

# HEMINGS ÞÁTTUR



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## INTRODUCTION

*Hemings þáttr* (The Story of Hemingr) was probably written in Iceland in the thirteenth century. The chief manuscripts are Hrokkinskinna (the relevant part of which was written in the sixteenth century), Flateyjarbók (the relevant part of which was written in the second half of the fifteenth century), and Hauksbók (written by the Icelandic Lawman Haukr Erlendsson in the first decade of the fourteenth century). None of these manuscripts contains the whole story. The text in Flateyjarbók has the first part, as far as the end of Hemingr's testing by King Haraldr (breaking off just before the chapter heading on p. 21), while the text in Hrokkinskinna, which is considerably shortened compared with that in Flateyjarbók, breaks off just before King Haraldr's expedition to England in 1066 (p. 28). Hauksbók has only the last part of the text, beginning just before the text of Hrokkinskinna breaks off, though the first leaf of the text in Hauksbók is now lost and has to be supplied from a copy made by Ásgeir Jónsson in 1697–8, when parts of the leaf were already illegible.

There is no reason to doubt that the text as reconstructed from these three manuscripts represents more or less the content of the original story, though the central section, based on the Hrokkinskinna text, besides being shortened, has a large lacuna (from 32/9 to 35/11 in the EA edition). This can be filled from a number of copies of the Hrokkinskinna text made in the seventeenth century or later; some late manuscripts also contain additional passages that may have been omitted from Hrokkinskinna or derived from some other source.

The historical background to *Hemings þáttr* has been constructed from Icelandic Kings' Sagas, chiefly *Morkinskinna* and Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla*. Some details may also have been derived from *Fagrskinna* and *Knýtlinga saga*; also *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, *Laxdæla saga* (for the idea of the swimming contest between the hero and the king) and perhaps other Sagas of Icelanders. Accounts of Haraldr Godwineson's survival of the Battle of Hastings are also found in Oddr Snorrason's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and *Játvarðar saga* (The Saga of Edward the Confessor). There are also several English sources that preserve this legend, which is also found in Geraldus Cambrensis, *Itinerary through Wales* II.xi; see E. A. Freeman, *The History of the Norman Conquest of England*, second edition, III (1875), 785–7, and Margaret Ashdown, 'An Icelandic Account of the Survival of Harold Godwinson', *The Anglo-Saxons*, ed. Peter Clemons, 1959, 122–36. It does not, however, seem likely that the author of *Hemings þáttr* knew any English sources at first hand, or, indeed any specifically Norwegian sources independent of the Icelandic ones. Nor is any source known for the life of Hemingr himself, who is probably not a historical character, though most of

the King Haraldr's Icelandic companions are. There are, though, several well-known analogues to this story of a skilful archer in conflict with a tyrannical ruler. In Iceland, *Eindriða þáttur*, about the Icelander Eindriði and King Óláfr Tryggvason of Norway, found in the *Greatest Saga of Óláfr Tryggvason*, may well have been inspired directly by *Hemings þáttur*. The Danish Historian Saxo Grammaticus (late twelfth century) tells a similar story of Toko (perhaps the same as Pálma-Tóki in *Jómsvíkinga saga*) and King Haraldr Bluetooth of Denmark (died c. 985) in Book X. Close to this is the account of A. Krantz in *Chronica regnorum aquilonari Daniae, Suetiae, Norvagiæ* (1546), IV 149–50. Another Danish story from 1472 tells of Henning Wulf and Christian I of Denmark. The Norwegian *Piðreks saga*, probably based on German sources, tells of the archer Egill, brother of Velent (Wayland the Smith), who also turns up in *Völundarkviða* in the *Poetic Edda* and on the Anglo-Saxon Franks Casket. The king in his story is the legendary Níðungr (Níðuðr, Niðhad). A folk-story from Rorbach in Germany tells a similar story of Puncher in about 1420 (see Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* I (1900), 380–83, IV (1888), 1393. The best known, but by no means the oldest story of this type is that of William Tell, the earliest account of whom is in *The White Book of Obwalden*, 1471–2. There is a thoroughly English version of the story, first recorded in the sixteenth century, but probably at least as old as the fifteenth, in the ballad Adam Bell, Clim of the Clough and William of Cloudesly, in which William demonstrates his skill in archery to the king of England (*The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. F. J. Child, No. 116, III 14–39).

The story of Hemingr himself was extraordinarily popular in Scandinavia. One set of *rímur* was composed in sixteenth-century Iceland, another by Benedikt Sigurðsson in 1729, a third by Magnús Jónsson in 1808. A prose paraphrase of the second of these, *Æfintýr af Hemingi Áslákssyne*, was made before 1750. Further *rímur* by Sigurður Breiðfjörð (1798–1846) and Davíð Guðmundsson (nineteenth century) have not survived. An ending for the incomplete text of *Flateyjarbók* was provided in the eighteenth century. Two Icelandic historians, Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648) and Þormóður Torfason (Torfæus, 1636–1719) included Latin paraphrases of the story in their histories, *Supplementum Historiæ Norvegiæ* (1597) and *Historia Rerum Norvegicarum* (1711), II 365–72. There are several versions of a Norwegian ballad (*Harald kongin og Heming unge, Heming og gyvre*) and a Faeroese ballad (*Geyti Áslaksson*), and traces of the story in Sweden too (A. I. Arwidsson, *Svenska fornsånger* (1834–42), I 123, no. 13; A. A. Afzelius, *Svenska folkets sago-häfder* (1844–68), I 43).

The standard edition, with an extensive but not always clear introduction, is *Hemings þáttur Áslákssonar*, ed. Gillian Fellows Jensen (Editiones Arnamagnæanæ B3), 1962.

*Hemings þáttur* is unique among the many Icelandic stories about subsidiary episodes during Haraldr harðráði's reign over Norway (1046–66), that are attached to various versions of the Kings' Sagas, in that the main character is a (fictitious) Norwegian rather than, like most of the minor characters in this story, Icelandic; and also in that the first part of the story is based on an international folk tale. This was about a great archer in conflict with a ruler who is made to shoot an apple or other small object from someone's head (see *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, ed. F. J. Child, No. 116, III 16–22).



## HEMINGS ÞÁTTTR

IT IS THE BEGINNING of this account that King Haraldr was ruling over Norway, son of Sigurðr sýr and Óláfr the Saint's mother Ásta. King Haraldr was for twenty winters king over Norway. He was two and thirty winters old when he became king in Norway. He was married to Silkisif Haki's daughter.<sup>1</sup> He left her behind in Hólmgarðr. He said he would come for her, and left behind a great deal of money as a pledge. This was a goatskin flayed with the horns still on. It was full of pure silver and he said she could keep this wealth if he had not asked her for it when fifteen winters were past. And each of them pledged the other their troth.

Their daughter was Maria, who had been the finest of women and a girl of the best kind. But when the king was back in his own country, then he got married a second time, and wedded Þóra, daughter of Þorbergr Árnason and Ragnhildr, daughter of Erlingr Skjálgsson of Jaðarr. Their sons were these, Óláfr kyrri (the Quiet) and Magnús father of Hákon whom Steigar-Þórir fostered.

King Haraldr was a big man in stature, the most courteous of men. He was intelligent and well spoken. There were lots of manly fellows with him. Nikulás Þorbergsson was with him, his brother-in-law, a most highly respected person. Secondly an Icelandic man, Halldórr Snorrason, and Þoðvarr son of Eldjárn son of Arnórr kerlinganef (Crone's Nose), and Oddr Ófeigsson from Melr in Miðfjörðr. Also there was Hjörtr Ólafsson and Þórarinn Nefúlfsson. They were highly regarded by the king.

The king was accustomed to this, to receive hospitality for every summer and winter alternately in either the north of the country or in the south.<sup>2</sup> One autumn he is receiving hospitality in the north of the country. Áslákr was the name of a landowner who dwelt on the island that is known as in Torgar. This island lies off the northerly part of Norway.

Áslákr was a very wise man. He was head man over the island. He had a son who was called Björn. Björn was a most splendid person. The king sends Áslákr word from where he was a guest and said he wanted to meet him. Áslákr responded quickly and goes to see the king and comes before the king. The king received his greeting kindly. The king begins to speak:

'You shall make me a banquet with my following of a hundred men, and I shall stay at it three nights.'

<sup>1</sup> Hrokkinskinna correctly calls Haraldr's queen Ellisif (Elizabeth) and adds that she was daughter of King Jarizleifr of Hólmgarðr.

<sup>2</sup> The kings of Norway at this time had no fixed capital, but would go on a 'progress' round the country receiving hospitality from landowners for themselves and their followers as a form of taxation.

He answers: 'I am unable to make you a banquet. But I shall give money to provide for you no less than you will use up at your banquet and on top of that I will choose gifts for you just as I would if I had provided it.'

The king asks: 'What is the reason for your drawing back from making me a banquet?'

'I do not feel I have a room for it,' says Áslákr. 'I know little about how to entertain people of rank.'

Then the king spoke: 'We shall not let that stand in the way.'

'I have no furnishings,' says Áslákr, 'and I would like to be excused from providing you with this banquet.'

The king answers: 'Make whatever objections you like, yet will I come for this banquet.'

'Then shall I also not excuse myself,' says Áslákr. 'When will you be coming?'

The king says: 'No later than tomorrow.'

Áslákr told him to do as he wished, then.

Áslákr went home with things as they were, and the king comes in the morning. Áslákr goes out to meet him and welcomed the king very warmly. They were taken into a hall and arranged in their seats. The hall there was all fitted out with shields and inside it was arranged most stylishly in every way.<sup>1</sup>

Then the king asks: 'Is there anything else you feel you are lacking for the banquet besides the furnishings?'

'What I think is,' says Áslákr, 'that other things must be lacking even more. But yet I think that the fare would be more plentiful if more were available; and yet I have hung everything on my own pegs and not got anything on loan.'

The king said he was pleased with this. Áslákr had the entertainment proceed and everyone there agreed that they had never received a better banquet.

The night passed, and in the morning after church, then they were all drinking together. They talked with each other, the king and Áslákr. The king asks:

'How well do you know the laws that King Óláfr the Saint son of Haraldr established? You are said to be a great lawyer.'

'I think I know something about them,' says Áslákr.

'What has he laid down about this,' says the king, 'if someone has his son fostered secretly?'

Áslákr says: 'It is not known to me that a man may not have his children fostered wherever he wishes.'

The king answers: 'I have heard of another pronouncement of his about it than that.'

'What have you heard about it?' says Áslákr.

<sup>1</sup> It was customary in aristocratic halls to hang shields round the walls.

Then says the king: 'That he shall forfeit land and life.'

'Why must he be sentenced so harshly?' says Áslákr.

The king replies: 'The king cannot enlist someone for his support or defence of his land when he does not know that he exists, and he cannot beware of someone when he does not know that he exists.'

'I do not wish to discuss this,' says Áslákr. 'It does not apply to me.'

'I have been told the contrary,' says the king, 'that you will be having a son fostered in secret.'

'Who says that?' says Áslákr.

'Nikulás Þorbergsson told me,' says the king.

'Is that what you say, Nikulás?' says Áslákr.

'It is going to be hard for me to sail between the rock and the wave,'<sup>1</sup> says Nikulás. 'I dare not accuse the king of lying, and moreover I cannot carry it off the island with dry feet<sup>2</sup> that I have not spoken of it. I remember this,' says Nikulás, 'that I was here in Torgar at the age of ten and was considered by no one anything other than rather a fine fellow. But at that time you had the son called Hemingr. And the two of us played children's games together, and I have seen no one else like him, and in every way he had greater strength at the age of six than I at the age of ten. And he remained here after we left, and since then I have never heard anything of him. Now I have said nothing more than that to the king,' says Nikulás.'

Then the king asks: 'What has become of that person?'

'So it is as Nikulás says, that I had a son who was called Hemingr, and he seemed to me very promising-looking,' he says, 'but later on he lost his wits, and I sent him away from Torgar, and so far from other people that no one should hear about him, and I have never enquired about him since and I do not know whether he is alive or dead.'

Then the king asks Áslákr: 'You shall not have a long period of expense on our account for the time being. We shall now set off and you will not have to receive us again before next year at the same time. You must then have your son come here whether he has more wits or less at his command, and even if he is dead, yet I want to see his bones,' says the king.

'That is no problem,' says Áslákr.'

Now they part. The king returns home and stays at home that year and all was peaceful in the land, and the following year the king comes to Áslákr for his banquet in Torgir. Áslákr receives them well and magnificently. So when the night had passed, then they talk together, the king and Áslákr. The king asks:

<sup>1</sup> i.e. between Scylla and Charybdis; he is in a dilemma.

<sup>2</sup> þurrt af hálmi (for hólmi?) bera 'carry dry from the straw (or island)', i.e. get away with saying.

‘Do you remember at all what we talked about together last autumn?’

‘I have not thought about it,’ says Áslákr.

‘Your son, whom you have been so secretive about,’ says the king, ‘must have come here by now.’

‘I have never thought about it,’ says Áslákr, ‘and I cannot get him here. He is staying much too far away.’

‘I shall not be as angry with you as you deserve,’ says the king. ‘We shall now go away from your banquet and be away for two months and you will not be pleased with your lot if Hemingr is not here by that time.’

Áslákr answers: ‘You do not need to make such a fuss about this, it is no bother for me to have him come here before the time has passed that you have specified.’

The angry mood of the king was obvious to everyone, and they part for the time being. The king receives hospitality on the mainland until a month of the winter has passed. Then the king makes his way out to Torgir. Áslákr has prepared a banquet ready for him and was very cheerful, and it seemed to them that no more decent banquet had ever been put on than this one. During the day the king asks Áslákr again whether Hemingr ‘has now come here, whom you have for a very long time been reluctant to let me meet.’

Áslákr replies: ‘Your business has again slipped from my mind.’

‘There is no need for us to exchange many words together. But I can tell you what I intend. Do not send for your son any sooner that you wish, but we are now going to stay here until he comes. But if your resources fail first, then you will not make any further banquets, nor your son Björn.’

‘That will have to be up to you,’ says Áslákr.

They break off their conversation for the time being. As soon as Áslákr gets away from there, then he calls twelve of his men to speak with him.

‘I have planned a mission for you,’ says Áslákr.

They say they are willing to go wherever he wishes.

‘You must go aboard a ship,’ he says. ‘You must row north past Snøs and land on the ness that is called on Framnes. Five men are to go ashore there.’

Kálfr was the name of the one he calls on for this expedition. He was in charge of the messengers.

‘The others are to look after the ship. You must go inland from the settlement into the wood. There you will find a path in front of you through the forest. This path will get broader the further you have walked along it. You will have to go on for four days even if you walk fairly briskly. Then you will walk on out of the wood late in the day. Then there will lie before you a valley. It is closed in by cliffs and woods. But it cannot be seen until you get to the end of the valley. There before you there will be a farmstead. Go up to it. There will be no one else there except a man and a woman.

They will ask where you are from, and you tell the truth about this. They will offer you all hospitality. You must accept this and take a rest there. Have the arrangements for your stay made early. You will lie in the living room. One of you men must keep watch. Then I guess that someone will come in when part of the night has past, fine and tall and prosperous-looking. The fires there will be made up. He will sit down by the fire. I will not deny that he may be more intelligent-looking than I have described him. Then Kálfr must stand up and greet Hemingr and give him my greetings and invite him to come and see me, and if he seems hesitant about it, then tell him to make up his own mind and say that my life depends upon it, and that of my son Björn, though it looks more likely that he will manage to escape. But tell him that I think that his life will be at stake if he comes. Now tell him to choose the course he thinks best.'

Now he bids them farewell. Now they set off in accordance with Áslákr's instructions. Kálfr went ashore and the group of five, and nothing worth telling about happened on their expedition until they reach the man's house. They were given a good reception as soon as the couple knew where they were from. Now their accommodation is got ready for them to retire, and they go to bed, but the man and his wife sit by the fire. And then she begins to speak:

'It is getting late for our foster-son now,' she says.

The man replies: 'I have little wealth, but yet I would give it for him not to come home this week.'

'Why is that?' she says.

'It is because I am afraid that these men may be sent to fetch Hemingr,' he says.

'I do not know how it will turn out for me then if I have to part with my foster-son,' says the old woman.

'I would be well pleased about it,' says the man, 'if I were sure that he was choosing the better course. And I am no less anxious about this than about parting from him.'

Then there is a short while to wait before there are footsteps outside and a man comes in there in a red tunic with the skirts tucked up under his belt. He had a gold band round his head, while his hair fell down onto his shoulders. Kálfr thought he had never seen a manlier-looking person or one better built in every way.

The couple stand up and welcomed their foster-son Hemingr. He responds well to their greeting and sits himself down by the fire. The man asks what game he had found. He replies:

'I did not see many birds, but it was up to me whether or not to take those I saw.'

He asks what has turned up. The old woman replies:

‘Your father’s men are come here and we are afraid they may be sent to fetch you. Many will say this, that it would not be too soon.’

Now it shall be told about Kálfr, that he stands up and goes up to him and greets him. Hemingr responds well to his greeting and asks where he has come from.

‘I am sent from your father with this message, that he invites you to come to see him, and wishes you to come.’

‘Indeed there must be something up of great importance,’ he says, ‘when he is just now sending word to me. I think I have a right to decide for myself, and I am going to stay at home,’ he says.

‘I think now,’ says Kálfr, ‘that there is no need to hammer a hollow ring about this,<sup>1</sup> that Áslákr bade you decide,’ telling him now what his father had said about it. Hemingr replies:

‘Then go straight away in the morning and do not stop before you come to the ship,’ he says. ‘And if you see no sign of me coming, then go back home, and you will not then need to expect me.’

Then they break off their conversation. And straight away in the morning Kálfr and his party set off on their journey and do not stop until at their ship, and launch the ship, and when they were ready, then they see where Hemingr is travelling on skis down from the land. He boards the ship. Kálfr asks when he left home. He said:

‘I left home this morning.’

Nothing is told of their journey until they come to Torgar. Áslákr welcomed his son. Then the morning was so far advanced that men were going to church. So after church, when the king had gone and sat down, then Hemingr goes before the king and greets him. The king responded kindly and asked who he was. Hemingr tells him his name.

‘I would not like to see the hide that you are the back leg (*hemingr*) of,’ says the king.

‘Not everyone’s name indicates his nature. But the reason I am come here is that I would like to offer you everything that you wish to receive from me. Though I have little support to offer, I put it at your service if you wish to make use of me for it,’ he says. ‘I will become your follower if you want me to. But if you want to debase me further, then I will offer you my exile to redeem my father and other kinsmen,’ says Hemingr. ‘And even if you want to condemn me to death, even then I will not run away,’ says Hemingr.

The king asked: ‘Are you at all a person of any special abilities?’

<sup>1</sup> i.e. ‘question this’. Gold rings were tapped with a hammer to see if they were solid.

Hemingr says: 'The old man and woman seemed to think I could do many things well. But I have not displayed my accomplishments to other people. And I guess they would not impress you greatly. There is one skill that I could demonstrate to you,' says Hemingr.

The king asks: 'What is that?'

'Skiing I do not care whom I compete with at, for no one will be able to outdo me at that.'

The king answers: 'We will watch your performance and see what we think you can achieve in it.'

Hemingr answers: 'I will attempt to perform whatever you have someone else perform first.'

'We shall now go out,' says the king, 'and compete with each other.'

Áslákr now went up to the king and says: 'I have made arrangements for your transport away by ship, if you wish, for it seems to us time now for the games to end.'

The king answers: 'We shall stay for today.'

Then everyone went outside. The island was thickly wooded and people went to the wood. The king took a spear and sticks the point of the spear down in the ground. Then he puts an arrow to the string and shoots it up in the air. The arrow turned in the air and the point of the arrow comes down onto the tail of the spear and stood straight up. Hemingr puts an arrow to the string and shoots after him and this arrow was lost to sight up in the air a long time and the point of the arrow comes down there in the string-notch of the other arrow. Then the king takes up the spear and shoots it from his hand. He shoots so hard and far that every one remarked on it, and yet straight. Then he told Hemingr to shoot at it after him. Hemingr shoots after him and right past it so that the socket of the arrowhead lay on the point of the king's spear. The king takes up the spear and shoots a second time and shoots the whole spear past Hemingr's shot.

'Now I would like not to shoot again after that,' says Hemingr, 'for I see that I cannot do it.'

'You shall shoot,' says the king, 'and make an honest attempt to shoot further if you can.'

'It is the truest of all sayings that every man is cross if he doesn't win with the weapons he has got. Now I shall shoot, come what may,' says Hemingr.

Now he shoots, and very much further.

Then the king puts an arrow to the string and he took a knife and stuck it in this oak. He shoots at the back of the haft of the knife so that the arrow stands fast. Then Hemingr takes his arrows. The king stood by his side.

'Your arrows are bound with gold, and you are a very ambitious man,' says the king.

‘I did not have any of these arrows made for me. They were given to me, and I have not taken off any of their fittings.’

Hemingr shot after him and it struck the haft of the knife and the haft sprang apart. The point of the arrow stood in the tang.

Then the king spoke: ‘We shall now shoot a greater distance.’

And he took an arrow and looked very angry, and puts an arrow to the string and draws the bow so that the tips seemed to touch. The arrow flew from the bow a very long way and comes to rest in a very slender twig. Then everyone said they thought it the most excellent shot. Then Hemingr shoots and somewhat further and the arrow stuck through a nut. All those that were present were amazed. The king said:

‘Now the nut shall be taken and put on your brother Björn’s head, and you shall hit the nut there. You shall shoot from no nearer than before. But if you miss, then your life shall be the penalty for it.’

‘Life is at your discretion. But I will not shoot this shot,’ says Hemingr.’

Björn spoke: ‘Rather shall you shoot than bring death upon yourself, for everyone is obliged to extend his life as long as he can.’

‘Are you resolved to stand still and not to dodge at all if I shoot at the nut?’

‘Yes, absolutely,’ says Björn.

‘Then let the king stand next to you,’ says Hemingr, ‘and note whether I hit the nut.’

The king answers: ‘It is next to you I am going to stand,’ and called on Oddr Ófeigsson to do it. He went up and said it was a suitable test of his reliability for him to make an honest judgment about this. Then Hemingr goes to where the king wants him to stand and crosses himself.

‘I call on God to witness that I place all the responsibility into the king’s hands, that I shall not wilfully do harm to my brother.’

Then Hemingr shoots. The shaft<sup>1</sup> travels fast and passes back over the crown of his head and touches beneath the nut and he was not scratched. The nut rolled back off his head, while the shaft flew on and only came to rest when it came down on the ground. Then the king came up and asks whether it hit the nut.

‘Are you going to trust what I say about it at all?’ says Oddr.

The king answers: ‘The one who knows must bear witness.’

‘It seemed to me better than if he had hit it,’ says Oddr, ‘as he shot beneath the nut, and it rolled down, and he was not harmed.’

‘It doesn’t seem to me that he shot as I told him to,’ says the king.

And they sleep through the night. So in the morning Áslákr goes to speak to the king.

<sup>1</sup> Flateyjarbók has *spjótit* ‘the spear’ here and in the next sentence, though surely it ought to be ‘the arrow’. Hrokkinskinna does not say what weapon is used.



‘Again I have made arrangements for your travel, if you want to go to the mainland.’

The king answers: ‘We shall stay here today.’

And when the drinking period was ended, then the king summons them outside and they go down to the sea. Then the king came to talk to Halldórr Snorrason.

‘I intend you to beat Hemingr at swimming today.’

Halldórr replies: ‘That would be beyond those who are more capable than I.’

Then he calls on Þoðvarr Eldjárnsson to do it. He answers:

‘Though I had the accomplishments of all the people that are here, yet I would not trouble him at all, and least of all when I know that I am inferior to him in every way.’

Then the king spoke to Nikulás Þorbergsson: ‘You shall compete with Hemingr at swimming.’

Nikulás answers: ‘I do not know how it will go, but I can try if you wish.’

The king summoned them both to swimming. Hemingr spoke:

‘I do not need to hold back now, for it is with him I would most like to compete if I had to with anyone.’

Now they get undressed and go swimming. Then Nikulás asked: ‘Shall we compete at ducking or at distance swimming?’

‘There will be an opportunity,’ he says, ‘to compete at ducking when you have first beaten me at the other.’

Then Hemingr swam off away from the shore. Nikulás then asks, when they had swum for a long time:

‘Do you not think we should turn back?’

Hemingr answers: ‘Further on I guess that you in-laws of the king would like to make your turning point.’

He swims on as before. Nikulás swims on a little while after and asks a little later:

‘Are you determined to swim further?’

He answers: ‘I would have thought you were capable of going on your own, even if you wanted to go back to the shore, but I am going further.’

‘I think that is a good idea. I shall have a go at turning back.’

Nikulás turns back at that point and has not swum far before his swimming weakened, and the point is reached that Hemingr swims over to him and asks how his swimming is going.’

‘That’s nothing to do with you. You can go on your way.’

Hemingr answers: ‘I would have thought that was what you deserve. But yet we may as well now both help each other along together.’

‘I shall not oppose that,’ says Nikulás.

‘Hold onto my back now and support yourself like that.’

And thus they carry each other to land. Nikulás himself goes up ashore and had got very stiff, but Hemingr sat down on a stone out at the tideline. The king asks Nikulás how it had gone with the swimming. Nikulás answers:

‘I would have brought no tidings ashore if Hemingr had not been more decent to me than you.’

‘Now you, Halldórr, must overcome Hemingr.’

‘That I will not do,’ says Halldórr. ‘It seems to me that the one has achieved very little that previously competed at swimming.’

The king threw off his clothes. But Áslákr goes to see Hemingr and says:

‘Be off,’ he says, ‘and save yourself. Now the king wants your life. But it is only a little way to the wood,’ says Áslákr.

Hemingr answers: ‘Face to face shall eagles claw each other. But the one that God wishes to raise cannot be sunk. Let him come when he wishes.’

Then Hemingr rose from the stone [and leapt into the water], and the king [did the same] in a different place. And when they meet, then the king swims at him and forces him under the water. Then the others saw nothing of their encounter but the sea getting so rough above them. Then the evening began to close in and when it was not long to nightfall, then the sea grows calm and the king swims to land. He was so angry-looking that no one dared to speak to him. The king was given dry clothes. But none of them saw Hemingr and they all thought him dead, but no one dared to ask. The king goes back home, and his men. There was little merriment there with the drinking. The king was depressed by anger, but Áslákr was depressed by grief. Lights were kindled in the hall and the king [was] come to his seat.

Then Hemingr goes into the hall before the king and lays a knife on his knees, the one that the king had been wearing on his belt. They all assumed that he must have taken the knife off him.

Now the night passed, and in the morning, then Áslákr speaks with the king.

‘We have made arrangements for your departure, if you wish to leave.’

The king says: ‘Now we shall not stay. But Hemingr will come with us to the mainland.’

Now they set out and cross to the mainland. They landed by a great mountain. It fell steeply down to the sea’s edge there, and there was a way up if one went on foot along the side and there lay a single track path there and a precipice below and a high mountain above, and there was no more of a ledge than would take one man riding along.

The king answers: ‘Now you shall entertain us with your skiing.’

Hemingr says: ‘It is not a good time for skiing, for,’ he says, ‘there is no snow now and there are sheets of ice and the ground is very hard on the mountain.’

The king replies: 'It would be no test of skiing if conditions were all at their best.'

'As you wish.'

Hemingr put on skis and slides over the slope alternately up or down and they all say that no one had they seen anyone ski with such agility. He slides up to the king and speaks:

'I would like to stop skiing now.'

The king says: 'You shall not do it more than just this once. You shall now go across here up onto the mountain and ski down, and take care that you stop yourself if you can out on the edge of the cliffs.'

Then says Hemingr: 'If you want my death, then you do not need to put it off.'

'If you will not do as I ask,' says the king, 'then you shall meet your death.'

'There will not be much postponement of my death for me in that. Yet everyone is obliged to extend his life [as long as he can]. So that is what I shall do too.'

Áslákr goes to the king and offers all his possessions for Hemingr to be then less threatened by death than before. The king said he did not want his money.

'Moreover he shall not be pushed further, but he shall undertake this run,' says the king.

Hemingr said no one was to try to get him off. He goes off away from the rest. Oddr Ófeiggsson [goes] with him and speaks:

'This is a bad farewell to a good fellow, and I shall demonstrate to you in one matter that I wished that you might live. I have here a linen cloth which has long ago been the holy Stephen's cloth. I shall put this round you, for I know of no kind of living creature that has died that has had the cloth round itself. But if you slide down over the cliff and die, then I will think the cloth no better than any other cloth. But if you are granted life, even if we do not meet each other, yet you must take good care of it, because I am not making a gift of it to you.'

He replies: 'It may be that you will not be properly rewarded, but it shall not be worse than nothing.'

Now they part for the time being. No one knew what had passed between them. The king goes out onto the cliff-edge, and all his men. The king had on a red cloak with ties and a spear in his hand. He undoes the pin from the cloak and leans over on the blade of the spear. Nikulás Þorbergsson stood at his back and held him by putting his arms round his middle, and so on one behind the other. So Hemingr goes up onto the mountain and puts on his skis and slides down over the mountain. He went so fast that it was incredible. He was never thrown about so much that the skis did not end up beneath him. And next he

comes down there where they were and he pushes down on the ski poles when he comes out to the cliff-edge and leaps up in the air. The skis run forward from under him. He gets his feet under him on the edge of the cliff. He is rocking violently. He grabs at the king's cloak, but the king ducks his head down and throws his cloak off to the front. Then Hemingr flies down over the cliff.

The king spoke: 'Now parted here the doomed and the undoomed.'

Oddr answers: 'It would not have been the case that you would both have gone the same way, even if you had both died.'

'What lodging place do you foresee for each of us?' says the king.

'I would like,' says Oddr, 'to go to the lodging place that I think is prepared for Hemingr. But I think that Christ must not wish the devil to be so pleased with you as to receive you this evening.'

'I could not grant you less,' says the king, 'than for you to get to that good lodging place that Hemingr has come to.'

Then he tells them to take him and throw him down over the cliff. Then Halldórr Snorrason replies:

'Either all we Icelanders will now die, or else none of us. And yet we all of us intend to have something as payment for us.'

'This shall be done for your sake, Halldórr,' says the king, 'that Oddr may go from me and be in peace this winter, and go to Iceland in the spring. But as soon as Oddr is away, then I shall make him an outlaw throughout Norway.'

Oddr answers: 'What is past must be put up with. But it does not seem to me to be a bad thing that we should part.'

Now Oddr is off straight away. Now the king goes on to where a banquet has been prepared for him, and he stays there for the time being. But this is to be told about Oddr, that he went out to Iceland in the summer, and he will come into this account later.

Now it is to be told about Hemingr that he flew down over the cliff. But it happened for him as happens for others that jump [out off cliffs], that all his clothes billowed out from him. Now the cloth blows out and drifted into the cliff and catches on a boulder, and there he hangs and is unconscious. And when he came to, then he was filled with panic and fear, and as his awareness increased, then the fear was drawn out of his breast. Then he spoke on his own to himself:

'How can it have so turned out that I should be stuck here? But it will not be any more trouble for God to let me get away than to let me be come here unscathed. Now I will make a vow and promise all my possessions, that is half of all the wealth in Torgar. This wealth shall be divided into three thirds: I shall give one to the holy King Óláfr. The second third shall be donated to pilgrims on the road to Rome and to people in need, and the third I shall give to the holy Stephen, and this money I shall put out for interest until I

find Oddr Ófeigsson. And I intend for myself to go on pilgrimage to Rome, if God is willing that I should get away from here and be present as close to the king's death as he thought himself to be to mine just now.'

It was now the darkest night when he sees a great light come above him and he sees a man walking along the cliff top. This man takes hold of his hand and pulls Hemingr up onto the cliff top, and he speaks with him.

'Here is come Óláfr the Saint to meet with you, because I did not want you to be destroyed in such a way that King Haraldr's responsibilities would be increased by it. But you must carry out your vow and go on pilgrimage to Rome. But if you come across strangers, you must call yourself Leifr while King Haraldr is alive. You shall be granted what you prayed for, that you will be involved when King Haraldr dies. But I do not think you will be rewarding me properly for the gift of your life if you take a major part in it. Now we shall part for the time being.'

Now Hemingr saw the king rise up in the air from him with the light. But he sees a boat and rows out to Torgir. He goes to church and sees there many candles burning and they were lying there in prayer, Áslákr and Björn.<sup>1</sup> Then Björn spoke, when Hemingr came to the church doors:

'Father,' he says, 'a great miracle! Here is come my brother Hemingr.'

Hemingr answers: 'This is no miracle, because I am alive just as it seems to you.'

And he tells them everything that had happened. They become more pleased than words can express. Hemingr stayed there in secret over the winter. And in the spring he divided up his wealth as he had vowed. After that Hemingr went to England and took with him the third part of his wealth which belonged to the holy Stephen and arranged for it to be taken care of there while he went on pilgrimage to Rome.

#### Of Oddr Ófeigsson

In England at this time there was the king who was known as Játvarðr the Good, son of Aðalráðr. He had no child. Leifr went to see him and the king welcomed him. And when he had been there a while, then he sent word secretly to Oddr Ófeigsson that he should come to see him as soon as he could. And as soon as Oddr heard this news he gets his ship ready and sails first to Orkney and so to England and there meets Leifr in London. And he welcomed Oddr, and he stayed there the winter. He had two bells founded. He took charge of the wealth that Hemingr had given to the holy Stephen to save his life, and also of the cloth, and Hemingr asked Oddr to have a church built with it.<sup>2</sup> But a little while before Oddr was ready [to

<sup>1</sup> Here Flateyjarbók breaks off. The text continues from Hrokkinskinna.

<sup>2</sup> i.e. with the wealth.

leave], then he was at a well-attended assembly that the king was holding. There he saw a tall man in a cloak, a sword with gold fittings in his hand. Oddr went up to this man and asked him his name, and he said his name was Aðalbrigt. Oddr spoke:

‘Where did you get these fine things, the sword and the cloak? For I know that my brother owned these things and he travelled from Iceland on a ship and nothing has been heard of him since.’

He says he had bought the things. Leifur went up and said:

‘You will have to tell the truth, for the king has a sword that is called Skírteinn (Proof), and you shall be struck with it. And it has this nature that it causes the death of any man that lies, but on the man that tells the truth it causes no wound. Adalbrigt answers:

‘It will cause a wound on me, then, for there were many of us on board ship and we captured a ship and the crew defended themselves bravely, and we murdered them all, and I do not deny this, that I was the death of the man you are speaking of; and I commit myself to God’s hands and yours.’

Oddr spoke: ‘I do not wish to have your life, but the king has the power to decide whether you may stay in this country. But you shall pay me a hundred marks in pure silver.’

Adalbrigt gladly agrees to this. After that Oddr sets off and received many honours from the king and Leifr. He sails out to sea. A storm forces him to Norway and they reach a harbour there that is called Eikundarsund and lay there a few nights. Late one evening King Haraldr came there with five ships. The king got to know that Oddr was come there. It was now dark in the night. The king then has his ships berthed in the sound round outside Oddr’s ship and had the ships tied together there. But he himself had a tent on shore, so Oddr was trapped in between. The crew became uneasy. Oddr said:

‘Do not be uneasy, for I am telling you the truth, that Hemingr is alive and he had got in greater danger than we are in, and we shall look for safety for ourselves to where he did, to almighty God. And I will vow this, to have a church built at Melr, as I have been asked, and I shall endow it with money and set up a foundation there and give for it all the goods that are on board here. You must all promise something too.’

And so they did, and when that was done then the wind dropped. Oddr then told them to weigh the anchors and hoist the sail. Then a bit of wind gets up. Those that are on shore laugh and they asked if Oddr was planning to sail overland or out over the ships. Oddr steers out onto the cables between the ships and sails out to sea and brings his ship into Miðfjörðr and went home to Melr and had a church raised there and it was dedicated to the holy Stephen. And the cloth that Hemingr had round himself is still there today.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> i.e. probably in the late thirteenth century.

Now the story must be taken up where the earl was ruling Northumberland who was called Guðni. He was married to Þorgils sprakaleggr's daughter Ingiríðr. She was King Sveinn Úlfsson of the Danes' father's sister. Guðni had many children. His son was called Haraldr, the second Tósti tréspjót (Wooden Spear), the third Mǫrukári, the fourth Valþjófr. His daughter was called Veigerða.

One autumn King Játvarðr rode to Skarðaborg and received a banquet from Jarl Guðni. The king invited Haraldr to visit him and he accompanied the king and when he got back home the king assigned him a place in the second high seat next to Leifr.

'He knows most skills and he shall teach them to you.'

Leifr did all he could to teach Haraldr skills, and he alone knows all about Leifr's life in England. And when five winters were passed, the only thing that Haraldr lacked of skills compared with Leifr was that he was less strong. And when Haraldr demonstrated his abilities before people, then everyone was amazed about where he could have have learned such arts, for no one knew that Leifur knew so many skills.

Haraldr was then eighteen winters old<sup>1</sup> when he went from England west to Valland<sup>2</sup> with twelve ships. Robert Rúðujarl was ruler there. He had a son who was called Vilhjálmr and was known as Bastard. He was greater in size than very many other men. Vilhjálmr was married to a woman who was called Móqld. Their sons were these, Heinrekr and Róbjartr, a most civilised and tall man. Vilhjálmr invited Haraldr to stay with him, and he was there during the winter. And in the spring they entered a partnership together with regard to present and future acquisitions, and also whichever of them came in for or inherited territorial power, it was to belong to both of them. And each of them was to provide the other with support in all undertakings and each to avenge the other as if he was his brother. So they went on raids with five and twenty ships, and they kept up this activity for six seasons. Haraldr was the more popular of the two.

Heinrekr was the name of a jarl of Glotesti in England. His son was called Helgi, a tall man and strong. He was a sensible man and ambitious. He gathers an army together and raids on King Játvarðr's realm. The king gathers an army against him. The man who led the king's army was called Jón. They meet by Bónólfr's Stone, and there a fierce battle takes place and the jarl was victorious and Jón fell. So the men that fled went to see the king. Then the king puts in charge of the army the leader who was called Ótti. He was son of Birgir Berti's Champion. He takes the army against the jarl.

<sup>1</sup> Here begins a lacuna in Hrokkinskinna. The next part of the text is supplied from various late manuscripts derived from Hrokkinskinna when it was complete.

<sup>2</sup> i.e. 'to the west of France' or 'to France in the west' (from the standpoint of Norway or central France), though Valland may mean Normandy here.

They meet at Hróttserkr. They fight for two days. Ótti fell there, but the jarl subjected the country to himself. The king hears of this. He sent men for both Haraldr Guðinason and Leifr, and meanwhile assembles a force. The messengers came to see Haraldr and tell him what the king had said. Haraldr tells Vilhjálmr that he wants to give support to the king. Vilhjálmr replies:

‘I am not parting from my army.’

Haraldr answers: ‘Then we must divide up our wealth and troops.’

Vilhjálmr answers: ‘You can go if you like. But there is going to be no division of wealth.’

Haraldr answers: ‘There shall be either the one or the other, that we shall divide the wealth, or else we shall both go to fight.’

It turned out in the end that the division of wealth took place. It is said that there came to be too much friendliness between the pair, Haraldr and Queen Móðld, and when Vilhjálmr accused Haraldr of this, he denied it. And afterwards Móðld and Haraldr adopted this scheme, that he asked for Móðld and Vilhjálmr’s daughter’s hand in marriage. And this was decided, that he should be betrothed to her before he went to England and their wedding was to be in Rúða in twelve months time, and they parted now as friends for the time being. Haraldr makes for England and goes to see King Játvarðr. The king now gathers an army together and marches against Jarl Heinrekr and they meet by the river that is called the Lodda, and there immediately takes place there a very fierce battle. The king had arranged that Haraldr should attack the jarl from the rear with his men. And when the battle had been going on for a little while, Haraldr came with a huge number of men behind the jarl’s battle line, and there were a lot of casualties there. And next flight breaks out among the jarl’s men, and this jarl is captured and a hundred men with him. Afterwards the jarl was killed, and thirty men with him, while others were made slaves.

A certain farmer went before the king and spoke: ‘Here is one man, young and strong, him I would like you, lord, to give to me, and I will make him my slave.’

The king answers: ‘He looks to me as though he is scarcely one for you to get the mastery of. So if he runs away, then you shall pay for it. But if you get no work out of him, then bring him back to me.’

The farmer said he had no fear of not being able to bow his spirit. After that they went back home. The farmer spoke to this man:

‘We shall make a good bargain with each other: I shall treat you well, and you will work hard.’

The newcomer answers: ‘I am not going to work.’

The farmer spoke: ‘You shall be put in a room on your own and be starved to death there if you will not work.’



‘You can do as you please about that,’ said Gestr (the newcomer).

The farmer puts him in a room and starves him all the time. He beats Gestr so that he can hardly walk, and sometimes he flogs him so that blood lay on the floor. Sometimes he offers him money to get him to work. Gestr refused that. So on one occasion Gestr spoke to the farmer:

‘Stop torturing me to make me work, for I tell you once and for all that you will not make me into a slave like that along with all your other workmen.’

The farmer answers: ‘Then I shall take you to the king.’

Gestr answers: ‘The king shall not make a slave of me any more than you have, though he may have more of a chance than you.’

The farmer answers: ‘You will also have good treatment from him.’

‘I had intended,’ says Gestr, ‘not to ask many favours of you, but I would like to be able to decide at what time we shall come before the king.’

The farmer agrees to this. Gestr said:

‘Then it shall be on Christmas Day when the king is going to High Mass.’

And that is what they do. The farmer greets the king and spoke:

‘Here is the man you gave me in the autumn, and I cannot make a slave out of him, for it is easier to soften a hard stone than his heart.’

The king spoke: ‘Kill him then.’

Gestr spoke: ‘I am entitled to have a truce for today.’

The king goes on to church. Gestr spoke:

‘Go home, farmer, and be pleased if we part without more ado.’

And when Mass had been sung, then Gestr goes before the king and spoke:

‘I am told that you grant everyone a truce for Christmas, even if you have serious charges against him.’

The king spoke: ‘You may have a truce if someone will stand surety for you.’

Gestr goes into the hall with the king and goes up to Hemingr and asks him to guarantee his truce with the king, and he does that, he obtains a truce for Gestr on over the Christmas period. So when the Christmas period was over, then Gestr asked Hemingr for help for himself. Hemingr answers:

‘I cannot wholeheartedly plead for you if I do not know who you are.’

Gestr says: ‘If there is little hope of your giving me help while you do not know, then there will be no hope after you find out what kind of man I am.’

Hemingr answers: ‘I would not help you if you think yourself too good to tell me who you are.’

Gestr spoke: ‘You shall have your way, but I am called Helgi, son of Jarl Heinrekr, and I exchanged arms with my shield bearer during the flight and he fell and they thought they had killed me.’

Hemingr goes before the king and asks for Gestr the right of abode in the country and the king grants this for his sake.

Now as time passes King Játvarðr gets sick in the first part of one winter, and he is confined to bed on over the Christmas period. After this he had a well-attended assembly called and had himself carried to the assembly, and said:

[‘May this be clearly and without concealment understood by everyone, the nature and condition of my illness and sickness, which is that I discover and note that I am on the point of passing on as a result of it, on account of which I would like this kingdom after me to be given proper supervision and good government. Therefore, since here in my kingdom I know of no one available of your leading men better suited than Haraldr Guðnason, who has been my follower for some time and turned out well in all difficulties, and who has also become widely famed for his abilities and skills, in which I believe him to be not inferior to most kings and leaders, so I appoint him today to each and every royal status which I have previously among you had and held, asking and instructing each and every one of you to grant and make available to him royal rank and obedience as befits his rank and is appropriate to your submission.’]

A little while after this the king died.<sup>1</sup>

After the death of King Játvarðr, Haraldr Guðnason succeeded to the kingdom in England in the manner as is told in the saga of King Haraldr Sigurðarson. It also says there that Tósti and other brothers of Haraldr Guðnason wanted to share power in England with him and did not get it. Then Jarl Tósti went to Denmark to see his kinsman King Sveinn, and he was welcomed there. Tósti asked King Sveinn whether he has some claim to power in England. The king answers:

‘I do not deny that I thought I had. But it seems to me to have turned out very well now that my kinsman King Haraldr rules there, for we are cousins.’

Tósti answers: ‘Many people in that country and his council say this, that I and my brothers possess a third of the land.’

The king answers: ‘Then it does not seem to me that Haraldr is sole king in England if you possess one third.’

Tósti spoke: ‘What I want is that if you would like to go to conquer the land, I and my brothers will give you help and all our support if you wish to be in charge, on condition that if we conquer the land you shall make us kings over the country. We will pay you tribute and put the country at your disposal if you ever need it.’

The king answers: ‘I must consider my reply to this.’

And he said he was to stay with him over the winter. Tósti wanted to know the outcome of his mission as soon as possible. It happened on one occasion in the autumn when the king was riding round his banquets, and Tósti with

<sup>1</sup> The passage in square brackets is supplied from AM 326c 4to. It appears to be a late invention to fill part of the gap in Hrokkinskinna, the text of which resumes at this point.

him—it was while they were resting out by a bridge and eating—the king had a sheepdog that was travelling with him. The dog was given a small loaf of bread. The dog runs onto the bridge and sees his reflection in the water and it seems to him that another dog was down there and that he has another loaf in his mouth. He leaps out from the bridge and dives into the water and thought he would get the loaf off the dog. Now when he got into the water, then he loses everything, and so went back to the bank with nothing. The king spoke to Tósti:

‘Did you see how my dog got on just now?’

Tósti spoke: ‘I wasn’t watching very closely.’

The king spoke: ‘The dog thought he saw another dog in the water, with bread in his mouth, and thought he would be able to take the loaf off him, but he was jumping at his own reflection and brought neither loaf to the bank. Thus, I know, it will happen to me if I now go to England, then I will be seeing my reflection, and even if I manage to get back here, then it may be that King Haraldr will be here first and then I shall not keep this kingdom. I shall now give you a decision on your business, that I shall not come to England, because in Denmark shall I be king as long as God wills, for it behoves me now never to covet more. But you, Tósti, can go to King Haraldr. And that is what he did.

The autumn before Tósti came to Norway Steigar-Þórir dreamed a dream and told his men and asked them to interpret it. He said that he dreamed he was present at an assembly that King Haraldr was present at. He was sitting on a seat so large that it reached over the whole of Norway, and the king was so large that he extended out over the seat in all directions. I dreamed a man went up to him and kissed him. And I dreamed that such a big fly flew out of this man’s mouth into the king’s mouth, like a raven. Thereupon I dreamed that a raven’s beak grew upon the king. With this beak I dreamed that he struck the head of everyone that was at the assembly except for us men of Steig. I dreamed that from this many died, but everyone suffered from it. Then I was afraid that he would strike us men of Steig. At that point I awoke. Now I shall myself interpret it. When we were present at an assembly and the king was sitting on a seat, this was his throne. And when he extended out over the seat in all directions, so his ambition extends out in all directions from his realm. And where I dreamed there was a raven’s beak on him, then I am afraid that he will come to face a raven’s beak<sup>1</sup> and the raven will drink his blood. Where I dreamed he was striking men’s heads with his beak, I guess it will fall on their heads so that many will meet their deaths because of it, but yet it will go worse for those that are with him. But we men of Steig are not going to accompany him.’

<sup>1</sup> i.e. die in battle and be attacked by birds of prey.

... learned<sup>1</sup> from reliable people that there is a different king over England. Now in the Christmas period when ... comes ... [I would therefore be] most [happy] for you to have this power. Tósti now also demanded the same fief from Haraldr as from Sveinn if the land was conquered. Tósti tells him also that King Sveinn would not accede to his demands. The king says that he shall take counsel with his men as to how this shall be responded to. Tósti now stayed with the king over the winter.

Earlier that winter King Haraldr had sent Þórarinn Nefúlfsson and Hjørtr east to Hólmgarðr to fetch the goatskin that he had left behind there with Queen Ellisif, as was told above, and they were not to come back unless they got the skin and the valuables that were in it. They came back when Tósti had been with the king a short while. Hjørtr went before the king and greeted him and says that Ellisif greeted the king, but he was so involved with his talk with Tósti that he takes no notice of those that had arrived. Then Hjørtr spoke a verse:

Grabs gold,  
the ruler, hard in heaps,  
[Sýr's] son<sup>2</sup>  
gives small coin;  
little land should  
Dangle-skin<sup>3</sup> have;  
then would to [us] warriors  
Haraldr reply.

‘How little?’ says the king.

‘No more,’ says Hjørtr, ‘than you could lie on.’

The king smiles, and asks: ‘How has it gone, Icelander?’<sup>4</sup>

Hjørtr spoke:

There is a white goat  
out in the yard;  
he leers with his eyes,  
has a big beard.  
He stamps his hooves,  
wants to snatch children.  
This nanny-goat's son  
wants to cause trouble.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hrokkinskinna breaks off after a few more lines (down to footnote no. <sup>4</sup>), with a very abbreviated text. The remainder of the story is from the Hauksbók version, beginning with a copy of a now lost leaf of Hauksbók.

<sup>2</sup> Haraldr's father Sigurðr was nicknamed Sýr (‘sow’). See *Two Icelandic Stories* 86.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Laf-Hamðir’: apparently an insulting name for Tósti, who is asking Haraldr for land to rule over.

<sup>5</sup> This stanza is said to be a nursery rhyme.

The king told them to have the wealth brought in. Then the goatskin is brought in before the king. Then he asks whether she had remained silent, who had handed over the money. Þorarinn said she had made no comment. The king said:

‘Then he must be asked, that is more truthful. What have you to say, Hjörtr?’

He answers: ‘This I say, that she spoke a verse.’

The king spoke: ‘How did it go?’

Hjörtr said:

He will not this spring  
west with warships,  
cowardly, over the sea  
Haraldr sail.  
So the paralysed king  
will be for long  
lacking all,  
both England and glory.

Then Tósti said: ‘This is a prophecy, they are asking you to go to England. Is there no likelihood of your going there?’

The king [answers]: ‘You shall go to the shrine of the holy King Óláfr and you shall swear an oath that you will tell the whole truth about the forces [of the king of the English] and then I shall raise an army to go abroad to conquer England. But I insist on having sole command of the army.’

Tósti said he would swear the oaths. ‘But if for any reason your expedition is broken off, then these oaths will be on your head.’

The king said it should be so. After that the king sends letters all over Norway and summoned out a full levy. Then Eysteinn orri (Heathcock), son of Þorbergr Árnason, came to the king and then was betrothed to Maria, daughter of King Haraldr and Ellisif, daughter of King Jarizleifr of Hólmgarðr. Her mother was Ingigerðr, daughter of King Óláfr the Swedish. Nikulás Þorbergsson was at this time an official in the most northerly assembly district in Hálogaland. This army all assembled at Sólundar. There was come there the king and Jarl Tósti and more than fifty landed men.<sup>1</sup> And one morning, while the king was waiting for a favourable wind, he told Tósti of a dream he had had, in which he dreamed that a man came aboard his ship and he thought he recognised there his brother King Óláfr.

‘He looked very angry,’ he said, ‘and he spoke a verse:’

For the renowned king, the stout one [St Óláfr],  
most victories brought glory.

<sup>1</sup> Landed men were men holding land in fief from the king.

When I fell to the earth I was in state of grace,  
 not having ventured out from my own dominions.  
 I fear for the king's final undertaking;  
 I feel that your fate awaits you:  
 You will provide its fill to the greedy troll-wife's horse [wolf];  
 This expedition does not have God's blessing.

Tósti replied: 'It won't have been King Óláfr who recited the verse, but rather I suspect it was the sorcery of the Englishmen.'

'I am convinced,' says the king, 'that no one is so skilled in magic that they can assume the form of King Óláfr.'

'A good man was King Óláfr,' says Tósti, 'and yet magicians have appeared in the forms of men who are no less holy than he.'

The king answers: 'I will go with you to England to try to bring about a peaceful reconciliation, but for no other purpose.'

Tósti answers: 'The oaths will fall on your head if you dismiss the levy.'

The king says: 'I shall not put myself in danger of that.'

It is said that when the king was sailing out past Þrándheimr, and he [was lying at . . .] a man [rowed out] to his ship in a boat and asked the king to sail to land and help his sick wife. The king asked what sickness she had. The husband said that she had fallen asleep near a [certain] spring [and woke to find] that she felt a sort of [swelling] in her mouth.

'And since then she continually wants to drink water.'

The king says that the ship is to sail to land. 'And then you will realise that you have not got a proud king, though he be called hard and mean.'

The king goes ashore, and the poet Þjóðólfr with him. They come to the woman and the king ordered that the woman should be carried to the same spring where she contracted the sickness. He ordered that she should be turned face downwards and put with her lips down to the stream. The king sat next to her and had a pair of forceps in his hand. He had a small fire lit by his side. The woman wept bitterly and begged to be given a drink, but the king would not allow her to get any water. Then the cause of her suffering is forced up into her throat. Then her mouth opens and a worm's head comes out. The king took the forceps and took hold of the worm's head and drew out of her a live worm and throws it on the fire. Afterwards the woman is taken home and soon recovered. Afterwards the king goes to his ship and sails south down the coast with the whole of the army that had now joined him from the north of the country.

It is said that while the king was lying in Súlundar, there sailed in from the sea a ship from Greenland. In charge of this ship was a man who was called Líka-Loðinn (Corpse-Loðinn) because he had carried the corpses of Finnur feginn (the Glad) and his crew from Finnsbúðir east of the glaciers

in Greenland at the request of King Óláfr the holy, for Finnur was the son of Ketill kálfr (Calf) of Hringunes in Heiðmörk and King Óláfr's sister Gunnildr. They launch a boat and row to the king's ship, and Loðinn greeted the king. The king asked how long they had been at sea. Loðinn answers:

'Seven nights.'

The king asked: 'Did you notice anything out of the ordinary?'

Loðinn answers: 'I don't think now that there was anything exceptional.'

Then his companions turned the boat round. Then the king spoke:

'Your men don't think you are telling the truth, so tell it now.'

Loðinn answers: 'When we had been sailing two nights away from land, we saw a fire burning. It was so long that we could not see past either end. It was dark like a flame. We had a very favourable wind and it was impossible to sail round it. I decided to sail into the fire at the place we had encountered it, and where the flames were lowest. We [felt a great deal of] heat from the fire and both sheets [of the sail] were burned, and [we had to replace] the sheets and the leeches [of the sail] with new Greenland cloth. And when we had sailed [for three days, there appeared] a dark bank of cloud above our ship. With it came such complete darkness that one couldn't see one's hands. Then we heard a great crash and I looked up. The bank of cloud had then broken in two and blood flowed from each [part] in a great cataract, and this stream of blood came down into our ship, and I had [a cauldron] put underneath and the blood can still be seen here. It has now congealed since it cooled, for it was warm when it came down. And when we had sailed another three days, we heard a great din. Then we saw a lot of birds flying, for which I know there are names there in Norway. The ones that were [biggest] flew nearest to us. They screamed and chattered with great joy. This flight lasted for three hours, so that one could not see clear sky because of it, and yet they were never the same [birds] flying. Afterwards we sailed for another whole day before we came to land yesterday evening. Then we saw the same birds flying over the sea from the west [from the direction of England]. Now all the biggest birds were missing. Now they all flew in silence and as if they were sorrowful. And when they came to land they scattered and alighted each on its own. Now I have no more to tell you.'

The king spoke: 'You tried to conceal this from me, since you claimed you had seen nothing.'

Loðinn answers: 'What I said was, lord, that I did not now think there was anything strange in this, since I know you have decided on an expedition abroad.'

'Why is that?' said the king.

Loðinn spoke: 'Because you will not return. It is to be expected that a great omen should be seen before the death of such important men.'

The king spoke: 'Will you go with me?'

Loðinn replies: 'You must decide, but I could fetch back the bodies of those of your men who die.'

[The king answers]: 'I shall have a better choice of men while I am alive, but you shall go for this reason, that you claim to know what will happen on our expedition.' Then the king spoke: 'Don't you think, Tósti, that this is rather a remarkable thing?'

Tósti says: 'If it had appeared before a reliable person then it would have been unusual.'

Loðinn says: 'It would be worth a lot that you, Tósti, should not tell more lies on your travels than I.'

The king gave Loðinn leave to depart.

#### The priest Hugi's dream

There was a priest called Hugi who served at Avaldsnes on Kǫrmt. He dreamed one night that he was looking into the churchyard and it seemed to him that all the people that were buried there were up and about. They had one man amongst them whom they were pushing away from themselves, and on the other side of the church they had another man, and this one they were all pulling at. There came out from among them a woman who approached the priest; she was naked. The priest asked what all the turmoil there was about. She replied:

'A corpse is coming to the church this morning when the sun is in the south-east which neither party wants to receive. But one will be coming at midday, which everyone wants to get hold of. But the corpse that comes first I would like to be buried on the east side of the churchyard, but the one that comes afterwards I would like to be buried to the north where the nave and the choir meet, and there you will find a person's bones, and I would like these to be piled round the corpse on all sides, for they are my bones.'

'Tell me then,' says the priest, 'how will our king fare abroad?'

She replies: 'He will fall.'

The priest asked: 'Who will rule the kingdom then?'

'Fri[ð]leifr (Peaceful),' she says.

'How long will he rule?' says the priest.

'Seven winters and twenty,' she says.

'What will happen then?' he says.

'Styrlaugr (Strifeful) will come then,' she says.

'How long will he rule?' says the priest.

'Ten winters,' she says.

'What will happen then?' he says.

'Góðráðr (Good Ruler) and Góðvili (Goodwill) and Harðráðr (Harsh Ruler),' she says.



‘Which of them will be the longest lived?’

‘Harðráðr,’ she says.

‘How long will he rule?’ says the priest.

‘Five winters and twenty,’ she says, ‘but after him there will come to pass many evil deeds. And now I shall not tell any further.’

The priest wakes up, and the corpses come during the day, just as she said. And it was Óláfr kyrrí (the Peaceful) there whom she called Friðleifr, and Magnús berfœttr (Bare-Leg) where she named Styrlaugr, Eysteinn where she named Góðráðr, and Óláfr where she named Góðvili, and Jórsala-Sigurðr where it was Harðráðr. But God forbade that she should tell of the evil deeds which were done afterwards.

#### Haraldr harðráði lands in England

Now the story has to be taken up where King Haraldr sails to sea with his army. First he came to Orkney, and left behind there his daughter Maria and many other people. From there the king sails to England and they came to Skarðaborg. Then the wind dropped to a dead calm and they lay there for the night. Men awoke at a chanting that was in the air, and it seemed to each of them as if it were above his ship. They all looked up and saw a troll-wife riding a wolf in the sky. She had a trough on her knees, full of blood and human limbs. She chanted these three verses:

It is certain that the king is eager  
to go from the east westwards,  
a rendezvous to make with many fine bones;  
that is to my advantage.  
There the corpse-grouse [raven] will pick out meat  
from Gjúki’s [sea-king] stem-horses [ships],  
he knows he’ll find food enough.  
I am always present there,  
I am always present there.

Great mountains begin to fall;  
sickness spreads among mankind;  
peace is destroyed, born  
is enmity between lands.  
I shall be called the weird [fate]  
among you as among other nations,  
singing sad laments.  
The she-wolf swallows blood in the south,  
The she-wolf swallows blood in the south.

The killer makes the red shield shine  
 when battle draws near.  
 The wife of Aurnir's offspring [troll-wife]  
 sees clearly misfortune awaiting the king.  
 The swarthy lady takes away  
 men's blood<sup>1</sup> with her chops.  
 The ferocious woman colours  
 The wolf's mouth within with blood,  
 The wolf's mouth within with blood.

The king asked Tósti whether he is awake. Tósti answers:  
 'I was woken up by this chant.'

The king spoke: 'Do you think all that meant anything?'  
 'Nothing,' says Tósti.

'Then you are dead in your heart,' says the king, 'for I have taken part in many battles, and I never saw omens like these before.'

They reach land and go ashore there in the district called Kliflǫnd. The king asks Tósti:

'What is that little hill called over there to the north of the area?'

Tósti says: 'Not every hillock here is given a name.'

The king says: 'But this one is sure to have a name, and you must tell me it.'

Tósti says: 'It is the grave-mound of Ívarr the Boneless.'

The king replies: 'There are few who have conquered England who have come across his grave mound first.'

Tósti says: 'It is sheer superstition now to believe such things.'

They go ashore with the army, but some stay on guard by the ships. The brothers Jarl Mǫrukári and Jarl Valþjófr and their brother-in-law Áki gather an army together as soon as they hear about the army of Northmen. They met at the river called the Ouse and there a very fierce battle begins which continues until none (3 pm). By then Eysteinn had penetrated the English lines and killed Áki the Tall. Then he sees that Mǫrukári has gone round to the rear of Tósti's lines. Then he brings his own men round behind Mǫrukári's lines. And when the Jarl Mǫrukári sees this, he tells his men to stand back to back and defend themselves well and valiantly. And in the end his men broke into flight and they flee out into the river, and Jarl Mǫrukári is killed there with the greater part of his army. Many were also drowned.

While this was going on King Haraldr had captured Jarl Valþjófr. Then Tósti goes up to the king and spoke:

'Let the brothers go the same way.'

<sup>1</sup> 'flesh' in the version of the verse in *Heimskringla*.

The king answers: 'You shall kill those that you capture, but I will decide his fate.'

The king spoke to Valþjófr: 'I will let you go free if you will swear never to fight against me and to give me information the same day if you know of any treachery being planned against me.'

Valþjófr says: 'I will not swear oaths and I will not save my life by not helping my brother Haraldr as long as I can, but I will give you information if I know of any treachery planned against you, and this I will do to save my life. But I will not swear any oath, for it seems to me that Tósti is not going to let me have much of my inheritance.'

The king set Valþjófr free to go wherever he wished. Tósti says:

'It is a foolish trick to let a man go free who thinks himself too good to swear you oaths.'

The king spoke: 'I consider his word more reliable than your guarantee.'

Tósti spoke: 'Let's take our army to London and lay waste the country with fire and sword and spare no one, neither women nor children.'

This was done. And after that they return to their ships and sail south down the coast and sail their ships up to Rafnseyrr. Then they find before them in the villages neither people nor animals, so swiftly everything flees away. And one day, when the king was lying in a certain harbour, then a woman rode from the land down to the shore and asked for the king of the Northmen. The king told her who he was. She spoke:

'I have a land-tent that I want to give you.'

Tósti spoke: 'Accept the tent and have it burnt afterwards.'

The king spoke: 'Burn what is given to you, but I haven't noticed that your countrymen have been giving you any tokens of respect.'

He orders the tent to be erected. And everyone agreed that no one had seen such a fine tent. The king asks what reward she desires for the tent.

She says: 'I have two sons, and I would like to receive assurance that they will both live.'

The king said that both her people and her property would be spared if he knew where it was. After that she rode away. So the king sleeps in the tent that night. And in the morning the king tells the poet Þjóðólfr that he thinks that Tósti had been right when he said that the tent would not be free from sorcery.

'For up to now I seem to have seen seven plans to meet every eventuality, but now I don't seem to have any idea what course to take.'

Þjóðólfr answers: 'We will nevertheless look at your counsels.'

The king spoke: 'Our plans shall now be changed. We shall go ashore with twenty hundreds of men, and sixty hundreds shall stay with the ships. In charge of these shall be the brothers Eysteinn and Nikulás. Tósti shall go with me.'

What the king does is go ashore and burn and plunder. And when he reaches the town that is called in York, then the citizens send him a message, offering to surrender to him. They confirm this with oaths. The king accepts their offer. Afterwards he returns to his ships. So the next morning he was to go ashore to install his men in charge of the city, and the king stayed at the ships for the following night. And when morning came, the king prepares to go ashore to the city. They wear shields and helmets, but no coats of mail, except for a hundred men who wore very light armour. Tósti spoke:

‘It is very inadvisable to go into the hands of one’s enemies almost unarmed, for it will be no good trusting the English if they get you in their power, and the housewife’s gift of the tent has not done you much good, king.’

The king spoke: ‘Are you afraid now, Tósti?’

He says: ‘I think it is much more to be feared that you have lost your senses than for poems to have been chanted at us.’

‘We shall nevertheless do as I say,’ says the king.

Tósti was so unpopular with the Northmen that no one would listen to him. The same evening, as King Haraldr was going back to the ships with the army of Northmen, King Haraldr Guðini’s son came up from the south of England with an overwhelming army to York, and there learned the true facts about the Northmen. And when the citizens knew that the king was come, then they broke all their promises to the Northmen and joined King Haraldr’s army. And immediately the next morning the king moved his army down to Steinfurða Bridge, which is now called Stamford, and so both armies advanced on each other. King Haraldr Sigurðarson spoke:

‘Is that a whirlwind or the dust from horses that can be seen up inland?’

Tósti answers: ‘It is dust from horses for sure, and now you can see how reliable the men of this country are.’

The king halts his army and waits, and soon sees that an overwhelming army in full armour is advancing on them. At that moment a man came riding up and asked for King Haraldr. He was told where he was. Tósti spoke:

‘This is now my brother Valþjófr, so kill him.’

The king forbids this. Valþjófr rides up to the king and greets him and tells him to turn back as quickly as possible to his ships.

‘For my brother, King Haraldr, is advancing on you with an overwhelming army and you have not the numbers to resist him, even if you were armed, but even less as you are.’

The king spoke: ‘Farewell, Valþjófr, and stand by your brother well. You have kept your word well.’

The king then asked what course they should take, and the majority asked the king to go back to the ships for the rest of his men. The king answers:

‘I have never yet fled without a battle, and I shall not do so now, for I do not want to give the English the triumph of both chasing me and killing me.’

Then he sends men to the ships to tell Eysteinn orri that he needs reinforcements, and he has the trumpets blown and arranges his lines of battle. Then the English army also halts and arranges its lines. And there was now little more than the distance of two arrow-shots between them. And just then three men ride up to the ranks of the Northmen and asked whether Jarl Tósti could hear what they said. One of them, the one who spoke, was not a very big man, and slight in build, and most gentlemanlike, and wore a gilded helmet and a red shield with a hawk painted on it in gold. The second man was very big and strong-looking and a most fine figure of a man. The third was a tall man, slim at the waist and broad-shouldered. This one rode last. Tósti told him to say what he wished. The horseman spoke:

‘Your brother Haraldr has sent you God’s blessing and has offered you terms of peace.’

Tósti says: ‘What further concessions does he offer now than before?’

The horseman says: ‘He considers you now deserve fewer concessions in view of what you have done against him.’

Tósti says: ‘We are not going to make up for that by paying compensation. But what is his offer now?’

The horseman says: ‘He offered that you should have a fifth of England, and his brother remain unatoned for. But the damage you have brought about in the country, that he says he would compensate himself.’

Tósti says: ‘I do not accept these terms.’

The horseman spoke: ‘I shall not conceal what he said should be offered in the last resort, which is that he would rather offer you half England than that you should fight it out in battle, and in addition [he offers you] the name of king.’

‘What will he offer King Haraldr of Norway then?’

The horseman says: ‘Because he was not satisfied with his own kingdom, then I shall give him the territory in England equal to three and a half ells in length, or as much more as he is of more than average height.<sup>1</sup> But he will not get any more here, for I am under no obligation to him.’

Tósti spoke: ‘These offers have been made too late. But I have often heard Northmen say that if good terms were offered me I would immediately abandon their cause, but this is not now going to happen.’

The horseman spoke: ‘Then the king said that the whole responsibility should be on your shoulders,’ and afterwards turns away.

King Haraldr Sigurðarson was riding on a horse with a black head and

<sup>1</sup> The standard ell varied in the Middle Ages between approximately 48 and 57 cm. The viking ell is said to have been 46 cm. 3½ ells would then be about 5ft 3in.

a white mark on its forehead, and was giving directions about the battle formation while this conversation was going on. While he was doing this the king's horse stumbled under him three times in a row. The king spoke:

'Why do you do that, brother Óláfr?' he says.

Tósti laughs and spoke: 'Do you think that King Óláfr is causing your horse to stumble under you?'

He says: 'I shall not have anyone else to thank for it more than you if he turns his favour from me.'

He dismounts and walks in among the ranks. The king spoke to Tósti:

'Who was that horseman who was speaking to you?'

Tósti says: 'My brother King Haraldr.'

'Why have you said this so late?' says the king.

Tósti says: 'I did not want to betray him when he came forward trusting in my good faith.'

[The king said:] 'He is a courteous man and decent-looking, and he stands well in his stirrups, and yet he will not be ruler of lands for long. But who was it on each side of him?'

Tósti says: 'Helgi Heinreksson was one and the other is called Bjár-Leifr.'<sup>1</sup>

'I little expected this man to be here,' [says the king,] 'for I recognise the man, and I would not have brought an invasion over here if I had known he was alive.'

Tósti says: 'That is none of our business.'

Then King Haraldr Guðini's son asked Leifr who the big man was whose horse stumbled under him. Leifr answers:

'That was the king of the Northmen.'

The king says: 'He is a fierce-looking man, and has the look of one who has not long to live, for I guess that his days are now up.'

The king of Norway had arranged his line of battle so that those of his men that had shields should stand in a circle and all face outwards.

'But those that are without shields shall stand inside and strike their blows out past the others.'

So when the two lines met, the Englishmen surrounded the formation of Northmen. Hemingr had revealed his name and everything that had happened to him before he went into battle. Then the Englishmen raise their battle-cry. Then King Haraldr Sigurðarson spoke a verse:

Let us go forward  
against the phalanxes  
under the dark blades  
without byrnies.

<sup>1</sup> In some versions Bæjar-Leifr, 'Town-Leifr'; a variant of Hemingr's pseudonym Leifr.

I have not mine,  
 but helmets shine.  
 Now our fine array  
 lies down at the ships.

‘That was not very good poetry,’ says the king, ‘and I will improve upon it.’

We do not crouch down behind  
 our curved shield before the clash  
 of weapons in the battle; so did  
 the discreet hawk’s land’s [arm’s] Hildir [lady] command;  
 necklace-plate [woman] bade me long ago  
 carry helmet-support [head]  
 high in metal-clash [battle]  
 where battle-ice [sword] meets skull.

King Haraldr Sigurðarson told his men not to fight recklessly, but to keep in line and not panic. Then the English began the attack, but the Northmen defended themselves so well that it didn’t get anywhere. Then King Haraldr Guðini’s son said to Helgi Heinreksson:

‘What strategy shall we employ to break down their stand? For it is likely they will soon be getting reinforcements from the ships, and then the attack is not likely to go well, when it is not even succeeding now, while they have only a small detachment of men.’

‘We shall attack,’ said Helgi, ‘as bravely as we can, and if that is no good, then we shall retreat, and perhaps they will think we are fleeing. Then they will break their ranks and chase us, and then we shall turn round against them again as quickly as possible.’

So they did this. And when the Northmen saw that they were turning away, then they pursued them, and when the others turned back again, then they were unable to get back into position again. The battle now became bloody. But where they, King Haraldr and Tósti, were standing the attack was not being very successful. Then King Haraldr Guðini’s son spoke to Hemingr:

‘What good is the accuracy and effectiveness of your shooting, if you don’t shoot the king, when only you can recognise him?’

Hemingr says: ‘I do not deny that I recognise him, but I dare not shoot him because of King Óláfr.’

‘I don’t know,’ says King Haraldr, ‘what you came to the battle for if you won’t do anything to help. Now you shoot so that I can see which is him, because I am not afraid to shoot him because of King Óláfr.’

Then Hemingr shoots at the king with a barbed arrow and it hit his cheek and the arrow fastened itself in the skin. The king immediately cut the arrow out. But because of this the king could easily be recognised. Then

Haraldr Guðini's son shoots King Haraldr in the throat. Then the king sits down. He spoke to the poet Þjóðólfr:

'Come here and support my head. I have for a long time held up your head.'

Tósti went up to the king and asked if he was wounded. The king answers: 'A small piece of iron was sent me, and I presume it was not forged to no purpose. I want you to agree to terms with your brother, but I will accept the amount of the kingdom that was offered me this morning.'

Tósti says: 'We shall both be the guests of the same fellow tonight.'

The king says: 'Now you are speaking of the fellow whose hospitality I wanted never to accept.'

And after that the king died. Then the Englishmen raise a cheer and say that the king of the Northmen has fallen and they offer Tósti terms. Then Tósti took hold of the standard and says that they will discover that not all the leaders of the Northmen have fallen, 'as long as I can fight.'

And Tósti kept the battle going for a while. Then Hemingr spoke:

'Why don't you urge me to shoot now, lord?'

The king answers: 'Because I don't want to bring about the death of my own brother.'

Hemingr answers: 'It is strange that you are willing to let your men be cut down, and I will send him a little present, if you do not forbid it.'

The king says: 'I will not demand blood-vengeance, though harm should be done him.'

Then Hemingr shoots Tósti in the eye. Then Tósti spoke, when the shot hit him:

'This one marked me for God,' and died immediately.

Then King Harold offers the Northmen quarter. At that moment Eysteinn orri arrived and asked the poet Þjóðólfr what had happened there. Þjóðólfr spoke:

Men have suffered heavy loss;  
 now I say the army has been caught.  
 On a vain journey Haraldr  
 has led men from the east.  
 So has ended the life  
 of the valiant king that we all  
 are in a parlous state;  
 the famed king suffered life-hurt.

Eysteinn spoke: 'Let us go forward bravely. We shall not spare ourselves, even though we had intended the result of our expedition to be something other than our burial here.'



They charged forward so hard that the whole of the Englishmen's ranks were forced to retreat. They tell the king that it was more than human beings they were fighting against now. The king answers:

'They are human, and they have got guts.'

When they had been fighting for a long time, then Nikulás spoke:

'We can't keep up this attack for long for weariness.'

Eysteinn answers: 'That is true. And so we shall resort to strategy. We shall retreat to the forest, and the Englishmen will not bother much about pursuing us, for they will be glad of any respite they can get. Then we shall take off our armour and after that take up the attack again, and each of us shall fight to win glory, but not to preserve our lives.'

Everyone said they were more than ready to do this. And so they carry out this plan. Then the English raise a cheer and offer the Northmen quarter. Then Eysteinn charges forward with the Northmen and they say that they will find that the Northmen have no wish to be spared. Then the battle begins afresh. The Englishmen desert the king in their hundreds. Nikulás Þorbergsson fights with Helgi Heinreksson, and Nikulás presses him so hard that Helgi cannot do anything else but give ground and ward off the blows. And Eysteinn orri directs his attack at the king and Valþjófr. This battle was so hard, that the term 'orrahríð' (Orri's storm) has always been used since in England to describe a situation of great danger. Then there is a great number of casualties, especially among the Northmen, for they were without protection. Then Hemingr sees that Helgi has been overcome by Nikulás. Then Hemingr shoots Nikulás in the lower abdomen, so that it came out the other side. Then Nikulás and the poet Þjóðólfr and a great number of Northmen fell. Eysteinn kept the battle going and got so near the king that he killed his standard-bearer. Hemingr sees this and shoots through Eysteinn's armpit, piercing his heart, and he fell with great honour. All the Northmen who could manage it fled as soon as Eysteinn had fallen. But the Englishmen did not pursue their flight. Then King Haraldr rode to London with no more troops than five hundred men. He appointed men to take the bodies of the men who had fallen, the Northmen as well as his own men, to church. He also gave permission for Óláfr Haraldsson to sail from Rafnseyrr with all the Northmen who survived.

#### Viljálmr Bastard

Viljálmr Bastard was ruling over Valland, as has been mentioned before. He hears about King Haraldr's invasion of England. He sends messengers all over his kingdom and summons to himself a great army. Then he addresses them and says:

‘You are aware what became of the fellowship between me and Haraldr Guðini’s son. Now I hear that an army is invading his kingdom. I now intend to go with this army here to avenge him if anything has happened to him. Moreover, there will never be another time when it will be easier to take vengeance on Haraldr for the dishonour he has done me, and to stake my claim to England, even if he has been victorious, for all his bravest men will be wounded and battle-weary.’

Now on the day that Viljálmr rode out of Rúðuborg, then his queen went up to him just as he had mounted his horse and took hold of his stirrup, wanting to speak to him. But he drives his spurs into the horse and she falls in front of the horse and the horse tramples over her and she was killed instantly. He spoke:

‘Evil happenings are portents of good to follow. It is very likely that our expedition will turn out well.’

After that they board ship and sail to England, and he starts to ravage the land as soon as he enters the country. It is said that he had Ívarr the Boneless cremated before he began to plunder. King Haraldr hears about this and summons his men together. His people were just now in the worst condition. The king tells them to clear out of the country if they thought themselves unable to support him, but they all said they wanted to support him. The king says:

‘You will be handing me over [to our enemies] if you don’t support me loyally.’

They said they would never desert him. He advances with his army against Viljálmr and a fierce battle takes place there. This was nineteen nights after King Haraldr Sigurðarson fell. There are many casualties there among the Englishmen, for there were many took part in the battle that were not fit for anything. They fight the whole day, and in the evening King Haraldr Guðini’s son fell. But they, Hemingr and Helgi and Valþjófr, get into a wedge-shaped formation and here their opponents are making no headway. Then Viljálmr spoke:

‘I will spare you, Valþjófr, if you will swear me an oath of loyalty. Then you may keep your inheritance and your jarldom.’

Valþjófr says: ‘I won’t swear you any oaths. But I will promise to be true to you, if you will do as you say.’

‘We shall make peace on these terms,’ said Viljálmr.

Valþjófr asked: ‘What terms shall Hemingr and Helgi have, if they make peace?’

Viljálmr answers: ‘Helgi shall keep his inheritance and jarldom. He shall swear loyalty to me, and advise me on all matters about which he can see more clearly than I. And Hemingr shall stay with me, and if he is true to me, then I shall honour him most highly.’

Valþjófr asks: 'What do you both want to do?'

Helgi answers: 'Let Hemingr decide.'

Hemingr answers: 'I know that you Englishmen must think it about time to bring an end to all this warfare, but I shall take no pleasure in life after this battle. But nevertheless I will not force you to risk your lives any longer than you wish. But it is my opinion that the truce will be short-lived for Valþjófr.'

Valþjófr answers: 'It is better for us to be overthrown than to refuse to trust anyone, and no more men shall die on my account.'

They give up the battle and accept a truce. Then Viljálmr was made king and they rode thence to London. Valþjófr asked leave to go home and received it, and rode away in a party of twelve. The king glanced after them and said:

'It is inadvisable to let a man ride off scot-free who refuses to swear us oaths, so ride after him and kill him.'

And they did so. Valþjófr dismounted and forbade his companions to defend him. He went to a church and was killed there and there he is buried. And people think of him as a saint.

#### King Haraldr Guðini's son healed

The night after King Haraldr Guðini's son had fallen, then a certain peasant and his wife drove to where the dead lay to strip the dead and get themselves some wealth. They see there great heaps of dead. They see there a bright light. They discuss this together and say that there must be a saintly man there among the dead. They now begin to clear away the corpses from where they saw the light. They see a man's arm lift up from among the corpses and there was a large gold ring on it. The peasant took hold of the hand and asked whether the man was alive. He answers:

'I am alive.'

The old woman spoke: 'Clear off the corpses: I think this is the king.'

They lifted the man up and ask if it is possible for him to be healed. The king says:

'I do not deny that I could be healed, but you cannot do it.'

The woman spoke: 'We shall have a go.'

They picked him up and put him in their cart and drive home with him. The woman spoke:

'You must strip the flesh off the carthorse and cut off its ears. And if anyone comes to you looking for the king's corpse, then you must say that I have gone mad, and that wolves have torn your horse to pieces.'

They cleanse the king's wounds and dress them and keep him with them in secret. A little later King Viljálmr's men come there and ask why he had taken King Haraldr home with him, whether he was alive or dead. The old man answers:

‘I have not done that.’

They answered: ‘It’s no use denying it, for there is the trail of blood leading to your pemies.’

The man says: ‘I am not at all concerned about the loss of your king. I am more concerned about the loss of my carthorse, that wolves tore to pieces the other night when the battle had taken place.’

They answered: ‘That is no doubt true, for we saw the horse here torn to pieces. But even so we intend to go in here and find out what is going on.’

The man spoke: ‘Misfortunes never cease to come upon me. My wife went mad from hearing the trumpets and battle-cries.’

They insist on going in all the same. And when they get inside, there was the old woman sitting by the fire eating coal. And when she sees the men, she jumps up and grabs a carving knife and swears and threatens to kill them. They go out laughing at her and go home without more ado, and tell the king they cannot find King Haraldr’s corpse. But the old woman and her husband heal the king in secret until he was better. Then the king sends the old woman to Hemingr and she tells him where the king was. Hemingr says:

‘I hope, grandma, that you know what you are saying now.’

The old woman answers: ‘I was not mad.’

The next day Hemingr comes to the king and there took place there a very joyful reunion. They talk together the whole of that day. Hemingr offers the king to go all over the country collecting an army together.

‘And you could soon get the kingdom back from Viljálmr.’

The king spoke: ‘I realise that this may be possible, but then too many will become perjurers. And I don’t want so much evil to happen on my account. Now I am going to follow the example of King Óláfr Tryggvason, who, after he was defeated off Vinðland, decided then not to return to his kingdom, but instead went out to Greece and there served God as long as he lived. Now I am going to have a hermit’s cell made for me in Kantarabyrgi, where I shall be able see King Viljálmr as often as possible in the church. And the only food I shall have is what you bring me.’

Hemingr agrees to this. The king gives the old man and his wife a suitable reward, and afterwards goes into a hermitage. He stays there for three years without anyone knowing who he is except Hemingr and the priest that confessed him. And one day when Hemingr came to see Haraldr, then he tells him that he has caught a sickness that will bring about his death. And one day, when King Viljálmr was sitting at table, bells were heard ringing all over the town. The king asks why such a fine peal is being rung. Hemingr answers:

‘I guess that a certain monk, who was called Haraldr, has died.’

‘What Haraldr is he?’ says the king.

‘Guðini’s son,’ says Hemingr.

‘Who has kept him hidden?’ says the king.

Hemingr answers: ‘I have done it.’

‘If this is true,’ says the king, ‘then you shall die for it. But we shall look at his corpse.’

After that he goes into the cell where the body lay. It was then stripped. Everyone then recognised King Haraldr. The corpse was beautiful and pleasant to look at, and people smelt there a sweet smell, so that everyone present there realised that he was a truly saintly man. Then the king asked Hemingr what he would undertake to do to earn a reprieve.

Hemingr asked: ‘What do you require me to do, king?’

‘I want you to swear me this, that you will be as loyal to me in every way as you have been to King Haraldr, and to serve me as you have done him.’

Hemingr says: ‘I would rather die with him than live with you. But I could have betrayed you long ago if I had wanted to.’

‘It is very true,’ said the king, ‘that England will be the poorer by one of the bravest men if you are killed. Now I will offer to make you the noblest baron in England, and to make you a member of my personal following, and put you in sole charge of it; alternatively, if you do not want this, I will give you an annuity of three hundred pounds every twelve months, and you may live wherever you like in England.’

Hemingr thanked the king for his offers and spoke: ‘I will accept your offer to let me stay in England, but I have no desire to possess wealth from now on. But this request I make of you, that you will give me permission and let me have this same cell, and in it I will end my days.’

The king was silent for a long time, and then spoke: ‘Because this request is made with purity of intention, it shall be granted you.’

Afterwards Viljálmr had the body of King Haraldr clothed in royal robes and gave him a most fitting funeral. And he was buried with the greatest honour. Soon after Hemingr entered the afore-mentioned cell and there served God until his old age, and finally became blind, and he died in that hermitage.

And that is the end now of the story of Hemingr.

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