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ODIN'S HORSE  
YGGDRASILL

BY

EIRÍKR MAGNÚSSON, M.A.

*(A Paper read before the Cambridge Philological Society  
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## ODIN'S HORSE.



IN the godlore of the heathen Northmen a prominent place is given to the great ash-tree that spread its branches over all the world. It reared its mighty stem up from three roots, under one of which "Hel" had her abode, under the second the "Rime-giants," under the third gods and mankind<sup>1</sup>. Under each root was a fountain: in Hel's realm "Hvergelmir" = Cauldron-roarer<sup>2</sup>, in Giant-home "Mimir's" fountain<sup>3</sup>, in Man-home "Urd's" = Fate's fountain<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Þriár røtr standa        = Three roots stand  
a þria vega                in three ways forth  
vndan asci Yggdrasil's:    from under Yggdrasil's ash:  
Hel býr vnd einni,        Hel bides 'neath one,  
annarri hrímþvrsar,       'neath another Rime-trolls,  
þriðio mennzkir menn.    'neath the third mankind folk.

*Grímnismýl*, 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Snorra Edda*, i. 40, 68.

<sup>3</sup> *ib.* 68.

<sup>4</sup> *ib.* 68.

But as I do not purpose to enter upon a general review of the various myths that centre round this tree, I pursue no further the description of it. My immediate object is to settle, once for all, what the true name of the tree is; for when that is established, we shall see how the hitherto uninterpreted myth of Odin's eight-footed horse, "Sleipner," falls into order in the cosmogonic system of the North, and comes out in a light in which it has never been regarded before.

As a matter of fact we do meet, or are supposed to meet, with two names of this tree, or rather with two forms of its name. We meet it in the form of "Yggdrasill," and in the form of "Yggdrasils askr" or "askr Yggdrasils." By modern writers we find it almost invariably referred to as "Yggdrasil," the only name by which it may be said to be known to the world at large.

This term is composed of two elements, "Ygg-," grammatically = "Yggs" and "drasill." "Ygg-" is the stem of "Yggr," a palatal mutation of "uggr," fear, awe, meaning Awer, Terrifier, the Terrible, and is one of Odin's

many names. "Drasill" is an exclusively poetical word, meaning a horse, a steed. "Yggdrasill" therefore means Awer's horse, or the horse of Awer. Hence, since "askr" means an ash, ash-tree, the longer term "askr Yggdrasils" signifies the Ash of Awer's horse, or the Ash of the horse of Awer. This is the only possible rendering of the term, due regard being had to grammar. For if we put the elements of the name in their simplest grammatical order, we get: "askr drasils Yggs" = the ash of the horse of Ygg, where the gen. "drasils" is governed by "askr" and the gen. "Yggs" by "drasils." I go into these obvious and simple details in order to remove all doubt as to the correctness of this translation, and to make it quite clear, at the same time, how utterly at fault is the rendering of the term in the *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, where, throughout, it reads: "the Ash Ygg's steed:" a genitive, governed by a noun, being treated as in apposition to that noun! But this rendering, in defiance of grammar, resulted of necessity from the preconceived notion which the editors shared with everybody else, that "Yggdrasill" was indeed the true

name of the world-overshadowing Ash of Northern mythology.

From the point of view of formal logic it is obvious that "Yggdrasill," Ygg's steed, Odin's horse, cannot be a synonym for "askr Yggdrasils," the *ash* of Odin's steed. For the former term only covers the second element of the latter, and leaves "askr" altogether out of the account. The term "askr Yggdrasils" obviously refers to two objects, of which one is an ash-tree and the other the steed of Odin. The term indicates clearly that these two objects are quite distinct from each other, though it also indicates that the primitive framers of the myth of "Yggdrasill" must have looked upon Ygg's steed as standing in so peculiarly close a relation to the Ash, as, in a manner, to be inseparable from it.

Now since the name of the mythic tree cannot be both "Yggdrasill" and "askr Yggdrasils," it is high time to ascertain which of these two terms is its proper name. We must approach the solution of that question by first examining the evidence supplied by the old texts, of which there are only five that concern us :

- |  |                             |   |                     |
|--|-----------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Of the Older Edda.   | Of the Younger Edda.        |   |                     |
| 1. Cod. regius <sup>1</sup> , ab. 1270.                    | 3. Cod. regius <sup>1</sup> | } |                     |
| 2. Hauksbók, fourteenth century (containing only Völuspó). | 4. Wormianus                |   | fourteenth century. |
|  | 5. Upsaliensis              |   |                     |

The first poem in cod. regius of the Older Edda is the "Völuspó," the spaedom or soothsaying of the "völva," a word that betokens a female being wandering about, "völr," i.e. staff, or wand in hand, from house to house, fortune-telling.

In the nineteenth stanza<sup>2</sup> of this poem we find the mythic ash mentioned for the first time, in these words:

Ask veit ek standa,  
heitir Yggdrasill  
hár baðmr, ausinn  
hvíta auri.

Prosaic order: "Ek veit standa ask ausinn hvíta auri, hár baðmr heitir Yggdrasill" = I wot to stand an ash over-poured with the

<sup>1</sup> So called, because probably both were presented by Brynjólf Sveinsson, Bp. of Skalkolt 1639-74, to King Frederick III of Denmark, the enlightened founder of the "Great Royal Library" of Copenhagen.

<sup>2</sup> According to Bugge's excellent edition, Christiania, 1867, which I follow in all quotations from the Older Edda.

white "loam<sup>1</sup>," the high tree is high Yggdrasil. With this reading that of Hauksbók coincides word for word.

Here it is stated that the name of the ash is "Yggdrasil," not "askr Yggdrasils."

But in the forty-seventh stanza of this poem we read :

Skelfr Yggdrasils  
Askr standandi,

= trembles Yggdrasil's ash a-standing. So that "Yggdrasil" in the former verse is meant to stand as a synonym for "askr Yggdrasils" in the latter. The logical incongruity of the terms I have pointed out already.

In the "Gylfa-ginning" or Deception of Gylfi (the first portion of the Younger Edda), which is a paraphrase of mythic songs such as we partly know from the Older Edda, though it is not based on the cod. regius edition of that work, we have the above-

<sup>1</sup> In this sense "aurr" is generally taken in this context. It gives no meaning, that I can see. If "ausinn hvíta auri" here rests on the same conception that underlies "á sér hon ausask aurgum forsi af veði Valföðrs" (Völuspó, v. 27, cfr. p. 10, note, below), "hvíta auri" should mean here "white or bright gold," the golden beam-flood from the sun. This however I advance, at present, merely by way of suggestion.

quoted semistrophe inserted, in its metric form, in all the three MSS. in which the text of the Younger Edda is preserved. But as the question here turns upon the reading of the second of the above-quoted four lines of strophe nineteen of *Völuspó*, and *codd.* Wormianus and *Upsaliensis* there agree entirely with *cod. reg.* of the Older Edda, I need adduce only the text of *cod. regius* of the Younger Edda which differs therefrom :

Ask veit ek ausinn,  
heitir Yggdrasils  
hár baðmr heilagr,  
hvíta auri.

Prosaic order : "Ek veit ask ausinn hvíta auri, heitir Yggdrasils (sc. askr) hár heilagr baðmr" = I wot an ash over-poured with the white "loam," hights Yggdrasil's (sc. ash) the high holy tree.

There are good grounds for supposing that, with regard to "ausinn" and "heilagr," this text is at fault, and that the reading of *cod. regius* of the O. E. with which *Hauksbók* and *Upsaliensis* agree in the first line (*Upsal.* has in the third the meaningless "har borinn heilagr") is the true one. For "Ask veit ek standa" seems undoubtedly to derive support

from "Yggdrasils askr standandi" in verse forty-seven of *Völuspó*. That being granted, "ausinn" must have been ousted out of the third line by "heilagr," and thus have been removed from its object, "hvíta auri," by two lines; whereby it came to occupy a position in the verse not absolutely ungrammatical but certainly awkward.

The verse, as the cod. reg. of the Y. E. has it, gives distinctly the impression of being quoted from memory. In the mind of him who gave it the form in which we now know it was floating another verse of *Völuspó*, the twenty-seventh:

|                     |                               |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| Veit hon Heimdallar | She wots Heimdal's            |
| hljóð um fólgt      | "sound" a-hidden              |
| undir heiðvönnum    | under the sky-wont            |
| helgum baðmi;       | holy tree;                    |
| á sér hon ausask    | on it she sees to pour itself |
| aurgum forsi        | a golden <sup>1</sup> force   |
| af veði Valföðrs.   | from Valfather's pledge.      |

And the words "helgum baðmi" of this strophe seem obviously to have determined

<sup>1</sup> I cannot here give the grounds on which I feel warranted to translate "aurgum" by "golden" instead of "loamy" which is the general rendering. The relation between Icel. aur- and Latin aurum is not disputed. Valfathers' pledge was the sun. What force, but a golden one, could pour from him over the "serenity-wont" holy tree?

the line: "hár baðmr heilagr" of the Gylfaginning edition, the consequence of which was that "ausinn," without which the verse made no sense, was shunted from the end of the third line to the end of the first. In point of poetical workmanship, too, this line bears evidence of having been unskillfully tampered with, for it is very unusual in the Edda poems, on the whole, to find a noun wedged in between two ornamental epithets, and in the Völuspó such a thing is absolutely without an example. Even in modern Icelandic such a piece of poetical technique would strike one as an instance of helplessness. On these grounds it may be taken for granted, I think, that the form which the author of Gylfaginning, or some scribe of the cod. reg. class of MSS. of the Y. E., wanted to give this verse, had his memory not played him false, must have been :

Ask veit ek standa,  
 heitir Yggdrasils (sc. askr)  
 hár baðmr, ausinn  
 hvíta auri.

Now is the question, is the genitive "Yggdrasils" also to be explained on the ground of faulty memory? Is it a thoughtless incorporation of "Yggdrasils" from the

above-quoted forty-seventh strophe of *Völuspó*? If it is not, then the conclusion that it must represent the original reading seems unavoidable. Professor Bugge<sup>1</sup> holds that it must certainly be a mistake, and that "Yggdrasill" is the right form. In his opinion, then, the line "heitir Yggdrasill" has preserved the true traditional delivery. In that form the originator of the expression "heitir Yggdrasils" must be supposed once upon a time to have learnt it by heart. Nothing could be more simple and natural than the term "it is hight Yggdrasil"; and to me it is inconceivable, how any one, who once had learnt such words, could feel any temptation, nay, should not resist every temptation, to change them into the much stiffer, though grammatically correct, "heitir Yggdrasils," where the genitive would be governed by "askr" understood as repeated from the first line. The fair probability therefore is, that this reading of the cod. reg. of the Y. E. is the true original one<sup>2</sup>, and that "heitir

<sup>1</sup> *Studier over de nordiske Gude-og Heltesagns Oprindelse*, Christiania, 1881-89, p. 393, note 2.

<sup>2</sup> In his ed. of *Lieder der Edda*, Halle, 1888, Prof. Sijmons adopts "Yggdrasils" in *Völuspó*, 19.

Yggdrasill" of cod. reg. of O. E., Hauksbók, Wormianus, and Upsaliensis is the faulty. A thought-exacting genitive has, in fact, been changed into a thoughtless nominative which gave a smooth reading. For "Yggdrasill" and "Yggdrasils askr" cannot possibly be convertible terms.

Professor Bugge relies on the fact that "Yggdrasill" in this verse occurs in four MSS. and "Yggdrasils" only in one. Let it be granted, though it be a matter of opinion, that these four MSS. are as many independent authorities. That concession, however, can mean nothing more than that they may be independent of each other. For they all depend upon one line in one and the same strophe of *Völuspó* delivered, orally or scribally, in one and the same form. The correctness or the reverse of that form depends, in the last instance, not on the number of MSS. supporting it, but on the circumstantial evidence which, critically sifted, proves or disproves the common sense of the reading of such MSS.

The great world-ash is mentioned in only two poems of the Older Edda, the *Völuspó* and *Grímnismól*, and in the prose paraphrase

of these songs in the Younger Edda. In cod. reg. of the O. E. the name of "Yggdrasil" is applied to it only once, but that of "askr Yggdrasils" seven times. In the other MSS. the rate of occurrence is respectively 1 : 5 or 6 except in Hauksbók, which of the old Eddaic poems contains Völuspó alone, 1 : 1.

No one who critically wants to ascertain the origin of this myth can leave unexamined or unanswered the question Which of these names is the proper one for the ash? Both cannot be so; that I have shown already. But the grounds on which, to my own satisfaction, I have established the proposition that "Yggdrasils askr" is the right name and "Yggdrasil" the wrong, are not, I admit, strong enough, perhaps, to command general acquiescence. "Yggdrasil" has passed for the name of the ash ever since the thirteenth century at least, and it is natural that the world should be unwilling to give up such a long-lived pet name, without being persuaded that there is nothing to be done but to give it up. I have no doubt I shall be told that, just as the ash is called, in a somewhat loose manner, both "Yggdrasil" and "Yggdrasils askr," so we find the terrible

wolf-offspring of Loki referred to now as "Fenrir," now as "Fenris-úlfr." Yes, but the answer to that is, that this is a demonstrable case of confusion. One of Loki's names has certainly been "Fenrir," the fen-dweller, referring to him either as a subterranean cave-dweller (Saxo viii. ch. 294), or as an inmate of the eastern iron wood where, with the Ancient Hag, "en aldna," he begat "Fenrir's brood" in the shape of wolves, and in other monstrous forms<sup>1</sup>. It is the slovenliness of tradition in a forgetting age that, by calling "Fenrir's wolf" simply "Fenrir," has conferred the parent's name on the most famous of the offspring. So this proves nothing with regard to "Yggdrasill" and "Yggdrasils askr," except that in this case, too, similar confusion may have, as I maintain it certainly has, been at work.

But the cod. reg. of the Older Edda is a very venerable record, and on its authority "Yggdrasill," Ygg's or Odin's steed, has been implicitly believed to be the proper

<sup>1</sup> Austr sat in aldna  
i Jarnvði  
ok fódði þar  
Fenris kindir.

East sat the old one  
In the iron wood  
and there she bred  
the brood of Fenrir.

name of the great mythic tree, ever since the thirteenth century, the vellum dating from about 1270<sup>1</sup>.

But this name was not to be, in fact could not be, taken in a natural or primitive, but only in a metaphorical sense. It must mean *gallows*. For mythologists have been convinced that, judging from a strophe of *Hóvamól*, to which we come presently, there must of old have been current a myth in the north to the effect, that Odin once upon a time, by some means or other, was hanged upon the great Ash. The name "Odin's steed," therefore, it acquired from having borne up the weight of the god's suspended body, as a horse bears up the weight of its rider. There was nothing more strange in calling the great ash by this name, since it was taken for granted that Odin was hanged on it, than to call the gallows on which ancient legends and popular ballads stated that heroes of great fame had been hung, their horse, cf. p. 19.

<sup>1</sup> So L. Wimmer and F. Jónsson in their phototype edition, lxxii. Bugge, in his edition of the MS., refers it to ab. 1240, Pref. lxxvii; Vigfússon, *Corpus Poet. Bor.* vol. I, xlii. to 1220-40, "certainly not later than the latter date."

This interpretation has been supported with especial force and energy by Professor Sophus Bugge, of Christiania, one of the very greatest students of northern philology and mythic lore that ever lived, in his amazingly learned work, already quoted<sup>1</sup>. This work is written with the object of showing chiefly how ideas of mediaeval mythographers and elements of Christian religion were grafted upon the Northmen's homely stock of heathen myth by vikings in the ninth and tenth centuries returning from foreign (Christian) lands, the British Isles in particular. A large portion of the Professor's work is devoted to "Odin on the gallows" and the gallows itself, i. e. the myth of "Yggdrasill," and the conclusion he arrives at is, that that myth, in its most essential points, is a northern metamorphosis of the Gospel story of the crucifixion, "Yggdrasill," Odin's gallows, corresponding to the Cross of Christ.

The primary source of this theory is two strophes of the Old Eddaic ethical poem of *Hóvamátl*, the song of the High One, the song of Odin, one of whose names is *Hór* (High). This very long poem is not one;

<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 12, footnote, above.

but several poems and portions of poems put together by the collector of the Edda songs to the best of his critical faculty for grouping kindred subjects. The stanzas referred to are the 138th and 139th :

Veit ec at ec heçc  
vindga meiði a  
neþr allar nfo,  
geiri vndaþr  
oc gefinn Oðni,  
sialfr sialfom mer,  
a þeim meiþi  
er mangi veit,  
hvers hann af rótom renn.

I wot that I hung  
the windy beam upon  
nights all nine (together)  
with spear wounded  
and given to Odin,  
self unto myself,  
upon that beam,  
that man not wots  
of whose roots it runs.

Við hleifi mic seldo<sup>1</sup>  
ne við hornigi,  
nýsta ec niðr,  
nam ec vp rúnar,  
þpandi nam,  
fëll ec aþtr þaðan.

With loaf they cheered me not  
nor with no horn,  
I spied adown,  
I caught up runes,  
crying I caught,  
fell I thence again.

On the former of these verses Professor Bugge comments as follows, *Studier*, p. 292—

<sup>1</sup> "Seldo" is not p. of "selja," to sell, deliver, hand over, which here would give no meaning. I have long taken it for the pret. of "sëla" = "sæla," to render seely, happy, to cheer, to comfort. Professor Bugge holds it for the pret. of "sëla," from "svalr," cool, to slake, quench (thirst), which sense suits the horn (drink) well enough, but not so the loaf.

“ I hung on the windy tree, vindga (or by an antiquated orthography vinga) meiði á, that is to say, on the tree round which whistles the cold wind. This expression signifies a gallows. Thus the gallows (varg-tré) is called wind-cold in Hamd.<sup>1</sup> 17. In Ynglingatal there is used, for the signification of a gallows, the expression: Signy's husband's cold horse, i. e. the cold horse that Hagbard rode.”

Still further, *Studier*, p. 396, the Professor says: “ It was a general expression in Norse, as it was in German and English, especially with the poets, that a hanged person was said to ride the gallows, and that the gallows was his horse. Thus in Ynglingatal it is said of king Agne, who was hanged, that he had to break in the cold steed of Signy's husband (i. e. Hagbard). In the same poem it is said of king Jorund, who likewise came by his death on the gallows, that the ‘Sleipner’ of the hempen ropes (=halter) had to carry Gudlaug's slayer.”

“ When now an ash-tree is called ‘Yggdrasill,’ Odin's horse, we must therein have the above figurative mode of expression.

<sup>1</sup> i. e. Hamðismól.

'Yggdrasill,' Odin's horse, must have been understood as the gallows whereon Odin hung. The name 'Yggdrasils ash' presupposes therefore that myth about Odin, who hung on the windy tree, which we know from *Hávamál*. The holy mythic tree, which in verses occurring in *Völuspá* and *Grimnismál*, and in *Gylfaginning* is referred to under the name of 'Yggdrasil's ash' (once 'Yggdrasill'), cannot be any other tree than the windy tree mentioned in *Hávamál*, or the gallows whereon Odin hung, wounded with spear, sacrificed to Odin, self unto himself. . . Hereby then it is demonstrated that the myth about 'Yggdrasil's ash' in the form in which we know it from verses in *Völuspá* and *Grimnismál*, as well as from *Gylfaginning*, is generated under the influence of communications from Christians relating to the Cross of Christ."

As it stands the 138th strophe of *Hávamál* is certainly a document whereby Odin is made to inform the world that he hung on a windy tree: "vindga meiði á." By this windy tree the author of the stanza obviously means some sort of a gallows, as the verb "hung," with a person for subject,

clearly proves. It is possible that by the windy beam he meant "Yggdrasil" or "Yggdrasil's askr," but proven it is not. If he really did mean that, he must have thought he knew that a myth existed in which it was stated that Odin had been hanged, and that the gallows was the Ash of Yggdrasil, the only tree that well could be supposed to fit such a lord for such a purpose. Of such an astounding incident in the god's life there is no trace of a mention anywhere else. One would naturally suppose that some allusion to such a startling event might have been left on record in the poems that have so much to tell about Odin, such as *Völuspó*, *Grimnismól*, *Hárbarðsljóð* and most especially *Lokasenna*, where Loki certainly does not hush up whatever he knows to tell of to the disparagement of the gods. But here all search for such an ignominy having ever befallen Odin is in vain. Search we the *Younger Edda*, the author of which has known a good many other mythic sources than what are found in the *O. E.*, or elsewhere, the result is the same. However, let this myth of *Hóvamól* stand, for the present, for what it is worth.

But looking a little more closely at the strophe in question, its form strikes us at once with its irregularity. It is not one strophe, but a strophe and a half. And it seems to me quite transparent that the lines

Geiri vndaþr  
oc gefinn Oðni,  
sialfr sialfom mer

have been wedged into this strophe, with a view to making it a matter of no doubt to whom the verse referred. Before that operation, then, it ran thus :

|                             |                             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Veit ec at ec hecc          | I wot that I hung           |
| vindga meiði á              | the windy beam upon         |
| neþr allar nfo,             | nights all nine (together), |
| á þeim meiþi,               | upon that beam,             |
| er mangi veit,              | that man not wots,          |
| hvers (hann) af rótom renn. | of whose roots it runs.     |

Here is a straightforward statement in a perfectly regular verse in the metre "ljóða-hátt" —the preponderating metre of *Hóvamól* —that the subject of this verse was hanged on a beam; a beam, that no man knows from what roots it springs<sup>1</sup>. That these

<sup>1</sup> The real point here seems to be this: the gallows tree from which the hanged is suspended is a horizontally rigged-up beam; from what roots such a tree springs, no one knows, since it has got no soil even to stand in. The

two halves, of which I here make one complete strophe, belonged together, prior to the composition of the semistrophe by which they are separated in cod. regius, seems naturally to be concluded from the manner in which they are, as it were, dovetailed together by the predicative terms: "vindga meiði á" and "á þeim meiði" (*windy beam upon: upon that beam*). The poetical manner here happens to be quite in keeping with that of the genuine Old Eddaic poetry. That, presumably, is the reason, why this Hóvamól verse has passed the review of many Edda critics unchallenged as an item of the good old stock of that poem. But by what I admit here, I do not mean to infer that this verse, even restored to what I take to have been its primitive normal form, is at all entitled to rank, as regards age, with Old Eddaic poetry handed orally down by tradition from preliterate times.

But on this point more anon.

The three lines I have eliminated from appearance of a gallows,  $\Pi$ , naturally suggested to an imaginative race the outlines of a horse; hence the "kennings" for gallows into which words, meaning "horse," "steed," do enter.

the verse in question serve in it, as it stands in *cod. regius*, for a documentary evidence to show that Odin, indeed, was a hanged god. But for these lines reciters and readers alike would have been left in the dark, as to the identity of the hanged subject. In a matter of such an indignity, and in want of all collateral evidence to show that the subject was Odin, it is pretty obvious that he would have been about the last being they would take this verse to refer to. Hence the object of the insertion of these lines has been to relieve "the public" of the trouble of puzzling out for themselves who it was who was telling them that he had been hanged on a windy tree.

If indeed these stanzas from the beginning referred to Odin, it is clear that they must date from a time when, for the purpose of doing a primary ancestor's duty in the genealogy of northern kings, he had been dragged down from his mythic majesty into the legendary anthropomorphic figure of post-mythic times, in which character he appears in *Ynglinga saga* throughout, and to a great extent also, both in the *Older Edda* and in *Gylfaginning*. By the lines

Wounded with spear  
and given to Odin,  
self unto myself

their author seems unmistakably to be giving expression to the opinion that was held by the antiquaries of his day, concerning the tradition recorded in *Ynglinga saga*:—"Ok er hann (Óðinn) var at bana kominn, lét hann marka sik geirs-oddi ok eignaði sér alla vápn-dauða menn:" "and when he, Odin, was at the point of death, he let mark himself with a spear's point and claimed as his own all weapon-dead men" (ch. x); and—"Njörðr varð sótt-dauðr, lét hann ok marka sik Óðni"—"Niord died of sickness, he too let himself be marked unto Odin" (ch. xi).

In this context "marka" is interpreted practically in one and the same manner by the two able lexicographers, Vigfússon and Fritzner; by the former—"to sign, to mark as one's property"; by the latter—"merke, sætte Mærke paa noget for derved at gjøre det kjendeligt fra andre Ting af samme Slags, eller for at betegne det som ens Eiendom = Lat. signare," i. e. "to mark, to set a mark upon something for thereby to make it distinguishable from other things of the same kind, or

to designate it as one's property = Lat. *signare*." We are not told whether this act of Odin or of Frey took the form of actual infliction of wounds, or of self-immolation, or merely amounted to the making of a symbolic sign. But from sundry sources we know that the act of devoting one's enemies to Odin consisted in merely hurling a spear over them and accompanying the act by an utterance to the effect that thereby they were given to Odin. But of self-immolation to Odin by means of suicide there is no record left us, when I except the meaningless episode of Skafnörtung and his wife Tötra, in the late, and for this inquiry worthless, Gautrekssaga. Had such been the case we should have heard more than we do about the repetition of such a devotional rite by Odin's worshippers. On the other hand, the ancient rite of sacrificing human beings to the god of war by means of hanging, or by other modes of execution, is not germane to the matter in question.

"Wounded with a spear" in our text can therefore hardly represent any genuine tradition from heathen times, for its real meaning must be "run through," "stabbed," "pierced."

And Professor Bugge must be right in insisting on the Christian origin of these lines. With the words "given to Odin, self unto myself," expressive of a theological notion absolutely foreign to northern theosophy, he parallels Eph. v. 2, "Christus dilexit nos et tradidit semetipsum nobis oblationem et hostiam Deo in odorem suavitatis." Equally aptly we may adduce Heb. ix. 14, . . . "semetipsum obtulit immaculatum Deo." The Christian origin of these lines is in reality no longer a matter of dispute.

Whether the 138th stanza of Hóvamól, after the elimination of the three middle lines, is to be regarded as of Christian origin or not, I will not discuss here, the point being immaterial for my purpose. But it is of more importance to ascertain, on linguistic grounds, which so far has not been attempted, what may be its probable date.

If in the words

Vindga meiði a

the syncopated dat. sing. "vindga," for "vinduga," be a form due to the *author* of this stanza, then it must date from the time when Hóvamól was first *written* down, or

from some time subsequent to that event. In that case this strophe cannot be older than the twelfth century when, so far as history vouches for it, the Icelanders first began to write books. This my standpoint I shall now try to explain.

Scholars seem to be generally agreed that the genuine portion of the *Hóvamól* cyclus may date from the tenth century. In that century there lived two poets of fame, one an Icelander, Egil Skallagrimsson, born c. 901; the other a Norwegian, Eyvind Finnson, the "Skaldspoiler," and both made use of what is supposed to be the same "kenning<sup>1</sup>," or poetical metaphor, for gallows, as we have to deal with in this *Hóvamól* strophe, but in the form of "vinga meiðr," not "vindga meiðr."

In an improvised rhyme which, according to his saga, Egil Skallagrimsson is alleged to have pronounced in the hall of King Athelstan in the winter of A. D. 925-26, he calls the arm of a man (in the dative)—

heiðis vinga meiði,

which the last editor of Egil's saga, Dr. Finnur Jónsson, in common with other com-

<sup>1</sup> See note at end (p. 63).

mentators, explains in this way: "‘heiðer’ = falcon; ‘vinga-meißr’ = Odin’s tree, gallows, i. e. ‘Yggdrasill,’ here: tree in general; the falcon’s tree = arm." The point of the kenning is not exactly that the arm, that is to say the fowler’s arm, is the "falcon’s tree," but the falcon’s beam, perch; and as the falcon sits on the falconer’s *outstretched* arm, the figure of a gallows that Egil had in his mind must, seemingly, have been a horizontal beam. Here Jónsson takes then "vinga" for gen. sing. of "vingi," which he looks upon as a name of Odin, since he translates "vinga-meißr" Odin’s tree.

Eyvind the "Skaldspoiler" composed a genealogical panegyric, called "Hóleygjatal," on Hakon the Mighty Earl of Norway, A. D. 976-95. In this poem he uses the expression:

ok ná-reiðr  
 á nesi drúpir  
 vinga-meißr.

Prosaic order: "Ok ná-reiðr vinga-meißr drúpir á nesi"; and corpse *ridable*<sup>1</sup> (ridden)

<sup>1</sup> This is the nearest literal English rendering of "ná-reiðr" that I can think of. "Reiðr" means both "ridable," of a horse, and passable on horseback, of ground or water. It is not to be overlooked here, how-

“*vinga-meißr*” droops (leans over?) on the ness.

Professor Bugge maintains that in “*vingameißr*” we have to do with a loan from Hóvamól, and that “*vinga*” is merely an antiquated spelling of Hóvamól’s “*vindga*”; wherefrom it follows that, at least, this stanza of Hóvamól must be supposed to have been known in the beginning of the tenth century, provided Egil’s verse is of the time assigned to it in the saga.

But here is a very important point to be considered. A syllable beginning with no matter what vowel and terminating in *ndg*, consequently the syllable “*indg*” in “*vindga*,” is foreign to Icelandic speech<sup>1</sup>. The reason

ever, that “*reiðr*” may very well mean “weighing” in an active sense, from “*reiða*,” in its technical sense, “to weigh.”

<sup>1</sup> In “*synþ*,” *sin*, and its derivatives “*synþogr*,” *sinful*, syncop. forms “*synþga*,” “*-an*,” “*-om*,” and “*synþgask*,” to “*besin*” one’s self, the stem, with one noticeable exception, ends in *þ*, interdental spirant, in the oldest vellums (cf. L. Larsson’s *Ordförrådet i de äldsta isl. handskrifterna*, Lund, 1891); while the stem “*vind*” invariably terminates in *d*, dental explosive. This, of course, means corresponding difference in pronunciation. But the spelling “*synom*” for “*synþgom*” in the Stockholm *Homily Book*, 3<sub>24</sub> (from ab. A. D. 1200), shows, that

is this, that in this position the explosive dental, d, cannot be pronounced before the explosive palatal, g, except with the utmost difficulty. But the organs of speech never give effect to what they have a difficulty in performing. They get round the difficulty, in one way or another, and the outcome is the compromise we are in the habit of calling laws of speech. The law of speech to which, in this case, the d becomes immediately subject, is the law of assimilation. No sooner could an attempt at pronouncing "vind-ga" be made, than the d would assimilate to the preceding nasal; the theoretical result would be "vinnga"; but as the organs here brought into play could not make any audible distinction between a long and a short dental nasal before the explosive palatal, g, the volume of the sound expressed could only amount to "vinga." The unpronounceable "vind-ga" must therefore of necessity be sounded "vinga."

at that early date even the p was being got rid of, though it could be pronounced in the syllable "ynþg" with much less trouble than d in the syllable "indg." It is more than likely that this case in the *Homily Book* reveals the fact, that though the etymological spelling was "synþg" the pronunciation very early became what to this day it is: "syng."

Now let us grant that the author of our stanza lived and composed it in the unlettered tenth century, and published it, after the fashion of the day, by reciting it to listeners, in order that, having learnt it by heart, they might start its circulation by repeating it to others. If he used the expression "vindga meiði," he must have had to explain to his audience that the first word must be pronounced clearly "vind-ga," for he meant "vindga meiði," to signify "the windy tree." This, however, would have been an utterly futile injunction. If he himself was such an unmelodious singer as to load his rhyme with such an unpronounceable word, common sense would tell him, even if his audience were courteous enough to hold their peace, that in oral repetition "vind-ga" could not be pronounced, and was sure to pass immediately into "vinga." And as this form would inevitably by reciters and listeners be associated with that group of words in the language which had "ving-" for stem, and were expressive of the notion of swinging, the author could not help knowing beforehand that no one would ever guess what *his* meaning was, but everybody would take him

to have said and meant what he himself never intended to say or mean. In 'an illiterate age it is obvious that no poet would deliver himself of such an aimlessly angular piece of poetical technique, especially since he himself, by "vindga meiðr," wanted to define exactly the same object as others did by "vinga meiðr."

There are still two, as it seems to me, unanswerable objections to be urged against Hóvamól's "vindga meiði," dating from the tenth century and having been borrowed by Egil and Eyvind from that poem. The first is the badness of the grammar of this term; the second, the *fact* that "vindugr" is not, and never has been, an Icelandic or a Scandinavian word, as, further on, I shall point out.

As to the grammar, the case of Egil is not so clear, because he uses the words in an oblique case, dat.; but Eyvind's is all the more telling. "Vindga," namely, is the form of the oblique cases (acc. dat. genit.) of the definite inflexion of "vindugr," nom. "vindugi," sync. "vindgi," *the* windy. Now if Eyvind's "vinga meiðr" is to be taken as borrowed from Hóvamól's "vindga meiði," and to

stand for "vindga meiðr," the adj. in an *oblique case* agreeing with its noun in the *nominative*, then he would in his own mother tongue be making himself guilty of a grammatical blunder as grave as would be that of a schoolboy, who should have put in his Latin exercise *altum mons*, or *alto mons*, or *alti mons*, where he should have put *altus mons*.

It is true that in ecclesiastical writings from the thirteenth century onward we meet with what at first sight seems to be a parallel case to "vindga meiðr" in the ecclesiastical terms: "hvíta-váðir" *albae*, "hvíta-dagr," "hvíta-sunnudagr," "Hvíta-Kristr," &c. But as it is certain that "hvíta-sunnudagr" is simply the Anglo-Saxon *hwíta-sunnandæg*, practically borrowed without alteration, so the inference seems perfectly safe, that the rest of these terms are either simply borrowed from Anglo-Saxon or are mechanical imitations of corresponding terms in that language. There are, however, other similar compounds—*hvíta-björn*, *rauða-víkingr*, &c.—to which this observation is not applicable; but genuine Icelandic formations they can hardly be made out to be, and cannot be used to explain "vindga meiðr"

if that grammatical figure is to pass for a creation of the tenth century.

Surely if the Hóvamól strophe were of that date, the word in question would never have passed through the era of oral tradition and come down to us in the form of "vindga"; it must, in common with that of Egil's and Eyvind's verses, have eventually made the scribal harbour in the form of "vinga."

Hence it follows that Hóvamól's "vindga" is a form that can only date from some time within the era of letters, and consequently cannot be older than the twelfth century. This, however, need not necessarily decide the age of the *strophe*; for it could have come down from oral times with the second line in the form of "vinga meiði á," which some scribe, who was uncertain of the sense of vinga, changed into the unmistakable "vindga meiði á" for the benefit of readers at large.

Supposing, then, that the Hóvamól strophe may date from the era of oral tradition, we have the author of it in evidence to prove that some one, possibly Odin, was hanged "vinga-meiði á." As the tenth-century poets Egil and Eyvind leave us no doubt that this term means a gallows, we are at liberty to

conclude that in Hóvamól the term means the same thing, in fact the verb "hekk" proves it.

Presumably however the notion "windy" had no association whatever with "vinga" in the kenning "vinga-meißr" = gallows. For had that been the case, the earliest instance of the use of this kenning, Egil's, to wit, in A. D. 926, would be an instance of an extraordinarily unskaldish neglect. The unfitness of calling a man's arm, on which outstretched sits the falcon when he is taken out fowling, "heiðis vinga-meißr" = the falcon's windy beam, is too transparent to require any commentary. To suppose that such a keen-witted bard as Egil should ever, metaphorically or otherwise, have applied to the arm of a man so ludicrous an epithet as "windy beam" seems to me out of question. I conclude, therefore, that the tenth-century poets who used "vinga meißr" to designate a gallows were unconscious of "vinga," in that kenning, having anything to do with "vindugr," windy.

So then it follows that, in "vinga," we must have a gen. sing. or plur. of a *noun* governed by "meißr." That noun must be an -an stem and have the form "vingi" in nom. sing.

A person bearing this name occurs in the Greenland lay of Atli in the Older Edda. But though he threatens his enemies with hanging them on a gallows, bidding them to wait while he rig it up for them, we know that the threat was never carried out. His threatened deed therefore never reached the consummation that would entitle his name to serve the poets as an element in a kenning for gallows.

Dr. Finnur Jónsson, with other commentators, takes "vingi" to be simply one of Odin's names, and "vinga-meißr" to mean Odin's tree, and that again to signify gallows, "i. e. Yggdrasil here" (in Egilssaga), "tree in general." Otherwise "Vingi" does not seem to occur as a name for Odin, though the lengthened form "Vingnir" is met with both in MSS. of the Younger Edda (A. M. fragm. 748 4to, 757 4to), and in Vafþrúðnismól in the Older Edda. If "Vingi" in "vinga-meißr" is to be taken simply as a name of Odin, then this kenning would be too indefinite to rank with the genuine kennings of bards like Egil. To make a good poet by "Odin's tree" mean (1) "Odin's gallows," (2) "Yggdrasil," (3) "tree in general," and

expect of his reciters and listeners to understand his pointless kenning in this same sense, comes to crediting him with far too little wits, and the public with far too much of that endowment.

The only alternative left, then, is to see what comes of treating "vingi" as an appellative noun. Words with "ving-" for a stem are not numerous in Icelandic, but they seem all to be expressive of the notion to swing, to wave, to sway to and fro : such e. g. are—

"ving-sa," an iterative w. v., to toss, to swing to and fro.

"ving-la," it. w. v., by tossing or swinging to make dizzy, to confuse.

"ving-ull," m., (1) stalk, festuca. (2) membrum genitale of a male horse.

Accordingly "vingi" ought to mean one who is in a swinging condition or position, one swinging, dangling, hanging; a hanged person; "vinga-meidr," consequently, is the beam of the hanged one or hanged ones (as "vinga" can be both gen. sing. and plur.). This is a perfect kenning for gallows or gallows-tree, for the words used leave no ambiguity as to the object they are required to betoken.

This would not be the case with "vindga

meiðr," even if such a term was formally faultless, or the word "vindugr" was even *linguistically* possible. The epithet here applies with equal propriety to *all* trees of any eminence. But this is not an epithet applied to gallows in Icelandic literature. The epithet is "cold" or "wind-cold," the point of which is the unsheltered, exposed position of gallows, which generally were rigged up on an eminence so as to be as deterrently conspicuous as possible.

Apparently "vindugr" occurs only in this *one place* in the whole literature. Its non-occurrence is easily accounted for. The termination -ugr (-igr) betokens subjective quality, condition or energy. "Vindugr" could therefore properly only signify him or that which of himself or of itself was productive of wind. The force of the sense of this derivative termination, with regard to *this* word, is still to this day realized by Icelanders in its keen primitive exactness. It would not be easy, therefore, to think of an object to which the people of the north ever could have applied the epithet "vindugr" in its proper sense as here explained. To apply it objectively after

the manner of A. Sax. "windig," "windige næssas," modern English windy, in e. g. "windy spot" or the like, must have always been felt, as even to this day it would be, as utterly foreign to the genius of the language. Hence the fact, that such an adjective as "vindugr" in Icelandic, or "vindig" in the Scandinavian languages, never *could*, nor to this day does, exist as a recognized vocable. It is exclusively a cis-Baltic and West-Germanic word. And yet this very objective sense is meant to be expressed by "vindga" in the Hóvamól verse! I think it is now safe to declare positively that this word is nothing but a scribe's or a would-be scholar's clumsy coinage, quite possibly on an Anglo-Saxon model, at war with the genius as well as with the grammar of his own language, and certainly dating from the era of letters.

But "vindga meiði á" is an integral part of the strophe, which is bound to share the fate of "vindga." Not only that, but the next strophe, the 139th, is so closely bound up with this that whatever befalls the one, befalls the other too.

The late date of these strophes which

I have now pointed out, in connexion with their thoroughly Christian character, which Bugge has so ably explained, renders it impossible to accept their subject matter as a genuine myth in any sense whatever.

We can guess pretty accurately, I think, how this so-called myth about Odin's hanging originated. The *rifacitore* of strophe 138 knew the false reading "heitir Yggdrasill" in *Völuspó* 19. Now, since the author of that poem gave a name, meaning "Odin's steed," to the great Ash-tree of Midgarth, and no tree or beam was, to the best of the knowledge of the re-framer of the *Hóvamól* strophe, called any one's horse or steed, unless the person in question was stated to have been hanged on the very beam or tree so called, it followed, that Odin must have been hanged on the great Ash. This was a discovery worth recording, and since something like it seemed to be hinted at in the 138th strophe of *Hóvamól*, and its corollary, the 139th, the parenthetical lines (in strophe 138) "With spear wounded," &c., were added for the sake of greater clearness, and thus the stanza came to mean what probably never was contemplated by the

original author of it (cf. p. 22, note). So here we have to deal with a myth the sole and primary source of which, so far as we can tell, is the false reading of a single word in *Völuspó*, dating, perhaps, even from pre-literary times. Both these strophes form anyhow a *spurious* interpolation in *Hóvamól*.

Though it cannot be proved, it stands at any rate to reason, that the false *Völuspó* reading should have led more poets astray than him to whom the *Hóvamól* verses I have dealt with are due. Two poets, the afore-named Eyvind, and Tind, the son of Hallkel, make or are supposed to make use of kennings that point to Odin as a hanged god; the former in a verse that is supposed to belong to his *Hóleygjatal*, the latter in a verse of a "drapa" composed after 986 in honour of Earl Hakon the Mighty, the common patron of both these Skalds.

The verse ascribed to Eyvind, on the sole authority of *Skáldskaparmól* (*Snorra Edda*, i. 248) runs (cf. Wisen's *Carmina norræna*, p. 19):

Viljak hljóð  
at Hás líði<sup>1</sup>,

I wish for listening  
to the High-one's drink,

<sup>1</sup> Hás líð = the High-one's ale = the drink of poetry that Odin robbed from Suttung—here: poetry, song.

meðan Gillings  
gjöldum<sup>1</sup> yppik,  
meðan hans ætt  
í hverlegi  
Galga-farms<sup>2</sup>  
til goða teljum.

while Gilling's  
were-gild I set forth,  
while his race  
in the cauldron-fluid  
of the Gallows' freight  
to the gods I trace.

It is difficult to believe that the author of *Hökonarmöl* could be guilty of such poetical padding as is here brought to light: three kennings for one and the same thing crammed together into one verse in *fornyrðislag* (metre of eight four-syllabled lines)! The last of these kennings:

hver-lögr galga-farms,

which is intended to signify Odin's mead, poetry, is so lacking in taste and propriety

<sup>1</sup> Gillings gjöld = the were-gild for Gilling, a giant whom the dwarfs Fjalar and Galar killed. Gilling's nephew, Suttung, took in atonement from these dwarfs the precious drink of poetry: the blood of Kvasir blended with honey; hence Gilling's were-gild = poetry, song.

<sup>2</sup> Galga-farms hver-lögr = hvers-lögr farms galga = the cauldron's (or vat's) fluid (mead, drink) of the Freight of the gallows; Freight of the gallows = Odin; his cauldron-fluid = the drink of poetry, preserved in the cauldron ("ketill," kettle) "Oðrerir," into which part of the blood of Krasir was shed. Gallows' freight's cauldron-fluid, therefore = poetry, song. Sense: I crave for listening to my song, while I set forth my rhyme, while in a poem I trace his (sc. Earl Hakon's) descent to the gods.

that it leaves on the mind the impression that it was Odin's hanging, or Odin hanged, that procured for humanity the precious drink of poetry. I do not believe the verse is Eyvind's; "hans" bearing the rhythmical stress is too gross a prosodic blunder, to be the product of such a finished poet. Still, Eyvind's or not Eyvind's, this kenning must have the same origin as the Hóvamól myth.

Tind is credited with this kenning for a byrny or coat of mail: "hrynserkr hanga<sup>1</sup>," the jingle-serk of the Hanged (-one), the last word supposed to stand for Odin<sup>2</sup>. But "hangi" is any hanged person, and any such might have owned a coat of mail. There is no evidence even to prove that "Hangi" ever was one of Odin's names. Until that proof is obtained, we have here to do with a kenning for Odin the indefinite character of which renders it quite unfit for such a function<sup>3</sup>. Still, if the author of it meant

<sup>1</sup> Ol. Tryggvason's saga, ch. xliii; cf. *S. E.* i. 422.

<sup>2</sup> So that hryn-"serkr" hanga was taken to square with kennings like "serkr Hárs," "bjálfi Hnikars," "váðir Váfaðar," &c., all meaning the same thing.

<sup>3</sup> In "Bidrag til forståelse af Tindr Hallkelssons vers" (*Aarbøger for nord. Oldkyndighed*, 1886, p. 322) Finnur Jónsson calls it a "blasphemy" to apply "hangi"

it for a poetical definition of Odin, it was in the character of a hanged divinity he wanted to designate the god; and we can hardly doubt that this kenning sprang from one and the same source as the preceding one.

It is a curious coincidence that these two poets, apparently "contubernales" at the court of Earl Hakon, and both composing poems in honour of their patron at about the same time, should be the only court bards of the north who are made, or have made themselves, responsible for making use of poetical metaphors regarding Odin which, in plain language, amount to "crimen laesae divinitatis." Was it, perhaps, the author of the *Hóvamátl* verse, or his school, that helped both these poets to the kennings about a "hanged" Odin?

Before finally dismissing the subject of this myth, I must call attention to the singular expression: "On that beam, that no man to Odin, yet in *Egilssaga* as well as in his edition of "Eddalieder," 1888, he questions not the genuineness of the myth about a hanged Odin. If a genuine myth existed in evidence of Odin having been hanged, there would be no blasphemy here. But after all it is more than likely that Jónsson, in common with Egilsson, *S. E.* iii. 78, is right in seeing in these words of Tind no kenning for Odin at all.

knows of what roots it runs." If the god by "vindga" or "vinga meiði" meant the Ash of Yggdrasil, then he was here telling mankind a piece of singularly audacious invention, through which he must have known beforehand that everybody would see. The heathen world of Scandinavia knew more about the roots of Yggdrasil's ash-tree than about the roots of any other tree in existence. They knew that the great tree was an ash-tree; they knew the roots of it were those of an ash; they knew no end of lore about the wide spread of these roots and the empires of life and death unto which and over which each of them extended. So these lines are quite meaningless unless they simply refer to a horizontal gallows-tree, as I have pointed out before<sup>1</sup>. Cf. note on Míma-meißr, pp. 62-64.

Having thus passed in review the evidence on which it is maintained that Odin was a hanged deity, I cannot help drawing the conclusion that no such genuine evidence exists. Consequently "Yggdrasill," Odin's steed = gallows, is a name that never was applied to the great world-ash of northern myth, except

<sup>1</sup> P. 22, note.

by confusion, the occasion for metaphorically so naming it never having occurred. But for all that we shall see that the name has its *raison d'être*, and that a good one.

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The fact of the matter is, that the myth of "Yggdrasil" refers to a conception much loftier, more serene and majestic than mythologists are yet aware of.

"Askr Yggdrasils," we have seen, means the ash of Odin's horse. On that point all must be agreed. The myth knows of only one horse belonging to Odin, and that the best of all horses. This was the eight-footed steed, "Sleipner," of which so little has been made hitherto. Generally this mythic figure is interpreted as betokening the clouds, when storm-tossed, on or above which Odin rides. The myth about the generation of "Sleipner" is looked upon as of late origin. But the allusions to this horse of Odin's in *Grímnismól*, Balder's dreams, and "Sigrdrífumól," show that the myth must be of a very respectable antiquity. In *Gylfaginning* its origin is referred to the early age when the gods had just set up Midgarth and reared Valhall.

"Then," says the myth, "there came

thither a certain smith, and offered in three half-years to make for them a burgh so good that it should be true and safe against rock-giants and rime-trolls even should they get within Midgarth. But he bespoke the bargain that he should get for wife Freyja, and sun and moon he would have too. Then the 'Æsir' had a parley and took their counsel, and with the smith the bargain was made that he should have what he bespoke, if he could build the burgh in one winter ; but should there be by the first day of summer, anything still undone towards the burgh, then should he be off his bargain, nor should he have any man's help towards his work. And when they told him these conditions, then prayed he that they would allow him to have the use of his horse, called Svaðilföri ; and Loki brought it about that this was allowed him. So he began to make the burgh on the first day of winter, and by nights he drew thither the stones by his horse ; and that seemed a mickle marvel to the Æsir what huge rocks the horse drew, and the work of might done by the horse was by half again as great as that of the smith. But at their bargain there were strong

witnesses and many oaths, inasmuch as giants never deemed it safe to be among the Æsir without truce, in case Thor should come home; but at this time he was gone into eastern ways to batter trolls. But now, as the winter wore, the building of the burgh went on apace, and so high and strong it was, that there was no attacking it. But when it lacked three days of summer the work had come close to the making of the burgh gate. Then the gods sat down on their doom-stools and each asked the other, who had ruled it to give Freyja away into Giant-home, or so to spoil air and heaven as to take thence sun and moon and give them to the giants; and most of them were of one mind thereon that this must have been ruled by him who doeth most evil, Loki the son of Laufey, to wit, and said he was worthy of an evil death unless he hit upon a device whereby the smith should be off his bargain; and they went for Loki. Then was Loki frightened, and he swore oaths to the end that he would so handle matters, as that the smith should be off his bargain, whatever it might cost him.

“ Now this same night, as the smith drove

out with the horse Svaðilfōri for to fetch stones, then there ran out from the wood somewhere a mare towards the horse and neighed therewith. But when the horse kenned what horse this was, then he grew wild and broke the traces in sunder, and ran for the mare, and she away towards the wood, and the smith thereafter in order to catch the stallion; but these horses ran about all night, and that night long the building stopped, and the next day nought so much was done towards the building as before had been the wont. And then the smith went into giant-fury. And when the Æsir now saw for sure that there was come a rock-giant, the truce was stood by no longer, and they called out Thor's name, and forthwith he was there; and next aloft went the hammer Mjolner; was then the building bargain paid, yet not in sun and moon, for Thor even allowed him no abidance in Giant-home, but smote so his first blow that the skull was smashed into small bits and the giant was sent below Nifhel.

“But such a visit had Loki made to Svaðilfōri that some time thereafter he bore a foal; it was grey and had eight feet, and that is the best horse among gods and men.”

In its main features this is obviously a genuine nature myth. The season at which the origin of "Sleipner's" existence takes place is winter wearing into spring. Loki, the androgynous deity of deleterious nightly exhalations<sup>1</sup>, whence possibly his name, the "Locked-up," deep, inscrutable one, and his epithet "hinn lævísí" (water-wise, swamp-cunning [læ = water, sea]? hence) hurt-knowing, evil-knowing, evil-natured, is, in relation to "Svaðilfōri," an air deity of the south, and, as such, of a warmer nature than the mate from northern Giant-home. "Svaðilfōri" must, it seems to me, be taken to mean him who has to "fare"; here, in view of the huge exertions of the horse, he who strives, struggles, rushes at violent exertion over "svaðill," i. e. over a ground covered with "svað." But "svað" means a thin miry covering over a frozen soil, produced by thaw. And as this condition of the surface of the soil makes it exceedingly slippery to walk

<sup>1</sup> A curious expression in modern Icelandic is "Loka-lykt," Loki's stench. In my youth I heard it used of certain foul exhalations from the soil, and remember it particularly used in connexion with thawing bogs in spring and the digging of new graves.

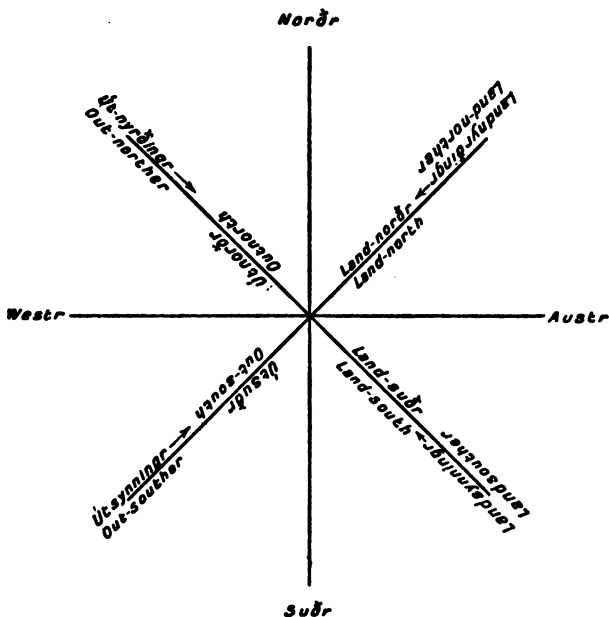
over, the notion of slipperiness is always implied, when the question is of walking over "svað." "Svaðilföri," then, is he who is about and stirring in the midst of a season of thawing, who is pacing a thawing earth.

That this horse from Giant-home must signify a storm-steed seems obvious from the whole drift of the myth, and especially from the nature of the offspring. Well then, the act that takes place between "Svaðilföri" and Loki is the impregnation of warm by cold air, the rushing down of the heavier cold into the lighter warm air. The physical result of such an air-impregnation, we know, is the atmospheric disturbance, called *wind*.

And "Sleipner," Odin's eight-footed horse, means unquestionably, as I shall show presently—the WIND. The very fact that "Sleipner" is eight-footed, a fact not explained hitherto, would by itself be a sufficient proof of my interpretation. But additional corroboration will be derived from the meaning of his name, "Sleipner," and from his metaphorical designation, "drasil," and lastly from the fact, that the true and telling name of the great Ash of Midgarth is Yggdrasil's Ash.

The ancient Northmen believed that wind could blow from only eight points of the horizon (compass).

So the makers of the myth of "Sleipner" must have pictured his feet to themselves in some such form as this :



To the four cardinal points of the compass the Northmen gave names which, with only

slight variations, are the same throughout the Germanic languages.

But for the octant wind-directions the Northmen invented special terms of their own, which are interesting in more than one respect.

1. The direction determined by the point that halved the quadrant of the horizon between North and East, they called "land-norðr," land-north, and the wind blowing from that direction was called "land-nyrðingr," "land-northing," "land-norther."

2. The direction determined by the point that halved the quadrant of the horizon between East and South was called "land-suðr," land-south, and the wind blowing from that quarter was called "land-synningr," "land-southing," "land-souther."

3. The direction determined by the point that halved the quadrant of the horizon between South and West was named "út-suðr," out-south, sea-south, and the wind blowing from that quarter "út-synningr," "out-southing," "out-" or "sea-souther."

4. The direction determined by the point that halved the quadrant of the horizon between West and North was called "út-norðr,"

“out-” or “sea-north,” and the wind blowing from that quarter was called “út-nyrðingr,” “out-northing,” “out-” or “sea-norther.”

These terms, we can clearly see, must be invented by a people who were dwellers upon a coast the compass line of which ran north and south, so that the winds that blew upon them between North and East and East and South could only blow over land, and the winds that blew from quarters between South and West and West and North likewise could only come to them over the “out,” the vast unknown sea-expanse in front of them to the westward.

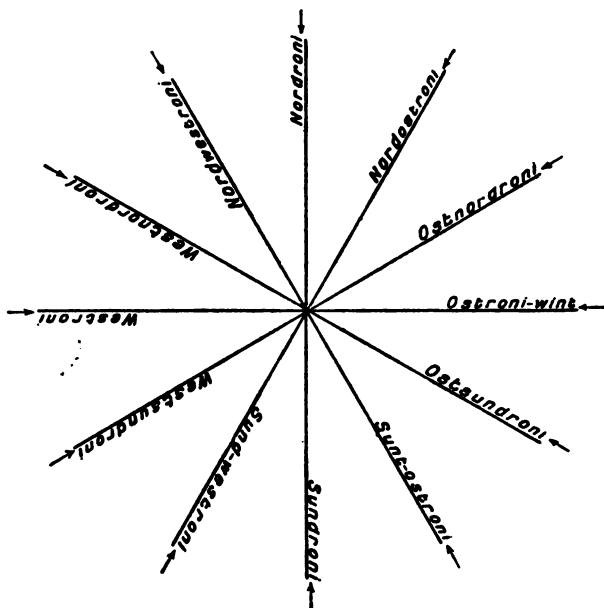
We have no difficulty in coming to a decision as to who the inventors of these homely terms must have been. They could have originated only among the coast dwellers of Western Norway.

Now, as these people knew that the god of the air performed his journeys by means of riding on his horse Sleipner, and as Sleipner undoubtedly meant the wind conceived under the figure of a horse, it obviously follows that the body of this horse, in order properly to bear up such a rider, must have been looked upon as having its whereabouts “on high,”

i. e. high up in the air. Consequently the dwellers on the earth could not conceive that they ever came in contact with any part of the horse but its feet. And as the feet of the horse were of the same substance as its body, and winds were realized by these primitive myth-makers as moving from and towards eight more or less accurately defined points of the horizon, it follows quite naturally, as it seems to me, that these primitive idealists should picture to themselves the eight winds so moving over the earth, as the wind-steed's eight feet.

Parenthetically, I may observe that the mode of defining the wind directions, as shown above, is quite independent of south-Germanic influences. Already in the days of Hrabanus Maurus the old Germans had elaborated their own system of dividing the compass by the directions from and towards which they conceived winds could blow. And as the scheme is little known, I give a diagram of it on the opposite page.

Here everything differs from the Scandinavian system to such an extent as to preclude the idea of any traditional dependence of the northern on the southern arrangement.



Now we have seen that the inventors of the myth about the eight-footed wind-steed of the god of the air can be no other than the people of Norway, who thus become the authors of one of the most beautiful conceptions that any myth-makers in the world can boast of; for the idea of an *eight-footed* wind- or storm-steed for a god of the air to travel on is, as far as I can ascertain, peculiar to *Norway alone*.

So here we have the real Yggdrasil, the true horse of the terrible air- and storm-god.

Where could this mighty horse of the supreme god have its run or pasture-ground as it were? Nowhere in the whole universe but in the vast branchy expanse of the world-overshadowing Ash of Midgarth. There Sleipner was everlastingly present, absent therefrom *he never could be*. Consequently it was essentially his own tree, and most appropriately called "askr Yggdrasils," the ash of Odin's horse, the ash of "Sleipner." In this close relation between the tree and the wind-steed of Odin I recognize the most solid refutation conceivable of the reading of cod. reg. of the O. E., of Hauksbók, of codd. Wormianus and Upsaliensis—"heitir Yggdrasill," as applied to this tree.

No less befitting was the name "Sleipner," both in regard to the material substance of this horse and to that of his habitat in nature. "Sleipner" must mean the "Slipperer," the smooth-footed, slip-footed, nimble-footed; a steed of such lighthness of foot as to find foothold anywhere, as to be able to slip his feet in anywhere. This word, like "sleipr," slippery, lubricus, "sleipni," slipperiness, is derived from the verb "slípa," while it was yet a strong verb, p. "sleip," pp. "slipinn," cf. Dan. "slibe,"

“sleb,” “sleben,” to smooth, to polish. It is unnecessary to comment upon the ingenious suitability of such a name as this for a horse of “Sleipner’s” substance and destined for such a trap-beset habitat as a limitless region of interwoven ash branches.

“Yggdrasill” then, as indicated already, is a metaphorical term or kenning for “Sleipner,” consequently of *later date than the myth of him*. “Drasill,” Professor Bugge suggests, may be derived from “þrasa,” which Egilsson translates “fremere,” in the context of Lokasenna, v. 58, where Loki asks Thor, who has arrived in a thunderous mood: “hví þrasir þú svá Þórr?” why blusterest thou so, Thor? and through “þrasa” Bugge traces it back to Latin “terreo,” and inclines to render it “perhaps,” the “scaring one.” The etymological connexion between “þrasa” and “drasill” would seem to derive support from “þrasarr,” one of Odin’s names, the rusher, he of the blustering habits. The old name of the steed was doubtless Ygg-þrasill; a form that was bound to go into Ygg-drasill, by reason of the long palatal explosive forcing the interdental spirant to take up the more neighbourly abode of an intra-dental explosive.

I would suggest, as etymologically perhaps most correct, an ancient root alliance between "dra-," older "pra-," in drasill, and "tri-" in "trivi" from Lat. "tero." So derived, "drasill" would mean tearer, wearer, grinder, bruiser, sweeper, as suitable an epithet to the great air-god's storm-steed as well could be conceived.

To my mind the myth of "Yggdrasill," as now explained, not only fits thoroughly, without any hitch, into the cosmogonic system of the ancient Northmen, but is elevated to an unexpectedly higher degree of ideality than, heretofore, it was supposed it could lay claim to. While the beautiful myth of "Sleipner-Yggdrasill" was still a living memory among the worshippers of Odin, it is an evident matter, that the myth-monstrosity of Odin's being hanged on his own horse could not possibly find an entry into the consciousness of any one of his worshippers. Such a thing was only possible when *that* memory was dead and gone to the grave with the generation that possessed it as a reality, and up had sprung a new one who from genuine myth-makers (true believers) had come down to being mythographers, and by an uncritical credulity made up a myth

out of a plausibly suggestive context, when occasion seemed to favour such an operation.

The way in which one such mutilated context discovered in *Völuspó* has served some ingenious mind in quest of mythic relics among the débris of ancient traditions, to falsify the true old myth of "Yggdrasil," is now, I think, sufficiently illustrated.

I cannot take leave of the subject of this paper without giving a last glance to the picture that "Sleipner's" rider must have presented to the generations that invented and ideally realized the myth of Odin's eight-footed wind-steed. On it the wavering weather-shifty<sup>1</sup> supreme deity swept through the boundless realms of his empire, one-eyed, but "flame-eyed"<sup>2</sup>, his one eye being the sun; capped with storm-clouds<sup>3</sup>; with a flowing beard of atmospheric vapours, mists and fogs<sup>4</sup>; with a mask<sup>5</sup>, the name of which

<sup>1</sup> "Váfuðr" = waverer; "Svipall" = swift, shifty; "Viðrir" = weather-natured, weather-maker.

<sup>2</sup> "Báleygr" = bale-eyed, flame-eyed, fire-eyed.

<sup>3</sup> "Hötr" = hatted; "Síð-hötr" = side- i.e. slouch-hatted.

<sup>4</sup> "Síð-grani" = of the side i.e. long lip-beard; "Síð-skeggr" = side- i.e. long-beard.

<sup>5</sup> "Grímar" = mask-wearer; "Grímnir" = mask-covered, mask-hidden; "Grímr" = the masked.

was night<sup>1</sup>. Such was the picture in its main features!

Mythologists seem to be generally of opinion that the myth of Sleipner is a late addition to the cosmogonic system of the north. But it is so intimately bound up with Odin's very nature, that it must rank among the oldest that have come down to us. The fact, too, that its true meaning was quite forgotten, perhaps for centuries before the Icelanders began to write down the ancient memories of the Scandinavian races, since no old poet even alludes to it, is in itself a very weighty evidence of its antiquity.

#### NOTE ON MÍMA-MEIÐR.

Between *Hóvamól* 138 and *Fjolsvinnsmól* 20 there is a close connexion, which it is of importance to point out. In strophe 19 of the latter poem "Wind-cold" addresses "Many-wise" ("*Fjolsvip*") in this way:—"Tell me this, *Fiolswith* . . . what that acicular leaf" ("*barr*," a misunderstood and misapplied word, by which the author wants to signify tree) "is hight, whereof the limbs spread all over the world." *Fiolswith* answers:

|                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <i>Míma-meiðr hann heitir,</i> | <i>Mimi's beam 'tis hight,</i> |
| <i>enn þat mangi veit,</i>     | <i>but this no man wots,</i>   |
| <i>af hverjum rótum renn.</i>  | <i>of what roots it runs.</i>  |

<sup>1</sup> "*Gríma*" = night, cf. *Lay of All Wise* 30: "night" among men, "*niol*" among gods; the great powers name it "mask."

Evidently "Míma-meid̄r," a form only found in Fjølsvinnsmól, corresponds to "vindga-meid̄r" in Hóvamól, and is unmistakably meant here to signify Yggdrasil's ash. Opinions are divided as to who is the borrower here, the author of Hóvamól 138 or the author of Fjølsvinnsmól. Considering that it is by no means certain that "vinga" or "vindga meid̄r," as the Hóvamól strophe originally stood, meant or could be taken to mean Yggdrasil's ash—that, on the contrary, most likely it meant nothing but an ordinary gallows (cf. p. 22, note), but, on the other hand, could be taken to signify nothing but Yggdrasil's ash after the three lines "With spear wounded," &c., had been foisted into the strophe—it clearly follows that the act of borrowing lies with the author of Fjølsvinnsmól, and took place after the said three lines had been inserted.

Moreover, I must call attention to a possible palæographical secret underlying "Míma" in "Míma-meid̄r." Supposing that "vindga" in "vindga meid̄i" was found spelt in some old vellum "uinga," and ng was represented by the sign η, as is not unfrequently the case in early vellums, then the MS. reading might very well have appeared as uī̄ja, i. e. uī̄n̄ga = uī̄n̄ga, the horizontal stroke meaning, as so often it does, in (im). For a later decipherer it would have been nothing out of the common to read this as m̄ja, i. e. mīma, the horizontal stroke being also a commonly employed sign for m only. Given such a reading of "uinga" in the Hóvamól strophe, the verse in Fjølsvinnsmól stands self-explained as a direct loan from Hóvamól, "Míma" being a mere misreading of "uinga," and the verse-lines quoted a thoughtless and unwarranted definition of Yggdrasil's ash, cf. pp. 45, 46 above. If I am right in what I have suggested, the age of Fjølsvinnsmól is determined by the age of Hóvamól 138.

#### NOTE ON "KENNING."

For the benefit of the general reader it may be observed, that the frequently occurring word "kenning" is a technical term for a peculiar device in Icelandic poetry in order to define an object somewhat after the manner of a conundrum.

"Kanna" is an active verb, meaning primitively, I make no doubt, to probe (a wound) with a "kanni," a probe (*specillum*). In its derivative sense it means to investigate, Lat. *cognoscere*. Then to explore, muster, &c.

A causal verb to this is "kenna," to "ken," to come upon, feel, find out that for the discovery of which the act of probing was undertaken, to know, Lat. *cognovisse*. Hence, actively, to make the discovery known, to betoken, to name. Now, as the thing so discovered must, in one way or another, derive its name from the point or place where it was found out, we find this verb commonly forming the phrase: "Kenna einhvern vit eitthvat" or "til einhvers," to name some one by or after something.

Out of this linguistic function of the verb the derivative noun "kenning" sprang, meaning, really, the naming of the object it betokens by, or after, something else, this "something else" pointing to the object betokened as lying in the depth beneath it after the fashion of a thing that has to be, or has been, found out by probing. Thus, by means of a "kenning" gold is named "sævar bál," sea's bale=flame; "ár kyndill," river's candle &c.; so "hauka ferja" hawks' ferry, is a "kenning" for hand, "hattar stallr," hat's stall, for head, "svell arms," the ice of the arm, for silver, &c. "Kennings" of the description here instanced are the simplest. If an object be defined with one more noun, simple or compound, beyond the simple "kenning," it is said to be "tví-kent," e.g. a "kenning" for battle is "ógnar-ljóma el": ógnar-ljómi=awe's (i.e. fight's) gleam=sword, its el (=squall)=brunt of battle=battle; so ship is designated as "má-ferils haukr" mew-path's hawk, where mew-path=sea, and the hawk thereof is the thing that flies, skims along it=ship. Any "kenning" carried further is "rekin" ("rekit"), driven, crowded. In the folds of "kenning" lie hidden the imagery of the old poetry, and a wealth of allusions to forgotten lore.





