky hue, have a long beard and black hair, and resemble a human being above the waist, but below it are like a fish. The latter, on the other hand, are fair and like a beautiful woman above, but below they have also the shape of a fish. The fishers sometimes catch their children, whom they call Marmæler, and take them home with them to get knowledge of the future from them, for they, as well as the old ones, can foretell things to come. Now-a-days, however, it is very rare to hear mermaids speak or sing. Sailors dislike to see these beings, as they forebode storm and tempest. To try to do them harm is dangerous. A sailor who once enticed a mermaid so near that she laid her hand on the gunwale, and then hacked it off, was punished for his cruelty with a terrible storm, from which he only escaped with the greatest difficulty.

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### The Fisher and the Merman.

ONE cold winter day a fisherman had gone out to sea. It began to grow stormy when he was about to return, and he had trouble enough to clear himself. He then saw, near his boat, an old man with a long gray beard, riding on a wave. The fisherman knew well that it was the merman he saw before him, and knew also what it meant. "Uh, then, how cold it is!" said the merman as he sat and shivered, for he had lost one of his hose. The

fisherman pulled off one of his, and threw it out to him. The merman disappeared with it, and the fisherman came safe to land. Some time after this the fisherman was again out at sea, far from land. All at once the merman stuck his head over the gunwale, and shouted out to the man in the boat,

“ Hear, you man that gave the hose,  
Take your boat and make for shore,  
It thunders under Norway.”

The fisherman made all the haste he could to get to land, and there came a storm the like of which had never been known, in which many were drowned at sea.

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### The Merman and the Calf.

AN old woman in Stradil tells the following story after her grandmother. Once, when no ship had been wrecked for a long time, and the merman thus had not got his victim, he went up on shore, and cast his hook into the cows which went about on the sandhills. Just beside the sea there lived a peasant, who had two pretty red calves that he did not want to lose, so he coupled them together with rowan tree, and the merman had no power over them. All the same he fixed his hook in them, but he could not drag them down into the sea, and had to let go his hook, with which the calves came home in the evening. The man took it, guessing it was the merman's, and hung it up beside the stove, where it hung till one day, when only an old woman was left in the house. Then the merman came and took his hook, and turning about to the old woman, said in his own imperfect speech, “ Two red cows' first calves ; rowan tree to couple ; man couldn't drag



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them ; man has lost many good catch since." With that he went away with the hook, and never tried to take cattle on the beach again.

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### The Dead Merman and the Sand-Drift.

A DEAD body was once washed ashore on the Danish coast, and buried in the churchyard of Nissum. No sooner had this been done than the sand began to blow over the country from the beach, and this continued for three days, growing always the longer the worse. People now began to think there was trolldom in the matter, and applied to a wise man for advice. On his learning that the sand-storm had begun immediately after the burial of the dead body from the sea, he declared that this was undoubtedly a merman, and that his burial in Christian ground had caused the drifting. They must instantly dig him up again, and see whether he had sucked his fore-finger into his mouth past the second joint. If he had done this there was no help for it, but if not they should bury him in the sandhills, and the drifting would cease. They accordingly dug him up again, and sure enough they found him lying with his finger in his mouth, but he had got it no further than the second joint. They then buried him in the sand-hills, and the drifting ceased. After that all bodies washed ashore were buried in these hills, down to quite recent times.

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### The Sea-Sprite.

THE sea-sprite is seen after sunset standing on out-lying reefs, and when men row out to fish he calls upon them

and asks to be taken on board the boat. Sometimes they have taken him on board, and set him on one of the seats to row with the others ; during the darkest part of the night he can row against two at the least, so strong is he. He is good at finding the fishing-ground when it is not clear enough to see the land-marks, but he grows smaller and smaller as day approaches, and fades away into nothing when the sun rises out of the sea. They have made the sign of the cross on him, but as the eastern sky grew redder and redder before the sun, he begged more and more piteously to be let go. One time they would not let him away, but when the sun rose he disappeared, and his pelvis was left lying on the seat, for the sea-sprite is said to take to himself a human pelvis, and this is left behind if the sprite himself disappears. He can also produce ocular deceptions : sometimes he seems like a man, sometimes like a dog. He is of a dark-red colour, and hoots and howls so that it can be heard a far way off. Fire flies from him when he is on shore. He has only one foot (or tail), but can hop a long way with it, and his tracks have been seen in the snow. When he meets a man on land he tries to drive him out into the sea.

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### The Shepherd and the Sea-Folk.

ONE time there was a rich yeoman who had a large and splendid house, with a sitting room all panelled from floor to ceiling, but it had the defect that any one who stayed there on Christmas eve was found dead next morning. It was, therefore, difficult to get any one to stay there, for no one wished to remain at home that

night, and yet it was necessary for some one to do so. Once the yeoman had got a new shepherd, as he did frequently, for he had many sheep and required an active man to look after them. The yeoman told the man honestly of this bad point about the farm, but the shepherd said he did not mind such trifles, and was quite as willing to come to him for all that. He came to him accordingly, and they got on very well together. Time passed until Christmas came, and the yeoman and all his household went to evensong on Christmas eve, except the shepherd, who was not making ready to go to church. His master asked why this was. The shepherd said he meant to stay at home, as it was impossible to leave the farm to itself, and let the cattle want their food so long. The farmer told him never to mind that, no one could venture to stay there on Christmas eve, as he had said before, for every living thing then about the house was killed, and he would not have him risk it on any account. The shepherd professed to think this all nonsense, and said he would try it. When his master found he could not persuade him, he went away with the others, and left him there alone.

The shepherd, when left to himself, began to think over his design, and decided that he had better be prepared for all emergencies, as there was plainly something wrong. He kindled a light in the sitting-room, and made it quite bright. Then he looked for a place to hide himself, and loosening two planks of the panelling at the end of the room, he crept in there, drawing them into their places again so as to leave no trace. There he stood between the panelling and the wall, being able to see all that went on in the room through a chink in the boards.

No long time after he had thus disposed of himself, he saw two unknown and very grim-looking men enter the room, and look all round it. Then one of them said, "The smell of man! the smell of man!" "No," said the other, "there is no man here." They then took lights, and looked everywhere in the room, high and low, till at last they found a dog that was lying below one of beds. Him they took and wrung his neck, and threw him out at the door. The shepherd saw then that it would not have done for him to come in contact with these fellows, and thanked his good fortune that he was where he was. After this the room began to fill with people, who proceeded to lay the table, and had all their table-service of silver—dishes, spoons, and knives. Food was then served up, and they sat down to it, making great noise and mirth, and were there eating, drinking and dancing all night. Two, however, were set to watch and tell if they saw any man on the move outside, and whether day was about to dawn. Thrice during the night they went out and said they saw no one coming, and that it was not yet day. When the shepherd thought that it must be dawn, he seized both the loose boards, sprang out into the floor with the greatest violence, clapped the boards together, and yelled with all his might, "Day! Day!" The strangers were so startled at this that they tumbled out, heads over heels, leaving all their belongings—table, table-service, and clothes which they had put off during the night to be all the lighter for dancing. Some were hurt and some trodden under foot, while the shepherd continued to chase them, clapping his boards and shouting "Day! Day!" till they reached a lake a little way from the farm, into which they all dived, and then he saw that they were "sea-folk" or "water-dwellers." After

that he went back home, dragged out the dead ones, and killed the half-dead, and then burned up the bodies. When his master came home, he and the shepherd divided between them all that the visitors had left, and from that time forward nothing strange happened there on Christmas Eve.

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### The Origin of the Seal.

SEALS originally come from mortals who have intentionally drowned themselves in the sea. Once in the year, on Fastern's Eve, they can take off their skins, and enjoy themselves as human beings, with dancing and other amusements, in caves and on the flat rocks beside the beach.

A young man in Mikladal had heard of this, and there was pointed out to him a place not far off, where they assembled on that night. Towards evening he slipped away to this, and kept himself concealed, until he saw the seals in great numbers come swimming up, take off their skins and lay them on the rocks. He noticed that a most beautiful girl came out of one of the seal-skins, and laid it a short distance from where he had hid himself, so he slipped up and took possession of it. They danced and played the whole night, but when day began to dawn, every seal went to look for its skin. The girl was distressed when she missed hers, and traced it to the man from Mikladal, but as he, in spite of her entreaties, would not give it back to her, she had to go home with him. They lived together for many years and had several children, but he had always to take care that his wife should have no chance of getting hold of her seal-skin,

which he therefore locked up in his chest, and always carried the key about with him. One day he was out fishing, and as he sat and fished out at sea, he discovered that he had left the key at home, and called out to the others, "To-day I have lost my wife." They pulled up their lines and rowed home in all haste, but when they reached the house, the woman had disappeared, and only the children were left. To prevent these coming to harm when she had left them, she had put out the fire and laid away all the knives. Then she ran down to the beach, put on the skin and plunged into the sea, where a male seal came up by her side,—he had all the time been lying out there waiting for her. Whenever these children came down to the beach, a seal might often be seen to rise and look towards land, and it was believed that this was their mother. So a long time passed, and it happened that the man intended to go into a large cave to kill seals. The night before this took place, he dreamed that his former wife came to him and told him that if he went on this expedition, he must take care not to kill the big seal at the mouth of the cave, for that was her mate, nor the two young seals at the back of the cave, for these were her two young sons, and she described to him the colour of their skins. The man, however, gave no heed to the dream, but went with the others, and they killed all the seals they could lay their hands on. The spoil was divided when they came home, and the man got for his share the big seal and the hands and feet of the two young ones. In the evening they had boiled the head of the big seal, and the flippers of the young ones for their supper, but when these were set on the table there was a great crash in the kitchen, and his former wife came in like a fearful troll, snuffed at the dishes, and cried, "Here lies

the head of my mate, the hand of Hárek, and the foot of Fridrik, but it shall be avenged on the men of Mikladal ; some of them shall perish on the sea, and some fall down the cliffs, till their number is so great that they can reach round the whole island of Kallsö, holding each other by the hand." After uttering this curse she disappeared and was never seen again, but to this day some are always being lost on the dangerous waters and cliffs in this neighbourhood, and it is also said that there is always a lunatic on the south farm in Mikladal. The number of those lost must, therefore, still be insufficient to stretch round the island.

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## Nykur or the Water-horse

NYKUR lives both in rivers and lakes, and even in the sea. In shape he most resembles a horse, generally grey in colour, but sometimes black ; all his hoofs point backwards, and the tuft on the pastern is reversed. He is, however, not confined to this one shape, but has the property of being able to change himself at once into other forms at his pleasure. When cracks come in the ice in winter, and cause loud noises, it is said that Nykur is neighing. He begets foals, just like stallions, but always in the water, although it has happened that he has got mares with foal. It is the mark of all horses that are sprung from Nykur that they lie down when they are ridden, or bear packs, over water that wets their belly. This property they have from Nykur, who haunts lakes and rivers that are difficult to cross ; he then appears quite tame, and entices people to ride across on him. When any happen to mount him he rushes out into the



water, lies down there, and drags his rider down with him. He cannot bear to hear his own name, or any word resembling it ; at that he changes shape, and springs into the water.

In Gríms-ey, in the north, it is believed that Nykur lives in the sea there, and neighs whenever he knows that the inhabitants have gone to the mainland for a cow. His neigh drives them mad, and they spring into the sea and are drowned. To this also points the fact that it is only of late years that the men of Gríms-ey have ventured to keep a cow on the island.

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### Nykur does work as a Grey Horse.

ONCE the farmers of the parish had to build a wall round the churchyard at Bard (some say Holt) in Fljót (N. of Iceland). One day they had all come to the work early except one man, who was thought rather evil-disposed. Not before mid-day did they see him coming, leading after him a grey horse. On his arrival he was assailed by those who had come early, for coming so late to do his share of the work. The man calmly asked what he was to do, and was set to work along with some others to bring turf for building the wall, with which he was well enough pleased. His grey horse was very fierce towards the others, bit them and kicked them, till at last no horse could stand before him. The men tried putting heavier loads on him, but that did no good, for he went with loads half as heavy again just as easily as before, and never stopped till he drove off all the other horses, and was the only one left. The man then put on his back as much as all the other horses together had taken at each



journey, and after that he went quietly and carried all the material needed for the wall. When this work was finished, the man took the bridle off the horse beside the new-built wall, and struck him over the loins with it just as he let him go. The horse not liking this, threw up his heels and struck the wall with them, thus making a great gap in it that could never be filled up afterwards, however often it was built again, until at last they came to use it as a gate to the church. The last seen of the horse was that as soon as he was loose, he set off and never stopped till he landed in Holt Lake, and all were sure then that this had been Nykur.

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### Nennir.

ONE time a herd-girl was searching after sheep, and was very tired with walking so far. She then, to her great delight, came upon a grey horse, for which she made a halter with her garter, laid her apron on his back, and proceeded to mount him. But just as she did this, she said "I don't think I care to (*nenni*) go on its back." With that the horse started violently, dashed out into a lake near hand, and disappeared. The girl now saw that this was Nykur, for it is his nature that he must not hear his name, otherwise he goes off into his lake, and his other name is *Nennir*. The same thing happens if Nykur hears the Devil named.

One time three or four children were playing themselves near their home on the level banks of a lake. They saw there a grey horse, and went to look at it. Then one of the children mounted it, and the others followed, one by one, till only the eldest was left. The others told it to

come up too, the horse's back would be long enough for them all to sit on. The child would not go, however, and said it did not care to (*ekki nenna*). With that the horse started and dashed into the lake with all the children on its back. The one that was left went home and told what had happened, and all knew that this must have been Nykur, but neither he nor the children were ever seen again.

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### The Long Horse.

IN the middle of the town of Ryslinge there was in old days a morass called Tange's Kjær, and the name is still given to a dam which by draining has taken the place of the morass. One evening, many years ago, some young girls from Ryslinge had been out at a farm in Skirret, to help the woman there to card her wool, and it was pretty late before they started to go home. They followed the path from Skirret to Ryslinge, which went through the morass. The girls were frightened as to how they were to get over this dangerous spot, but on coming to it they found there an old lean horse, so lean that one could count its ribs. The boldest of the girls immediately mounted on its back, and the others followed her example, for the more that mounted it the longer grew the horse. They then rode into the morass, but when they had got half way over, the foremost girl looked behind her, and when she saw that they were all on one and the same horse, she was so scared that she cried out,

" Jesus Christ's cross !  
We are sitting all on one horse."

As soon as this was said, the horse suddenly disappeared, and the girls were left standing in the middle of the bog, and had to wade to land.

## Nykur in the Færöes.

NYKUR lives in lakes, where he has his abode deep down at the bottom of the waters, but he often comes up on shore, and it is no good thing to meet him. Sometimes he is like a pretty little horse, and looks quiet and tame, and so entices folk to come near to him, and clap him and stroke him on the back ; but as soon as they happen to touch the tail, they stick fast to him, and then he lets no one go, but drags them down with him to the bottom of the water. Sometimes he appears in human shape, as a fine young fellow, to entice girls to go with him, and promises them mirth and play in his hall, if they will but follow him ; but if they get a suspicion of who it is that they are giving themselves over to, they have only to name him by his right name, "Nykur," and he loses all power over them, and must let them go and return all alone to his lake. It is said that Nykur can also assume the shape of all four-footed beasts, but he cannot get the point of a wether's horn made on himself. So long, however, as he keeps his own shape he is like a horse, and it has happened that men have got power over him by cutting a cross on his back, and have then employed him to drag large stones down from the hills with his tail, to build walls or houses with, such as may still be seen at Húsavík in Sandö, and at Eid in Österö. The huge stones gathered there bear witness to his great strength. On Takmyre, in Sandö, lies a huge rock, which they would have had him draw to Húsavík, but his tail broke, and the stone stands there with part of the tail still to be seen adhering to it.

### The Nök or Neck.

THIS water-troll resides mainly in rivers and lakes, but sometimes also in fjords. He requires a human sacrifice every year, and therefore in every river or lake where a Nök has his abode, at least one person is lost every year, and when one is to be drowned, the Nök is often heard shouting with a hollow and ghostly voice, "Cross over." These foreboding cries, in some places called "ware-shrieks," are also sometimes heard like those of a human being in a death-struggle.

The Nök can change his shape to resemble all kinds of things, sometimes a half-boat in the water, or a half-horse on land, sometimes gold and valuables. If any one touches these, the Nök has power over him, and is especially greedy for little children, but is only dangerous after sunset. On approaching a water at that time, it is not amiss to say, "Nyk, nyk, needle in water! the Virgin Mary threw steel in water: you sink, I float!"

Although the Nök is a dangerous troll, yet he sometimes finds his master. In Sund-foss in Gjerrestad, says the story, there lived for a long time a Nök, who was often the cause of people being lost, when they rowed up or down the fall. The priest, who feared danger from this Nök, took with him on his journey four stout fellows, and made them twice row up the foss with all their might, but each time they were carried back without getting over it. When they rowed up for the third time, they saw the priest, at the head of the foss, plunge his hand into the water and pu'l out of it a creature which looked like a little black dog. The priest then told them to row further up the stream, while he set the Nök between his feet and remained quite silent. As they neared the cairn beside

Tvet, he charmed the Nök into it. Since that time no one has been lost in Sund-foss, whereas two have been drowned beside the cairn of Tvet, where cries are often heard as of people in danger of their lives.

Not much better did the Nök in Bahus fare. In Norland he transformed himself into a horse, and went on the bank to graze, but a wise man, who saw that there was something on foot, cast so ingenious a halter on him that he could not get free again. He kept the Nök beside him the whole Spring, and worked him well, for he ploughed all his fields with him. At last the halter gave way by accident, and like a shot the Nök sprang into the lake, and took the harrow along with him.

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## The River-Horse.

THE river-horse (bäck-hästen) is very malicious, for, not content with leading folk astray and then laughing at them, when he has landed them in thickets and bogs, he, being Necken himself, alters his shape now to one thing and now to another, although he commonly appears as a light-grey horse. A good long time back a peasant got the better of him. The river-horse wanted to get the man on his back, when he would soon have carried him out into the stream ; but the peasant was wiser than that, for instead of mounting him he put a bridle on him, and Grey-coat had to go home with him. He now got something else to do than go about and play tricks, for the peasant harnessed him to the plough and to a heavy waggon, so that he had to use all his strength, and the bridle was never taken off him for a single minute so long as the peasant remembered about it. One day, how-

he forgot what kind of horse he had and took off the bridle, whereupon the river-horse went off like a shot, and was never again seen in that district.

He also changes himself sometimes to other animals. On one occasion a servant-girl went into the cow-house, and found there a new-born calf. It was a winter day, so she took the calf and carried it into the house, where she laid it beside the stove. Her master and mistress were delighted with this, as they had not been expecting one, and asked the girl whether it was a bull or a cow. She did not know, and when she proceeded to find out, the calf sprang up and laughed, "Ho, ho, ho!" and dashed out of the house.

It is certain that the river-horse still exists, for it is no more than a few years back that a man in Filborna district, who owned a light-grey horse, was coming home late one night, and saw, as he thought, the horse standing beside Våla brook. He thought it strange that his man had not taken in Grey-coat, and proceeded to do so himself, but just as he was about to lay hold of it it went off like an arrow, and laughed loudly. The man turned his coat, so as not to go astray, for he knew now who the horse was.

In Kristianstad there was a well, from which all the girls took the drinking-water, and where a number of boys always gathered as well. One evening the river-horse was standing there, and the boys, thinking it was just an old horse, seated themselves on its back, one after the other, until there was a whole row of them, but the smallest one hung on by the horse's tail. When he saw how long it was he cried, "Oh, in Jesus' name!" whereupon the horse threw all the others into the water.

A worse thing about the river-horse is that he has a

great passion for women who have just given birth to a child. He then puts on the appearance of the genuine husband, and tries to share her bed ; but however he may change his shape he cannot get rid of the horse's hoof, and by this the wife can distinguish him from her real husband. If she does not look to this, and allows herself to be deceived by him, she becomes wrong in the head from that day forward. No woman, however, receives these ugly visits unless the midwife or some other person has been so careless as to wash her linen in some stream or river, and dry it in the open air, for through this the river-horse (or river-man, as one may call him) gets power to enter the house.

### The River-Man.

LIKE the trolls and the wood-fairies, the river-man belongs to the fallen angels, and like these also he desires to play wicked pranks on mankind, so he changes his shape at pleasure. A story is told of a young girl who engaged herself to an agreeable young man, and the two were in the habit of meeting beside a stream. The river-man took advantage of this, put on the shape of her betrothed, and met the girl several times. She found, however, that he behaved differently from his usual conduct, and complained to her parents. These suspected mischief, and told her that the next time she met him, she should pretend to be very friendly with him, and so get out of him the way to protect herself against the river-man. She took their advice, and he was foolish enough to say to her, that whoever carried on their person, "wall-stone, sausage-bone, and the white under ground," would be safe from

him. The girl then searched for a stone from a clay-covered house-wall, a bone-splinter from a meat-sausage, and a garlic-root ; these she carried about with her, and so put an end to his tricks.

The river-man plays music in the rivers and streams. His music is wondrously beautiful to hear, but dangerous to listen to, for one can lose their senses by standing and hearing the dance to the end. Many village musicians have been known, who have learned from him to play this elf-dance, and have sometimes played the first parts of it at Christmas parties and elsewhere. This might be done without any danger either to themselves or the dancers, but if the player had not sense enough to stop at the end of the third part, but began to the fourth and last, then it was too late. At the third part both old and young danced like mad, but now the musician and tables and benches danced as well, and could not stop so long as life was in the people, unless some one from outside entered the room, and cut all the strings of the violin across with a knife.

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### Necken is Promised Redemption.

IN the songs which were composed in old times about Necken, he is represented, like all the elf-folk, as worthy of sympathy and compassion, and the country people always listen with a feeling of melancholy to the sorrowful Necken's song, in which he laments his hard fate.

“ Oh, I am ne'er a knight, though so I seem to you,  
I am the wretched Necken, that dwells in billows blue,  
In fosses and thundering torrents.

“ My dwelling it lies beneath a bridge so low,  
Where no one can walk and where no one can go,  
And no one can remain till the morning.”



Among the most common and most widely-spread stories of Necken is the following. A priest was one evening riding over a bridge, when he heard strains of most melodious music. He turned round, and saw upon the surface of the water a young man, naked to the waist, wearing a red cap, with golden locks hanging over his shoulders, and having a gold harp in his hand. He knew that it was Necken, and addressed him thus: “Why do you play your harp so merrily? Sooner shall this withered staff that I hold in my hand grow green and blossom, than you shall get redemption. The unhappy Necken threw his harp into the water, and wept bitterly. The priest turned his horse again and rode on his way, but lo, when he had gone a little way, he noticed that round about the old pilgrim’s staff that he had in his hand green shoots and leaves had come forth, mingled with the most beautiful flowers. This seemed to him to be a sign from heaven, to preach the comforting doctrine of Redemption after another fashion, and he hastened back to the still mourning Necken, showed him the flowering staff, and said, “See, now my old staff is green, and blossoms like a rose; so also shall hope blossom in the hearts of all created beings, for their Redeemer liveth.” Comforted with this, Necken seized his harp again, and joyous tones sounded over the banks the live-long night.

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“The hour is come, but not the man.”

IT was the Nök, or another water-troll, who late one evening shouted from the lake beside Hvide-sö Parsonage, “The time is come, but not the man.” As soon as the priest heard of this, he gave orders to watch the first man

who came with intent to cross the lake, and stop him from going further. Immediately after this, there came a man in hot haste, and asked for a boat. The priest begged him to put off his journey, but as neither entreaties nor threats had any effect, the priest made them use force to prevent his crossing. The stranger became quite helpless, and remained lying so, until the priest had some water brought from the lake from which the cry came, and gave him it to drink. Scarcely had he drunk the water, when he gave up the ghost.

In southern Vend-syssel in Denmark the river-man is also known as the Nök. The river Ry there takes one person every year, and when it demands them, it calls, "The time and the hour are come, but the man is not yet come." When this cry is heard from the river, folk must beware of going too near it, for if they do so, they are seized by an irresistible desire to spring into it, and then they never come up again. There are many who are said to have heard the cry, among others a girl who was going along its bank with a dog by her side. When she heard the call, she cried out, "Not me, but the dog," which immediately sprang into the stream and was drowned. She also saw a little man with a large beard running about in the river; this was the Nök, from whom the cry no doubt came.

In Odense river there is also a river-man, who requires his victim every year, and if one year passes without any one being drowned there, he takes good care to have two in the year following. It is said that two little boys were once playing on the bank, when one of them fell into the water. The other tried to help him out, but just as he got hold of his comrade's hand, a voice was heard out of the river, "No, I shall have both of you; I got no one

last year," and with that this boy also slipped into the water and both were drowned. Some men, who were witnesses of the accident from the opposite bank, hurried with a boat to lend their aid, but came too late. The bodies were never found either, the river-man had kept them.

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### The River-Man.

THERE was a river-man in a stream which runs on the south side of Maarup-gaard in Fjaltring. The man on the farm was well acquainted with him, and the river-man gave him permission to pasture his cattle along his possessions. Finally, however, they fell out, as the river-man thought that the farmer was coming too close to him ; so he decided to play him a trick. The meadow had just been mown, and a pair of bullocks were pasturing on it, one of which he resolved to take when it came down to drink. One of them had a piece of a tether round its neck, and as it bent down its head to drink, the river-man fixed his gold hook in this, and tried to drag it down into the stream. The bullock, however, dragged the hook from him, and ran straight home with it. The farmer came out into the yard, and saw this big gold hook hanging at the bullock's neck, so he took it off and hung it up in his parlour. In a little the river-man came and asked it back, but the man said, " No ; it is hanging in a place that you cannot take it from." " Oh, never mind," said he, " you can just keep it for the services you have done me in time past ; I wanted you to have it as a reminder of me, and there is a blessing along with it, for you and your descendants will never come to poverty so long as

you have it." This has been fulfilled, for there has always been prosperity on that farm, as far back as any one can remember.

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### The Kelpie.

IN Gerrestad, they formerly used to set down a bowl of gruel, or something of that kind, beside the mill, so that the kelpie might increase the meal in the sacks. For a long time he lived in Sand-ager-foss, where a man had a mill. Whenever he tried to grind corn, the mill stopped, and the man, who knew that it was the kelpie who caused this annoyance, took with him one evening some pitch in a pot, under which he lighted a fire. As soon as he had started the mill, it stopped as usual. He then pushed down a pole to drive away the kelpie, but in vain. Finally, he opened the door to look out, but right in the doorway stood the kelpie, with open mouth, which was so big, that his under-jaw rested on the threshold and the upper one on the lintel. "Have you ever seen anything gape so wide?" said he to the man, who straightway caught up the pot of boiling pitch, and threw it into his mouth, with the words, "Have *you* ever felt anything taste so hot?" The kelpie disappeared, roaring loudly, and has never been seen since.

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### Sea-Serpents.

IN the fresh-water lakes and rivers, as well as along the coasts of Norway, are found monstrous sea-serpents, which, however, differ in respect both of their appearance

and magnitude. According to the general belief, they are born on land, and have their first abode in forests and stone-heaps, from which, when they are full-grown, or have tasted human blood, they make their way down to inland lakes, or to the sea, where they grow to a monstrous size. They seldom show themselves, and when they do, they are regarded as omens of important events. In most lakes and rivers of any importance these monsters have, according to tradition, been seen some time or other rising from the depths of the waters, and thereby foretelling some great event. In the fresh-water lakes none have shown themselves within living memory, but they are sometimes seen in the firths when it is perfectly calm. In Snaasen Lake is found a large serpent, which yearly demands a human life, and in Sælbo Lake there exists one which has lain there since the Deluge. When once it turns itself, it will break down the mountain that now dams in the lake, and the result will be that Trondhjem will be overflowed. Some time after the black death, says tradition, there came two large serpents from Foksö past By and down into Lougen; one of them is said to be still there, but the other, a couple of centuries ago, tried to go down the river to Gulosen, and was killed in the waterfall, and drifted over to Braaleret, beside By-nes in the neighbourhood of Trondhjem, where it rotted and gave out such a stench that no one could go near the spot.

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### The Sea-Serpent in Mjösen.

IN Mjösen there once lived a sea-serpent, and one time, when it was fine summer weather, it came to the surface to sun itself, throwing the water into the air, while it



reared its head above a reef. Its eyes were large, and glowed like a carbuncle; a long mane like sea-tangle hung down its neck; and its body, covered with scales which glanced with a thousand colours, stuck up here and there. As it was unable to go away again, and lay and beat its head upon the reef, there was a monk, a daring fellow, who shot an arrow into one of its eyes. It died in terrible convulsions, so that the waves became both red and green with blood and venom, and finally it drove ashore at Pulstö on Helge-ö. It lay there and rotted till the stench became so intolerable, that the inhabitants had to cart wood and burn it up. They afterwards set up its ribs, which were so high that a man on horseback could ride under them.