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III

SVERRISSAGA

THE SAGA OF KING
SVERRI OF NORWAY

TRANSLATED BY

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THE SAGA OF KING SVERRI

Prologue.

Here we begin to speak of events which happened a while ago, within the memory of the men who related them for this book; to speak, that is, of King Sverri, son of King Sigurd Haraldsson. The beginning of the book is written according to the one that Abbot Karl Jonsson first wrote when King Sverri himself sat over him and settled what he should write. The story has not come far [from its source]. It tells of certain of his battles, and as the book advances, his strength grows, foreshadowing the greater events. They therefore called this part of the book *Gryla*, that is, bugbear. The latter part of the book is written according to the relation of those who remembered what happened, having actually seen or heard it, and some of them had been with King Sverri in battles. Some of these stories were fixed in memory, having been written down directly the events occurred, and they have not been altered since. Possibly, if this book is seen by those who have full knowledge of the events, they may think many matters passed over hastily, and many left untold which they regard as worthy of mention; they may well cause these to be written down if they wish. And though, in telling of battles against large numbers, some things are here said to have occurred otherwise than seems most probable, let all know of a certainty that nothing has been added. To us it seems probable that the stories are true which are told in books concerning famous men who lived in old times.

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Sverri's birth, and early life in the Færeys.

Fb. 1. Bishop Hroi was at that time in the Færeys. He had a brother called Unas Kambari, who married a Norse wife named Gunnhild late in the reign of the brothers Ingi, Sigurd, and Eystein, the sons of Harald Gilli. Before long, Gunnhild had a son, who was called Sverri, and was said to be the son of Unas. His coming into the world was heralded by remarkable dreams, such as ever precede remarkable events. His mother Gunnhild told of a dream that came to her before he was born. She dreamt that she was in a goodly upper room, and about to give birth to her child, and her maid was seated at her knees ready to receive the child at its birth. After the birth a great terror seized the maid, and she cried aloud saying, "Gunnhild, my Gunnhild! you have brought forth a wonderful and awful birth." Three times she cried out, using the same words. And when Gunnhild heard the maid utter the same cry so often with trembling voice, she inquired what it was that was born; and it seemed in her dream to be a stone, very large, white as snow to the sight; and it glowed fiercely, so that it emitted sparks in all directions like iron at a white heat in the fierce blast of a forge. And she said to her maid, "We must have a watchful care of this birth and let no one know aught of it, for all who see it will think it a strange sight." So, in her dream, they took the stone and set it in a large chair and hid it under a fair covering. But cover it as they would, sparks continued to issue from it which flew in all directions through the covering to every part of the room, and they were greatly affrighted at the awful issue from the stone. Then Gunnhild awoke.

Unas and Gunnhild had a son named Hidi; a daughter, who was married to Svina-Stefan, and had a son named Petr Steypi; and also several other daughters.

When Sverri was five years old he sailed from Norway to the Færeys, and was there brought up as the foster-son of Bishop Hroi. The Bishop put him to books, and admitted him to Holy Orders, and he was ordained priest. But when he reached a ripe age he did not shape himself to the priesthood, and was rather unruly. He had a quarrel with Bryniolf, son of Kalf Sendiman,

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who was then King's bailiff in the islands. Sverri had struck a man, and Bryniolf, with a large company, went to seize him, but he escaped. Yet they pressed him so closely that he ran into a stove-room to conceal himself. A woman hid him in the oven, and set a flat stone before the oven's mouth; then she lighted a fire outside. His pursuers sought him in the room, but did not find him. And afterwards, when people saw what he became, they thought there had been many signs pointing to supernatural power in him.

Sverri's dream.

- Fb. 2. Sverri had remarkable dreams, which some men regarded as nonsense and made sport of. He told of one in which he dreamt that he was in Norway, and was become a bird, so large that its beak reached the boundaries of the land in the east, and the feathers of its tail as far north as the dwellings of the Finns, while its wings covered the whole country. He told this dream to a wise man named Einar, and inquired what he thought it might portend. Einar answered that the dream was dark to him, but that it probably pointed to power of some kind. "Possibly," said he, "you may become Archbishop." "It seems to me very unlikely that I shall become Archbishop," replied Sverri, "when I am not well suited to be priest." Sverri was twenty-four years of age before he was told who was his real father, and he remained one year longer in the Færeys before he proceeded to Norway.

King Magnus of Norway and his father Earl Erling.

3. At that time King Magnus and Earl Erling were strong in the support of mighty men and of all the commons. The King was beloved and popular; the Earl was powerful and wise, energetic and blest with victory, and held all rule over the land. There were many, great and small, who wished him ill, especially in the communities of the Thronds north of the land. But Archbishop Eystein, who controlled all the north, was a very dear friend of King Magnus, and secured to him its whole strength.

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King Magnus had all the greatest men in the land on his side; some of them served in his bodyguard, and others held royal grants; while the commons, with one consent, agreed to exalt him and maintain him in the kingdom. His ancestry was the greatest advantage to him; for all the people of the land loved him because of it, preferring rather to serve a descendant of Sigurd Jorsala-fari than one of Harald Gilli.

Sverri learns that he is a son of King Sigurd Munn.

- Fb. 4. A strange matter now happened: Gunnhild, the mother of
 3. Sverri, left the land to go south to Rome. There, to one who heard her confessions, she confessed that the man whom hitherto she had stated to be her son's father was not so; but that a king was his father, and her son himself knew it not. This confession being laid before the Pope, she was commanded in her penance to inform her son of his real parentage as soon as she found him. Not long after her return home, she sailed to the Færeys, and told Sverri that he was the son of King Sigurd Munn. This information caused him much anxiety, and his mind wavered greatly. To contend for the kingdom against King Magnus and Earl Erling seemed difficult; and yet, supposing he were a king's son, it seemed contemptible that he should do nothing more than a plain yeoman's son would do. But when he called to mind the interpretation put upon his dreams by wise men, those very dreams quickened his courage to avenge his kinsmen.

Sverri dreams that he aids St. Olaf in fight.

- Fb. 5. Sverri related in these words a dream which appeared to
 4. him. He dreamt that he had come to Norway over the sea from the west, and had attained some position of honour, chosen to be bishop most likely. And there was much unrest in the land, because of the contention of kings. He dreamt that King Olaf the Saint was contending against King Magnus and Earl Erling, and he was pondering in his mind which side he should join. He chose rather to go to King Olaf, and on his arrival the King

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Sverri arrives in Norway; meets with Earl Erling; and visits Earl Birgi Brosa in Gautland [1174-1176].

- Fb. 6. Sverri now made ready for a voyage to Norway to see what would happen, and he arrived there at the time when Eystein had let himself be proclaimed King.¹ Now Eystein and he were cousins, sons of two brothers. And when Sverri heard of Eystein's doings, he made careful inquiry into them, and found many of his plans and designs quite immature; this checked him, so that he did not feel it right to join Eystein.

Afterwards he journeyed to the north of the land, for his foster-father, Bishop Hroi, had advised that he should present himself before the Archbishop and tell his difficulty to him. As he went on the voyage he made inquiries of men who had come from the north. He delayed for a time at Selia, because he found friends. And there was a priest who gave him accurate information about all he wished to know, from which Sverri perceived how strong an opponent the Archbishop had been to his brothers. There seemed to him small hope that he would be exalted where his brothers had been abased.

He then turned south to leave the land, and sailed to Tunsberg with the crew of a merchantman, and thence to Konunga-hella. Here he had constant speech with Earl [Erling] himself, and dissembled with such success that the Earl neither knew who he was nor what his mind was brooding over. Sverri mixed much with the body-guard and others of the King's men, and his cheerful manner and conversation were a pleasure and amusement to them at all hours. By prudent speech he so sounded them that he became assured of many matters which they would never have disclosed if they had known who was among them or with whom they conversed. He applied his mind diligently to observe if the commons showed doubtful loyalty in their language, taking care that his own words roused no suspicion, and that no one perceived what his mind was brooding over. But he only found that the whole of the commons were loyal to King Magnus.

From Konunga-hella he passed to Liodhus, enduring much

¹ Eystein Meyla, son of the late King Eystein. His band was called Birkibeins; see c. 36 of the Saga of Magnus Erlingsson in *Heimskringla*.

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welcomed him with great joy. He had not been long with him when this event happened. One morning, as it seemed to him in his dream, there were few men with the King, not more than fifteen or sixteen, and the King was washing himself at a table in an upper room. When he had finished, another man wished to go to the table and wash in the same water, but the King pushed him aside with the hand and bade him desist. He then called Sverri Magnus by name, and bade him wash in the same water; and Sverri dreamt that he did as he was bid. When he had washed, a man rushed into the room with the sudden tidings that the King's foes were at the door, and he bade them seize their weapons as quickly as they could. But the King spoke, and said there was no danger, and bade the men take their axes and swords and march out, while he himself would take his shield and protect them all. And they did as the King commanded. Then he took his sword and offered it to the young man Sverri, and placed his standard in Sverri's hand, saying, "Take my standard, Lord, and know of a surety that henceforth you shall be its bearer always." And Sverri in his dream received the standard, though with a feeling of dread. Afterwards the King took his shield, and they all walked out together somewhat hastily. The vestibule seemed long as they marched through, not less than sixty ells in length, and while they were in the building, Sverri was unable to carry the standard upright. But when they reached the door through which they had to pass, seven men came against them with weapons, intending to cut down the standard-bearer. But the King moved forward in front of him, and with his shield protected him and all the others, so that they were unharmed. Afterwards they came in his dream to an open country and a fair field, where he carried the standard upright, and bore it against the array of King Magnus and Earl Erling. And as soon as the attack was made, that host fell away. Then Sverri awoke, and pondering his dream, considered it better than no dream, though it seemed a strange one. He told it afterwards to his friends, that is, a few, and succeeding events agreed fairly with their interpretation. And when such things came into his mind he was greatly strengthened.

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fatigue and toil; and thence into East Gautland, where he arrived weary and exhausted. Three days before Yule he came to his kinsman Earl Birgi Brosa, who had married his father's sister Brigit, and he laid bare his difficulty to the Earl and his wife. But they looked coldly on the project of helping his cause. There were two reasons for this: the first, that his kinsman Eystein had raised his band of followers by their aid, and so long as he lived they would help no one else; and the second reason, a rumour had come to the ears of Birgi that Earl Erling had sent Sverri to him in mockery. Sverri remained here during Yule, and constantly spoke to the Earl of his difficulty, begging him to give wholesome advice as to the plans he should adopt. Now there happened to be men present, such as constantly are met with, fuller of malice than kindness, and their presence was a source of great danger to Sverri. For as they were mostly short-sighted men, they believed the rumour and wished to slay him; but Earl Birgi would not have him slain without just cause, and he wished rather to inquire what were his usual habits. So they gave him to drink wine and mead, that he might become drunk, and he proved criminal out of his own mouth. But Sverri, anxious about his cause at every moment, gave little heed to either mead or wine though placed before him in plenty, and when he found that answers were drawn from him on all matters of moment to himself, he grew more and more cautious; so that those who would make him drunk found nought of which to accuse him.

Sverri visits his sister Cecilia in Vermaland [1177].

7. After Yule-tide was passed, Sverri, perceiving that he did not obtain from the Earl such an answer as he wished, turned his course to Vermaland. He was not accompanied by a large crowd of followers, for he had only one man with him when he left the Earl; and he endured much fatigue and toil on the road. His condition most resembled that of royal children in the old stories, under the curses of step-mothers. For six or seven days together he strayed through wide and unknown forests, suffering cold and hunger in his wanderings. Arrived in Vermaland, he met men

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who had come from Norway, and asked them minutely of the tidings. They were able to tell him of what had lately happened: that King Eystein had marched from the north, east into the Vik, and had fought a battle at Re against King Magnus, in which he had fallen with a great part of his force. Those that escaped had fled to Vermaland, or Thelamork, or south to Denmark. The sorrows and perplexities of Sverri seemed greatly increased by this event, and he went first of all to his sister Cecilia, who, as soon as she had heard of her brother's movements, had prepared for him a hospitable reception. She was glad at his coming, and welcomed him with much joy. Afterwards brother and sister deliberated what plan he should follow. To return to Norway was not safe, for information of his affairs and movements had found its way there. It seemed to them the best course that he should visit foreign lands for a time and wait for the tidings that God would send him.

The Birkibeins, having lost their leader, offer to serve under Sverri. He refuses their offer.

- Fb. 8. And now the miserable band that had lost its leader learnt that a son of King Sigurd Munn had come to Vermaland. All of them that heard the news went to see Sverri, and they begged him to put himself at the head of their cause and become their leader. The troop was in a very shameful condition: some had grievous wounds, some were without clothes, and well-nigh all were weaponless. So very young, too, were they all, that they appeared to him unfit for any great enterprise. He answered them in this manner:—

“It does not seem to me desirable for either you or me that we take that course. You are poor men, and I am without resources and unknown to you. If my resolves are not to your liking, you may say that you do not clearly know whom you serve. I was brought up where men are little accustomed to such high aims or labours; and you and I, it seems to me, have small foundation for comradeship together, except poverty and trouble. I am not prepared to join your perplexities to my anxiety. But inasmuch as you have applied to me, I will give you advice that

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seems to me good. Birgi, my kinsman, and his wife Brigit, have three sons, who have an equal right with King Magnus Erlingsson to rule the land. Go to Birgi and ask him to give you one of them as your leader. Besides, I have carefully viewed and considered your band, and I observe in particular that there is little to distinguish one man from another among you. It is quite out of my power to take up with this band. I see great hindrances to a common cause, especially in the absence of that which either of us can least afford to lack; for there is good reason to suppose that your company has not in it the elements of such great influence in the land as is needed to cope with Earl Erling. And for myself, brought up on an outlying rock, remote from other lands, I am incapable of enterprise. Little acquaintance had I even with the customs of other men, until lately when I came to your land; far less have I the knowledge to lead a warlike host, or direct the government of the country. I am capable of nothing, being unknown to every one. No man knows from what family I spring: all are ignorant, except so far as I myself may tell of it. Possibly you will now say of me, as of your former leader, that you did not know what manner of man he was to whom your service was given. Thus your chief will ever be held your reproach wherever you meet your foes. Let all men set their hopes on the sons of Birgi, no one on me."

The Birkibeins consult Earl Birgi about a leader, and he sends them back to Sverri. Sverri's favourable answer.

9. These men, still in search of a leader, went to see Birgi Brosa. He bewailed their loss greatly, and thus spoke: "My sons are children in age, unable to form plans either for themselves or others; they are not capable of such—chiefly, though, because of their youth. Among the men of your band I see none to choose that are able to form plans for my sons, and I could raise no force here, because the men of Norway will not suffer a Gautish host to invade their land. But I will lay before you the plan that seems to me the best; God will decide how it turns out. A son of King Sigurd was with us during Yule, and he will be now in Vermaland. Take him for your leader; he is of the right

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age, and of a suitable understanding. Ask him to place himself at the head of your cause." "We went to that man," they answered, "and he gave us a refusal." The Earl then became the more urgent and said: "It is my belief that your cause will find no success unless it comes from him; and so if you will take my advice, you will go to him. You may bear him this message from me, that I promise him all such friendship as I can afford, and he shall bring his force here as to a friendly country whenever he comes into the realm of the Swedes. Give him the choice either to yield to the need of you all or to lose his life." Now they had set men to keep watch over him while they went to consult Earl Birgi; because Sverri had formed a design to visit Jerusalem, thinking that he knew no men in Norway from whom he might expect protection. For King Magnus and Earl Erling had so fearfully bewitched the whole of that region that no man dared speak of Sigurd¹ or Hakon by the title of King.

These men now came the second time to Sverri, bringing letters from King Knut and Earl Birgi containing these words: "It is our prayer that you be moved to help this poor band, and show no disregard to our words. And notwithstanding that we looked coldly on your cause aforetime, yet now we will support and strengthen your rule in every way that we can." But although they used this fair, enticing language, Sverri none the less perceived his lack of means for so great a design, and again refused the men's prayer. They then called to mind the last words of Earl Birgi and offered Sverri the choice of two courses: would he prefer to take pity on their cause or look for sharper trouble from them; and they spoke in this manner: "We have long served your kinsmen. For your father's sake we have lost our fathers, brothers, well-nigh all our relations, and we have no land wherein we may dwell peacefully. And now we all again offer our duty to you yourself, but you prefer to despise both us and your own honour. Know then of a surety that we will slay you and all belonging to you, and so purchase to ourselves peace with King Magnus; we who were most loyal to you in time past will now be most stern." Sverri's position now seemed to him one of great

¹ Sons of the late King Sigurd. See the account of Hakon Herdibreid's death in c. 7 of Magnus Erlingsson's Saga in *Heimskringla*; and c. 18 for Sigurd's death.

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and fresh difficulty, and he pondered it in himself. He saw that he would bring all his kindred to a very swift end if he risked these threats of evil. He chose otherwise, and on the Lord's day before Lent, he entered into fellowship with them; the Monday following, seventy men swore fealty to him. Some became his Guardsmen, some his Gests, and some his House-carles.

Sverri dreams that he is anointed by the Prophet Samuel.

10. The next night Sverri had a dream. He dreamt that he was at Borg, where the Raum-Elf falls into the sea, and King Magnus, Earl Erling, and their force were in the town. There was somewhat of a stir, because a king's son was supposed to be in the town, and all the people were busy seeking where he might be. And it seemed to Sverri that this stir was about himself. He dreamt that he was making his way secretly out of the town, and had come up to Mariukirk, which he entered for the service. As he was at prayers in the church, there appeared to him a man who came and took him by the hand, and leading him into a chapel that lay north of the choir-door, thus spoke to him, "Come with me, brother, I have somewhat to tell thee in secret." Sverri went in his dream with the man, carefully observing his appearance. The man seemed to him to be very aged; his hair was of a snowy whiteness, his beard was long, and his garments trailed upon the ground; his face was ruddy, with short hair around it, and he inspired great awe. Sverri's mind was full of concern, wondering what the man might want. The old man perceived his anxiety and said to him, "Fear not, brother, for God has sent me." Then Sverri, in his dream, sank to the ground before him, and asked, "Who art thou, Lord, that I may be assured that God has sent thee." The old man answered a second time, bidding Sverri fear not, and saying that God had sent him to him. But Sverri's fear became rather greater than less. Then the old man took him by the hand and raised him up, saying the third time, "Fear not, brother, peace be with thee. I am Samuel the prophet of God, and I have a message from God to deliver to thee." After this, the old man took a horn from a scrip which he carried about his neck, and the horn appeared to Sverri to contain holy

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oil. And the old man said, "Let me see thy hands." And Sverri stretched out both his hands towards him. And the man anointed them, saying, "May these hands be sanctified and made strong to hate foes and opponents, and to govern much people." Then he kissed Sverri, and taking his right hand in his own, said, "Be thou strong and valiant, for God will give thee help." Sverri then awoke and related his dream to the twelve men, two priests and ten others, who slept in the same room with him. They all considered the dream remarkable and of great import, and all of them were somewhat gladdened by it. But when he asked them to interpret the dream, no one had the confidence to explain it, though all thought the dream better than no dream. When Sverri perceived that there was no interpretation of the dream forthcoming, he bade his men avoid speaking of the vision, though it had appeared to him.

After this dream his disposition seemed to all who were about him to undergo a great change. It was altogether a trying experience for him to live in a strange land and among a people altogether strange. And at the very same time that he took on himself the charge of his company he had to bear the burdens of those who served him; for in the troop that he had accepted, and whose lot he had bound to his own, there was not a man besides himself able to form a plan.

Sverri leads his troop into the Vik, where his men make him King. He returns to Vermaland.

- Fb. 11. The following Wednesday, which we call Ash-Wednesday, 7. Sverri took with him this troop, and started from Hamar in Vermaland with not more than seventy men. He marched into the Vik, and on the way, men crowded to his band, so that when he reached Saurby in the Vik he had three and a half hundred¹ men. Here he caused an Assembly to be summoned, at which his men would have him accept the title of King. But he excused himself, saying that it became him better to wait until his cause was strengthened by some clear evidence of its truth. Then they declared that they would not listen to him: "They were unwilling,"

¹ The hundred is here, as elsewhere in the Saga, the long hundred, or 120.

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they said, "to serve one who had no higher title than any one of themselves." They gave him, therefore, the title of King the first Lord's day in Lent, and swore fealty to him, laying their hands on his sword.

He had not been long ruler of the band before he saw, what he had already suspected, that he would not gain much strength from their counsels. He began, then, to take the whole burden on himself, and while he stayed in the Vik with his men he studied diligently their ways and proceedings. They seemed to him a very unequal band, some of them gallant and orderly men, others unruly. Then he formed the design of putting them to the test if they would follow him for any other object than pillage and disorder. He returned to Vermaland, being unwilling to plunder in the Vik, and desirous rather of fighting for the land that was his by birthright. Thence he continued his journey, intending to march north. He proceeded as far as Eidaskog, where he reviewed his troop, and found that many who had become his liegemen lacked manliness, and had thought of plunder rather than of fighting for the honour of their King, for he had then no more than seventy men of the four hundred. He now saw that he had not the means to attain his object; his troop was too small to confront such overwhelming odds as he might expect to meet. He could put no trust in a force that was unwilling to follow him north and back again. They seemed, indeed, more willing to bring down the wrath of the commons on their heads by pillage and disorder than to support him in dangerous undertakings. And this brought him much depression of mind, because almost from the outset he had been compelled to accept the title of King, and those who compelled him had given him no loyal support afterwards. Then he pondered on the plan he should follow. He could see, as he thought, no way to separate himself from his force, because those who were his most eager followers kept careful watch over him, now that he had accepted the title of King and become known to all in the land. So he turned again into Vermaland, and kept Easter with a priest who prepared a grand entertainment for him. Afterwards he sent letters into Norway, to Thelamork, because its people were at variance with King Magnus and Earl Erling, and he promised them some amendment of their laws if they would turn to him.

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He also appointed that they should meet him north in the land, if they would join him or afford him assistance.

King Sverri's toilsome march north through the forests.

- Fb. 12. Easter week being past, Sverri perceived that he would not be able to reach the north of the land unless he made a laborious march by strange paths. For directly it became known that a rebellious troop was forming in the east of the country, great preparations to meet it were made over the whole land, so that no progress was possible through well-peopled districts. To turn towards the Eystra-salt seemed his best plan. The first wood through which he marched with his men before they reached Aekisherad was twelve miles long. And when they passed thence, they had to march through another wood quite as long, before they came to Molung. Thence they marched fifteen miles through a wood to Jarnberaland. In all these woods there was no food except flesh of birds and elks. For many reasons the marches were toilsome and difficult, for they were made chiefly through uninhabited districts, and the men suffered hunger, cold, and much weariness; they were unable to make use of horses or other means of progress, for the roads were in the worst condition, as at that time the snow was melting in the woods and the ice thawing on the waters. At one time they marched over bogs or wide moors, at another through dense forests or over great felled trees.

Jarnberaland is under the rule of the King of the Swedes, and was at that time a heathen land. Its people had never before set eyes on a king, and they were unaccustomed to the visits of kings. It might even be said, there was not one among them who understood what king's men were, or knew whether they were men or animals. There was great difficulty in making way among so rude a people. But Almighty God and Holy Maria gave such abundant grace to King Sverri, that when the people heard his words they furthered his progress and permitted him to pass through their land. But his road lay for the most part by wild forests, mosses, deserts, great streams and lakes, rather than by human dwellings. From Jarnberaland he marched eighteen miles through a wood to the district called Herdales, which was

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his own land. Thence he marched thirty-two miles through another wood, in which his men were so distressed that they found nothing to eat except the bark and sap of trees, and such berries as had lain all winter under the snow.

King Sverri the subject of a miracle. Continued sufferings of his men on the march north.

Fb. 13. It happened that King Sverri had to pass over a large lake in a forest, and as there were no boats in the neighbourhood, his men constructed rafts of trees, three or four together, just as they then could. The raft which bore the King was not large, and had four men on it. The lake was half a mile across. As soon as they had moved a short distance from shore, the raft sank until the water reached half-way up the legs of those who were on it. At this moment a man came running to the edge of the lake, much exhausted by the march, for they were in the very thick of the forest, and the whole troop had now been two days without food. He called to those on the raft, begging them to save him, as he was almost dead of exhaustion. Now the rest of the troop were well on their way over the lake. The King heard the man's cry, and saw that his life depended on their taking him; yet the raft seemed scarcely able to bear those already on it. But he had the raft pushed to land and took the man on, though it was no easy matter; and when he came on the raft, the water reached above their knees. In this way they crossed the lake, and then quitted the raft, landing by means of a single log. The King was the last to go on shore, and as soon as he left the raft it sank like a stone. All marked the singular and marvellous character of the event. For having beheld the raft float when carrying its human freight, and sink the instant they left it, all saw clearly that it had borne one who was destined to do great deeds that were yet undone, and to hold higher rank than he yet held.

They passed the next two days in the wilds without nourishment, except from chewing pine-shoots for the sap, and sucking birch-wood. The third day the whole troop was in extreme need. Yet they marched with such vigour through this wilderness that only thirteen short miles yet remained. And now it came to pass

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that the troop crossed a large river, and as they reached the other side they lay down on the bank, having lost all desire to go farther, so wearied had they become. The King was among the last three that crossed, and the current bore them a long way down the river, but at last they drifted to land and took rest. Then the King bade his men be of good courage; they were not far now, he said, from the abodes of men, and their hopes would again shine bright if they should come at last to a Christian people.

King Sverri marches through Jamtaland and comes to Nidaros. The men of Selbu and Gaulardale submit to him.

- Fb. 10. 14. The King now reached Jamtaland, and the Jamts wished to oppose him. He therefore sent forward Sigurd of Saltness, supposing they would be less on their guard against wise schemes before he himself, the chief of the band, came up. And his supposition proved true, for Sigurd in his expedition got possession of all their ferry-boats, which they had prepared for the defence of their land. When the King himself arrived, the yeomen felt the loss of their boats, and, as the best course before them, submitted to him. King Magnus had many barons in the land, and they all made peace with King Sverri; they prepared receptions for him, and full entertainment; they supplied him with sixty men. Afterwards he proceeded on his march, and again his troop suffered great distress, so that no man tasted food for five days; neither had they time for sleep, because the King did not wish intelligence of his march to precede him. On the Friday night before Whitsunday he came into the neighbourhood of the town [Nidaros]. The townsmen heard of his approach, and crossed the river Nid to oppose him with twelve hundred men under Sigurd Nikolasson, Birik Arnason, Ivar Horti, Ivar Silki, and Ivar Gjalvallsson. When the King became aware of this force he went himself to spy them out, taking with him a man named Jon, and coming right among them, obtained an accurate knowledge of the odds against him; and seeing that with one hundred men he was unable to fight against twelve hundred, he turned away for the present.

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Then the men of Selbu gathered together against him to the number of three hundred. But King Sverri's men were so exhausted by their toilsome march and long want of sleep that they were forced to take rest. So he sent messengers to Vigleik of Digrin, bidding him give his men food, and Vigleik thought good to obey the message. On their departure from Digrin, God so furthered the King's cause that he and his troop got between the Selbu host and their boats, the whole of which they took. They then sailed to the abodes of the very men who were eagerly plotting against their lives, and found a lodging in their houses, whether the owners of the farms liked it or not. And when these reached their homes, there was not a man of them but consented to all the King required; and he laid on them the charge of half a month's provisions. The King then occupied an island in the lake of Selbu, afterwards called the King's-holm. This place they left in the night, no one knowing of their departure but themselves, and marched into the Vatsfell. Here they lay, no one being aware of them; and they learnt all that occurred in the town, and heard much that was said of themselves. The men of Gaulardale also had gathered a great host together, which the Birkibeins watched closely, but this force was disbanded when, after some days, nothing was heard of the King. Forthwith the Birkibeins, seeing them disperse, followed close upon their heels and came quite unexpected to their abodes; the inhabitants then gladly submitted to all that King Sverri demanded. This news was soon told in Nidaros, and a force was again despatched from the town to go after him. But King Sverri again withdrew for a time and marched up into Soknadale. When he arrived there he heard that Rut and eighty men, all well armed, had come from Thelamork. This was in answer to the message and letters, already mentioned, which the King had sent to Thelamork. He rejoiced greatly to hear the news, and then marched up to Rennabu to meet them.

King Sverri's victory over the men of Nidaros.

Fb. 15. After this the King turned back, having now with him a
11. hundred and eighty men. They marched until they came to the

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mouth of the Gaul, which they crossed on ferry-boats. The twenty men who first reached the other side were sent forward by the King as scouts under Jon Gudrunarson. The townsmen [of Nidaros] had also sent out scouts on their part, seven in number. These two bands met; five of the townsmen were slain, one was taken prisoner, and one escaped, who bore the news to the town. Hereupon the townsmen went forth, twelve hundred in number, drawn up in orderly array. And Ivar Horti spoke, saying, "We must use craft in hunting them down; let us hide some of our force, for if they see the whole they will not venture to attack." So they placed seven hundred men behind a fence, to come forth and attack the enemies' rear when the hosts were engaged in close combat. The townsmen showed such audacity—barons and yeomen as they were—that they took the banner of King Olaf the Saint, to bear it against King Sverri; but you shall hear now what came to pass. The man who bore the banner was mounted on horseback, and as he rode behind the force he could not stop his horse, which ran against two men. One of these was killed, and the other so injured that he never fully recovered; the rider himself was thrown, and let the banner fall to the ground. Against these five hundred men, all in battle array, the King drew up his force, setting his bowmen all together; and every man made good use of his weapons. The ambush behind the fence only became aware of the fight by the whizzing of the arrows over their heads. These all whom Ivar supposed to have the victory in their hands were the first to flee, each man running against his fellow; and those who, considering their numbers, might be thought unlikely to win, were made glad by victory. King Sverri in this battle slew Ivar Silki and Ivar Gíafvallsson, and more than a hundred men besides. They captured the banner of King Olaf the Saint, which they bore to the town in glorious triumph, while the chiefs who escaped from the battle ran hither and thither like mice to their holes. Eirik Arnason was there taken prisoner. Afterwards quarter was accepted, and many came with meekness into the presence of Sverri who before, in excess of pride, had been loudest in their talk against him. And now King Sverri gave thanks to Almighty God, to Holy Maria the Mother of God, and to King Olaf the Saint, for the glorious victory which God had given him; and he showed his

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thankfulness by granting pardon to every one that asked it. Many great men had escaped, and he was conscious that they would lay plots against him if he were not on his guard.

After the battle the King sent forth spies from the town both by sea and land. These returned after three days, bringing with them tidings that the Inner Thronds had collected twenty hundred men, and were already on the way thither; and that Ivar had fifty ships at sea, near the Raudabiorg. As soon as these tidings came all at once to the ears of the King, he perceived that he could not remain where he was, and his men hastened on board eleven cutters which they procured. When they had rowed a short distance beyond Holm, they beheld the fleet of the Inner Thronds sailing from the inner part of the Fiord, and came within range of them. There were nine ships of burden at anchor near the Raudabiorg, but the King would not attack them, for they were a merchant fleet come from Vaga, and he would never do harm to merchants if they would value themselves aright. Near the Raudabiorg, also, lay eleven cutters and one long-ship which Ivar had got together. These fled immediately, for they dared not fight with the Birkibeins; and the King sailed on to Agdaness, where he came upon nine cutters, and at once made at them. Their crews did some trade—trade of this kind: they bartered their clothes and weapons for knocks and shame. They lost everything of value they possessed, but the King would not allow the men themselves to be slain. Then he took his ships seaward to Folskn, where they met with a ship of burden, owned by Ivar; and on board of it was property to the value of six marks of gold, which they took. After this they sailed south to Moeri, where they came upon twelve or thirteen cutters, and a like market was made for these as for the former crews. Both fleets were intending to join Ivar, if there came no 'trolls in the way between outhouse and home.'

The Assembly at Eyra accepts Sverri as King. He marches into the Uplands and gains two victories.

- Fb. 16. After this the King turned back north to Throntham,
12. and, coming to Nidaros, was received as befitted a king by the

townsmen, who had the bells rung throughout the town and went in procession to meet him. He then caused the Assembly to be summoned at Eyra, calling to it twelve men by name from each of the eight shires that lie within Agdaness. At this Assembly of the eight shires, met together, the title of King was given to Sverri, and ratified by the brandishing of weapons; land and liegemen were confirmed to him by oath in accordance with the old laws of the land.

Tidings of these things spread abroad rapidly, and reached King Magnus and Earl Erling, who straightway gathered a force together and sailed north coastwise. On hearing this, King Sverri would not wait for them, but with his ships and men sailed away into Orkadale. Here they dragged the ships ashore, set fire to them, and burnt them completely. They now turned to the Uplands. Having passed over Dofrafell into Gudbrandsdales, they held an Assembly, after which they marched on till they came to the lake called Miors, where was a gathering of barons with eighteen ships. There were three barons, Hallvard of Sasteads, Sæbiorn Sindrason, and Ivar Gæsling. They had another force on land which numbered twelve hundred men. King Sverri had two hundred men. He now sought counsel of his troop what plan he should adopt; and they all wished to fight. But the King thus answered them: "It does not appear to me as to you; for I think there are great odds to deal with. I intend to avenge my sorrows another way, a way more promising than that of walking into such a snare, for my father, brothers, and many ancestors besides, will not be avenged by my biting the dust or being driven to flight." So by the King's advice, but against their own wish, they marched thence two days' journey. The King sent forward forty men to Hadaland, to the lake called Rond, and they seized all the ships that were there. And when the King arrived he found three hosts gathered together—in two places three hundred men, and five hundred in the third. He then divided his force into two, himself taking one half, a hundred men, and the other half he sent to the homestead of Ozur Bilsa, which they plundered to the amount of twenty marks of gold. The King did not wish to be idle while they were absent, and he decided to attack with the force he had a host of three hundred before him. Both sides made ready

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as best they could, and marched against each other. But as soon as the Birkibeins brandished their weapons, the yeomen fellows were struck to the heart with fear. They took now a better course. They asked for quarter, threw down their weapons, and so showed their fear. The King acted as before, and gave every man quarter that asked. A second host of those gathered together, seeing how their fellows were dealt with, also reconciled themselves to the King. They promised such obedience as never before was promised in Hadaland, and an Assembly was summoned at which the King should conclude peace. But this meeting for peace was not meant by the yeomen to be free from guile, for seeing that the King had but a small force with him, they intended to fall upon him at the Assembly. On the day appointed for the meeting, those who had been sent to plunder Ozur's homestead returned, and as the King's force was now more numerous than the yeomen expected, they dared not utter a word in opposition to what the King wished. He therefore laid upon them such terms as he liked, and they promised all that he demanded. Thus they were reconciled, so to speak. But yet the yeomen fellows showed somewhat of a deceitful disposition as before; for they decided to send word to Orm Kings-brother, who was then at sea on board ship, and ask him to sail up from the Vik against the King, whom they said they would oppose if he should attempt to escape. Orm therefore collected a numerous force, and had large ships dragged out of the lake called Tyrfi, to go to Rond and attack King Sverri, who was there on board ship.

The King's bailiffs had arranged to have in Heidmork at that time fourteen ships on Miors. King Sverri, having intelligence of these, formed his plan. He made as though he would go to meet Orm, and sent forward all his scouts in that direction. Then he went into the wood with forty men, and they felled trees. No one knew the reason of this; but the King had commanded his men to follow him, which they did, and passed the night there. At daybreak the next morning the trumpets were sounded, and the whole force arose, not knowing what business the King had in hand. When the men were dressed, he arranged them, and bade them drag the ships from Rond, five miles along a road never before passed by ships. No need now to ask why the King

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had those trees felled in the wood; they were the rollers. No pause was made on the road until they came to Miors. Arrived there, they rowed forward and made an unexpected attack on the barons. The encounter so ended that he whom God favoured gained a victory, and King Sverri routed all his foes. When he had cleared the place he sailed to Hamar-Kaupang, where he held an Assembly, and no man spoke a single word against the King. The barons fled before him to the south of the lake, and there was now a long distance between them, for Miors is so large a lake that it is more like a sea.

King Sverri defeats the barons near Lake Miors.

Fb. 17. Hallvard of Sasteads and other barons held a great feast at Sasteads, to which he invited all who wished to be invited, that their following might be as numerous as possible. It was the anniversary of the dedication of the church. Three hundred were bidden, but more than three hundred attended; for the Birkibeins came to the festival, all prepared for battle. Both sides drew up their array, marched against each other and exchanged shots; the barons and their host were soon in flight, seven being slain and five taken prisoners. And now the unbidden guests were they that enjoyed the feast, and they that prepared it were chased away. These ran to Orm Kings-brother, and told him that their paths had not been smooth. King Sverri now inquired of the men made prisoners where their ships lay hidden, and being told, he seized all the ships on Miors, both small and large. He took of the property of the barons and of all those who fled away, likewise all the land dues which King Magnus and Earl Erling expected for themselves.

The whole of the Uplands and the Eystridales were now in the possession of King Sverri, and those who submitted to him had ever a better lot than those who steered away from him. And as men perceived his power growing, more by wise counsels than a multitude of adherents, they were ever the more eager to cultivate his friendship. His host increased so that he had three hundred men. After this, King Magnus and Earl Erling came into the Vik, and having heard all the tidings now related of the