LEGENDS OF ICELANDIC MAGICIANS

Translated by Jacqueline Simpson

With an Introduction by B.S.Benedikz

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FOREWORD

THE TALES CHOSEN for inclusion in this volume are representative examples of a type of legend that has been current in Iceland from the sixteenth century to the present day; with the exception of seven stories which were included in G.E.J.Powell and Eiríkur Magnússon, *Icelandic Legends* (London 1864), they have not previously appeared in English. The majority are from Jón Árnason's classic collection of folktales, first published in 1862-4; a few are from Ólafur Davíðsson's collection, gathered in the late nineteenth century and published in 1945; three are taken directly from oral tradition as preserved in the 1930s in the family of B.S.Benedikz, to whom I am most grateful for permission to include them (ch.V, nos.2 and 8; ch.VII, no.5). I am also indebted to him for the translation of 'Loftur the Magician', and for generously offering me his article, 'The Master Magician in Icelandic Folk Legend' (previously printed in the *Durham University Journal*, 1964, and reprinted here by kind permission of the Editor) for use as an introduction to these translations.

In the body of the text (but not in the notes and bibliography) the Icelandic consonants 'þ' and 'ð' have been anglicized as 'th' and 'd' respectively. The letter 'j' is to be pronounced like 'y' in 'yes'.

When such references as 'ML 3000' occur in the notes, they refer to Reider Th.Christiansen's classification system for identifying international migratory legends.

JACQUELINE SIMPSON

INTRODUCTION *by B.S.Benedikz*

WHEN ONE OF his colleagues asked the great Árni Magnússon what were the subjects of the Icelandic Family Sagas, he replied succintly: 'Squires at fisticuffs.' And, reducing them to the bare bones of plot, he can be seen to be right. While there is considerably more to the finished articles, these were the basic tales which survived in popular memory into the time when the authors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries wove them into the works of art which have survived down to our day.

In a similar way the short answer to the question 'What is the subject-matter of the post-Reformation Icelandic folktale?' could be 'Superstition', though, like all endeavours at brevity, it needs very considerable qualification. For in the dark centuries between the Reformation and the renaissance of the desire for independence, there arose a new folklore, and its roots were very different from those from which the old literature sprang. There is only room here for a very sketchy account of the times and the reasons which bred these legends. The origins of the vast majority of the tales lie far back in time, for magic is as old as the settlement of Iceland. Down to the time of the Reformation, however, we do not have any evidence of popular preoccupation with magic, although it is implied in the medieval sagas that in pagan times and after there were people who 'knew farther than the ends of their noses', in the words of the Icelandic saying.

But at the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the wind began to change ominously. The great wave of persecutions which swept over Europe in the latter half of the fifteenth century was slow to reach Iceland, lying as it did far out of the lines of European traffic and the hurly-burly of Continental controversies, and the ructions

attendant on the Reformation were such as to put witchcraft into the background for over half a century. But when the time came, the delay appears to have doubled the venom of the persecutions. Moreover, during the last quarter of the sixteenth century the country finally sank into a slough of mental and physical degradation in which it was to remain for over two centuries. The reformers had taken away from the mass of the people the spiritual comforts and defences of the old religion, and simultaneously presented all that the people remembered as good as being inspired by the Devil. Further, they were reduced by starvation, lack of education, and sheer brutal oppression by the Danish governors and the rapacious merchants who gained absolute control of the country's trade at that time, to a condition of a dull and animal-like rabble void of any instincts higher than those needed for mere physical self-preservation. Their passions, the annals of the time tell us, were lust and greed, and they looked with undisguised envy upon and spoke with malice of anyone who had the manhood to drag himself out of this morass of brutishness.

These people's minds were fed by ill-trained priests, most of whom were no better off than themselves physically or spiritually, with an ill-digested adulterated Lutheranism which passed for theology, in which Hell became of greater importance than Heaven, and which attributed to Hell almost everything which people had previously regarded as heaven-sent gifts. Anything except the handful of ideas chewed to tatters in the various turgid translations of German and Danish obscurantists which were issued from the press at Holar was cried down as heresy and devilry with such ferocity that it is not surprising to find that traces of this particular kind of intolerance still lingered in the minds of the older people in the remotest parts of the country a good three and a half centuries later.

This was the people over whom there came in the seventeenth century one of the most horrible persecution manias recorded before the advent of the racial extermination practices of the present century. They had been acquainted with magic and its practitioners from the earliest period of Icelandic history onwards, and its rituals and formulae had been handed down in the literature of the past, in the Eddic and skaldic poems and the medieval sagas, as well as in those actual records of folk-tales which were written down in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and which Árni Magnússon preserved. But no story in those records is as passionately concerned with the working of magic in evil acts as are those which come from the late sixteenth, the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, and the seventeenth in particular.

In that age the belief in witchcraft and devilry in general became the spiritual scourge of the people. Every disaster was interpreted as the act of some evil wizard, and the common people lived in constant terror of them. It was natural enough therefore that they should cast about for some comfort and protection against these omnipresent agents of the Devil. And out of their distorted memories of the sagas, the scattered lines of verse from the Eddas which still lingered in their minds, and from other more romantic sources such as the medieval romances and the *Rímur* (quasi-doggerel epics into which many sagas and romances had been recast), they gradually built up this outstanding phenomenon of the folklore of modern Iceland, the good master wizard.(1) This figure has been recreated from generation to generation, each age picking on the runner of its own especial fancy from the vast number of wizards at its disposal. Here I propose to deal only with those whose surviving legends are numerous and interesting enough to benefit from a brief discussion.

The legends which have survived indicate that the men of the north-western parts of the country, the Western Firths, were most consistently cast as black magicians in the popular imagination. The remoteness and inaccessibility of these parts, coupled with the hardness of life there, made the people of the south and south-west, where most of tales seem to have originated, look upon their inhabitants with suspicion. This suspicion easily ripened into active malice, and thus the Western Firths became in the popular imagination centres of black magic. An example of this attitude may be seen below (Ch.IV, no.1) in the story of Thormódur of Gvendareyjar and the three men named Jón from Ísafjordur. In due course we find the people of the other regions making their own champions of magic, both black and white, to match those of the witches' kitchen of the west. Of the six with whom I shall deal here, three are champions of the other regions and two may be said to have been created as scourges for their own backs; in the first however tradition has created a man who wrestled with the Devil himself and became his master.

In the earliest historical writings of Iceland frequent references are made to Sæmundur Sigfús-son the Wise (1056-1133), the priest-prince of Oddi in southern Iceland, as a great and learned authority on the history of his country, and the author of a Latin *Historia Regum Norwegiae* among other works. His writings are now lost (2). But the great reputation which he acquired in Iceland for learning grew as popular ignorance increased, until his name became associated with a more than human wisdom, and therefore, *more temporum*, magically acquired. By the seventeenth century he had become the pattern for all subsequent wizards. His known life, that of a blameless priest of noble lineage, was covered with a haze of romance, and the fact that he had been educated in France was

made the starting point of his career of sorcery. One of the earliest stories preserved about him, from the collection made by Árni Magnússon towards the end of the seventeenth century, shows Sæmund-ur as a captive in the legendary Black School of Satan, saved by the intervention of his saintly contemporary, Bishop Jón Ögmundsson of Hólar (see below, Ch.I, no.1). In this and other of the old-est stories we can see how the belief in the mir-acles of the native saints of Catholic Iceland survived in a disguised form as late as the second half of the seventeenth century.

But in the stories collected in the late eight-eenth and nineteenth centuries we are given a dif-ferent picture. From being a man rescued by a saint, Sæmundur has been magnified to the status of a superman, into a kind of eleventh-century horror-comic hero who can see both into the earth and over it, who is constantly engaged in cheating the Devil, promising him vast rewards in return for the performance of menial or disgusting tasks, and then avoiding payment by means as shady as any of those employed by the Father of Lies himself. He leaves the Devil impotently gnashing his teeth, and foils any attempt at revenge with magnificent aplomb. Such anecdotes of Sæmundur the Wise give a small glimpse of what the people's imagination could do when roused from its customary torpor by the contemplation of some favourite hero. Oppress-ed by tyrannical Danish officials, fleeced by un-scrupulous and ill-bred Danish merchants, and kept in daily fear of Hell by their own clergy, the people fashioned this remote being into the image of their own wishes, and in doing so, made him a master of magic, the most powerful lore imaginable to them.

As a contrast to the wise and noble Sæmundur, the ogre whose image haunted the world of magical legend was the last foreign bishop in Iceland, Gottskálk Nikulásson of Hólar (1497-1520), whose

ruthless exploitation of his great powers for his own profit made him hated and feared to an unparalleled degree. To him is ascribed the ownership of *Rauðskinna* (Red Skin), the most potent of all the manuals of Icelandic sorcery. Even his death, because of its suddenness and its proximity to that of Jón Sigmundsson, the man whom he had hounded from high office into poverty and misery, was held to be divine vengeance upon him for his cruelty and evil life. With him, popular legend said, 'Red Skin' was buried, and on that legend is based one of the most horrible of all the Icelandic stories of sorcery, that of Galdra-Loftur (see below, Ch.VI).

Most ogres become less fear-inspiring with the passage of time. Even the bad bishop became eventually the subject of sundry light-hearted anecdotes about the long and strictly enforced Lenten meat-fast. This was kept in some parts of Iceland right into the early nineteenth century, and countrymen would lighten it with tales of how crafty peasant Lent-breakers outwitted the spies sent out to catch them and so bring revenue from their fines to the bishop's coffers. The bishop was also to have his natural opposite created.

In the late seventeenth century there grew up a very large body of legend about an obscure country priest, Hálfdán Narfason, vicar of Fell in the diocese of Hólar, who came to be regarded as the white wizard of the north country, in contrast to the black bishop, Gottskálk. Little of Hálfdán's life is known, except that he was a parish priest at Fell in Slettuhlið, and died there at a great age in 1568. But there exists a surprisingly large body of anecdote about him, and one full length tale, 'The Woman of Malmey', which is an extraordinary gripping story of an unusual encounter in this type of legend, a battle of wits between wizard and trolls (see below, Ch.III, no.3) (3). This one story apart, the legendary Hálfdán is

generally a light-hearted person who uses his magical powers as much for amusement as anything else, and who, like Sæmundur, knows how to keep the Devil in his place. One of the later stories about him shows how the fishermen would use their imaginations to ease the discomforts of fishing in small open boats in cold and windy weather with a form of wishful tale (see below, Ch.III, no.2).

During the nightmare years of the seventeenth century, it is only to be expected that thoughts of black magic should be uppermost in people's minds, and the number of stories relating to that period and to the one immediately following, the first half of the eighteenth century, is considerable. Their matter is repulsive in the extreme: the magicians have constant recourse to handling corpses, disinterment being apparently a prime requisite, and perform all kinds of ghastly ritual with strange ingredients. The sole aim of these ghost-raisings seems to have been to use the spirit as a 'sending' to kill or harm some enemy for what seem to be the most trivial reasons. In the seventeenth century witch- (or rather wizard-) hunting reached its climax under the direction of the learned provost of Selárdalur, Páll Björnsson, and his neighbour Thorleifur Kortsson, lawman of north and west Iceland. Inevitably their hysterical prosecution-zeal had its effect on the common people. At that time a wizard was thought to be hiding under every stone, and every illness was a plague wished upon the invalid by some malicious sorcerer. As a result of this, the slightest abnormality, such as physical or intellectual superiority, or even living in a strange, inaccessible place, was enough to brand a man as a wizard. The pages of the three greatest collection of printed folktales, those of Jón Árnason, Ólafur Davíðsson and Sigfúss Sigfússon, are crowded with legends of such people. Moreover the *Acta Comitiorum Generalium Islandiae* of that period comprise at times

nothing but a string of prosecutions for sorcery. They make melancholy reading.

One interesting feature which emerges from a study of the period is that after the death of Gottskálk the Cruel the highest dignitaries escape charges of sorcery, although supernatural powers are often ascribed to them. Thus Bishop Oddur Einarson, probably because he was a learned astronomer, was said to have powers of foresight, and the great and eloquent preacher, Bishop Jón Vídalín, was reputed to have gained his eloquence through intercourse with the Elvenfolk in his youth. But black magic was never laid at the door of these men. It sounds as if the people's malice now boggled at aiming so high, though it must be confessed that it made up for this in ample measure by the virulent attacks on those of a less high station, until one is surprised to find anyone with a clear reputation, especially if he had been at either of the cathedral schools. But a few gifted people, especially poets such as the great author of the Passion Hymns, Hallgrímur Pétursson, and the popular farmer-poet Thormódur of Gvendareyjar, whose competence as an exorcist suggests that he possessed psychiatric gifts far in advance of his times, escaped the general fury. They were allowed by popular opinion to have received their gifts by divine grace. As for the others, any abilities with which they were credited came directly from the Devil.

But there were some men who inspired a body of legends which suggest that in the eighteenth century at any rate some degree of tolerance had crept in. These were the white wizards, led by the man who was to become the greatest of the fraternity of good magicians after Sæmundur, Eiríkr Magnússon of Vogsósar, and the grey wizards, men who had acquired their knowledge by highly reprehensible means and were sometimes obliged to take strong measures to defend themselves from the

black fraternity, but who preferred to use their magic for good purposes. The white wizards were prominent at the end of the hysterical period from 1620 to 1700, and their nature can be seen in the career of Eiríkur, whose actual life is passably documented and contrasts most interestingly with the kind of life which he is given in the large and varied bulk of legend which surrounds him.

Eiríkur Magnússon was born in 1637/8. He was admitted to the Cathedral School at Skálholt, where his name appears as the lowest in the Upper School in 1654-55, and from this it can be conjectured that he received his letters of dimission in 1658 (4). He was ordained curate of the parish of Arnarbœli in 1668 by the great bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson, and became vicar of the parish of Selvogsthing, residing at Vogsósar, in 1677 (5). There he remained for the rest of his life, dying at the age of 79 in 1716 (6), barely noticed by the annalists of his time. He did not, as far as can be traced, take any part in the momentous activities of his age. All that we know of the actual man, from a letter from the parishioners of Selvogsthing asking for his appointment as their parish priest, suggests a worthy, pious man of no special note (7). But this earlier Parson Woodforde is a very different being from the king of sorcerers presented to us in the legends. Apart from Sæmundur, he is the only Icelandic wizard to have an entirely blameless record as a practitioner of magic, while there is no other post-Reformation sorcerer of whose magical career we possess so complete a dossier. How it came about that an apparently blameless parish priest, who even survived the hysterical age without being accused or openly suspected of any such activities, was in an incredibly short time regarded as the uncrowned king of Protestant wizardry, cannot now be discovered— but we can make a fair guess from our knowledge of the conditions in which he and his

flock lived.

The district around Selvogur is very poor agricultural land, and until very recent times the inhabitants were almost entirely dependant on the sea for their livelihood. At the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth there was an unparalleled series of disastrous years. Abnormally long winters, short and chilly summers, negligible opportunities of harvesting the scanty crop of hay needed to keep the few starveling beasts alive, and, worse than all, constant failures of the fishing banks, succeeded one another through those two decades. Apart from the parson, most of the people were desperately poor already, of low mentality, and with superstition ingrained in the innermost depths of their minds. The parson himself seems to have maintained a reasonable standard of living throughout this period. It is not hard to imagine what feelings of greed and envy must have possessed his parishioners when they thought of the comparative wealth of food and hay at the parsonage, and they could well attribute to magic his constant possession of what to them seemed incredible wealth. His generosity however, for which he was famous, saved him from the fate of Mensalder the Rich of Papey, whose stinginess according to legend sent him to the Devil. Instead Eiríkur is remembered as the greatest of the good wizards, as kindness incarnate; not above playing harmless practical jokes on people who he thought needed to be taught a lesson, but bearing no malice if he was outwitted, as occasionally happened. Such a tale is the one of the roll of tobacco, which I heard from my great-aunt, Kristín Thórarinsdóttir of Ós in Breiddalur (see below, Ch.V, no.8). In Jón Árnason's collection and the two made by Ólafur Davidsson are stories of a similar kind, designed to show Eiríkur's gratitude for kindness received and mild malice at niggardliness (see below, Ch.V, no.7) but I have

found no other version of the tobacco story.

The function of Eiríkur and the other good wizards, however, was not merely to uphold the standards of kindness, frankness, honesty, courage and generosity. Many of the later stories also embody the wish-fulfilment of resentful peasants, bullied and cheated by the jumped-up merchants at the trading-stations; in the face of exploitation they tried to cheer themselves with the story of how Eiríkur reversed the figures in the merchant's ledgers, or how Halla fooled the traders into seeing mice and boulders as sheep and butter and was paid high prices for them (see below, Ch.V, no.15; II, no.3). This would be some consolation for being given little or nothing for the wool, tallow and fish they had prepared with much sweat to trade for timber, grain and iron. In other tales Eiríkur figures as the protector of the peasants against foreign pirates (see below, Ch.V, no.13); the latter role is also played by Snorri of Húsafell with regard to that notorious pair, Eyvindur of the Hills and his doxy Halla.

Not that all tales of séra Eiríkur are humorous. As time passed, the kindly domestic wizard took on some of the more terrible aspects of the lord of sorcery. These we can see in such a tale as 'The Woman of the Western Islands' (see below, Ch.V, no.12), the best of three attempts to make him into a hero like séra Hálfdán in 'The Woman of Málmey.' The transference has not been wholly successful, but the fact that it had taken place by the end of the eighteenth century serves to show the esteem in which he was held within a century of his death. Thus when Gísli Konrádsson gathered together the huge medley of true and false stories which has still not been investigated as fully as it deserves, Eiríkur had risen to a position far ahead of all competitors among the white wizards, apart from Sæmundur. I can myself bear witness to his long-standing popularity, since in my child-

hood in the years immediately before the second World War I heard stories of him from old people of long memories, and especially from my great-aunt, mentioned above, who lived from 1863 to 1938.

During the time when Eiríkur was becoming lord of the white wizards, Galdra-Loftur Thorsteinsson was bidding fair to oust Bishop Gottskálk from his place as lord of the black ones. Dr.Hannes Thorsteinsson has investigated the known facts about Loftur (8), and I do not propose to repeat his findings, beyond the fact that Loftur was at the cathedral school of Hólar, and died suddenly around 1722. The most gripping story from this period is one about him (see below, Ch.VI, no.2) (9). In it we have all the elements found in the innumerable shorter anecdotes of black magicians in Icelandic folklegend— notably the stress on the blasphemous raising of the dead. The two manuals of magic, Grey Skin and Red Skin, the former represented as the elementary text book from which all intending sorcerers must learn, and the latter as the master-manual whose possession meant unlimited power, are presented here in their normal character; the insatiable greed of the black magician, in whose hands everything is bound to turn to evil uses, is given its fullest expression in Loftur's words to his school-fellow. The sin of covetousness, emphasised in the story, becomes the motive-spring of all the tales of the black magicians, never contented and driven on by the dark power to seek always for something more, this being the penalty for their original deviation from the path of righteousness.

As an example of how the white wizard is contrasted with the black brethren, we may take the tale of how Eiríkur of Vogsósar learnt his arts, as told by Kristín Thórarinsdóttir (see below, Ch.V, no.2). It is the reverse of that of Loftur. The hero, Eiríkur, is in the background at the raising of the ghost, and does not take an active

part until the others (who have presumably made their attempts through covetousness) have failed. The Devil's representative, the ghost, seems to be aware of the slight part which covetousness has in Eiríkur's nature, for he yields the book without argument. It may be, however, that this apparent docility is the supreme temptation, and Eiríkur is handed the means of self-destruction with every inducement to use it. If so, he stands the test triumphantly, stopping at the very word beyond which lies perdition. Here he shows his difference in quality, not only from the opposite camp but also from the other white wizards, whether the gentle Thormoður of Gvendareyjar or the more sardonic and vigorous Hálfdán of Fell.

Eiríkur was at once the greatest and the last of the white wizards. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, folk-legend became less uncompromising in its categorization, and a third variety of sorcerer, the grey wizard, appears. One of these is a most interesting character, the only master-magician of post-Reformation times to achieve fame for something else beside magic, Snorri of Húsafell. Snorri Björnsson, usually described as Snorri of Husafell or Snorri the Strong, attained considerable fame in his own lifetime, not only because of his fabulous physical strength (the subject of one of Grímur Thomsen's most biting satirical poems (10)) but also on account of his not inconsiderable literary ability. He is now regarded as the author of the earliest preserved piece of modern Icelandic drama, *Sperdill*. He also wrote a considerable quantity of verse, both humorous and serious, some of which was printed in his own lifetime. But these abilities, presumably through the usual motivating force, envy, produced for him the reputation of a wizard. His successful tenure of the cure of Staður in Aðalvík, (including a district where, in the opinion of the rest of the country, the situation was like that of

Scotland in the reign of James VI: 'you might find a warlock in every other house and a witch in every one'), and his prosperous survival for 45 years after a change of livings, did a great deal to enhance this reputation. He died at the great age of 93 in 1803 (11).

Séra Snorri is said to have come to his first living to find that his parishioners had no time for such matters as church attendance or the learning of Christian doctrine. He is said to have altered this radically during his time there, but he had to overcome and often crush the sorcerers who fought his reforms, by means of much magic as well as the power of his holy office and his strong right arm. In the legends he is shown as a fighter, willing to use his own and his opponents' weapons, but only making use of black magic against those who practised it. He is undoubtedly the greatest of the grey magicians and the last of the true masters of magic. The tale of his death, told me by Kristín Thórarinsdóttir (see below, Ch.VII, no.5), is in character with his stature of mind and body.

Here, as elsewhere, we have the popular belief in the occurence of supernatural events at a great man's death, expressed in its humblest and yet most charming form. The torrential rain at the burial of Bishop Páll of Skálholt, the fearful storms associated with the passing of most of the black magicians (and incidentally of Beethoven and Oliver Cromwell) are here reduced to a simpler form, appropriate to the kind of man whose death is related. The last of the great wizards of Iceland passes away to the peaceful burning-out of a candle, and leaves the world in the darkness of unbelief.

Sæmundur, Hálfdán, Eiríkur, Snorri — these four names, and those of their opposites, Bishop Gottskálk and Galdra-Loftur, exercise an extraordinary power upon the imagination of those who have wand-

ered in the thick and ill-charted woods of Icelandic magic. The four good masters are the homely man's safeguards against the nightmarish horrors of the world to which the other two belong. When the terror of the Devil was most rampant, the legends collecting round Sæmundur and Hálfdán formed sheet-anchors for the people's sanity and outlets for wholesome humour, exorcising fear by mockery; when the violent and mysterious death of Loftur spread a wave of superstitious fear, the good wizards Eiríkur and Snorri arose to comfort the peasantry with the thought that there were still men with the strength to beat the Devil back.

In the lore of Icelandic magic the contrasts are strong, and the black side is truly black and terrible. The Devil in whom the people believed was no jolly pantomine Mephisto, but a thing unspeakably evil. Because of the ravings of séra Jón Magnússon, whose *Book of Persecutions* is a gem of Icelandic literature in the seventeenth century, to be compared with Hallgrímur Pétursson's hymns, two men were burned at the stake for having caused sufferings through sorcery, and a woman only narrowly escaped the same fate (12). The case is a repulsive one, and both in séra Jón's writings and in the court documents the evil in these two men's natures is painted with greater intensity than anything in the legends except the character of Loftur. The Icelanders of these first three Protestant centuries genuinely believed that an evil power was constantly lurking around, straining for a chance to seize them, and that nothing could save them but the protection of the white wizards or men of a holiness equal to that of Hallgrímur Pétursson, the saint whose burning faith shone even through the terrible disease of leprosy, or of Master Jón Vídalín, the great bishop and homilist. If their terror seems strange today, let the sceptics remember that in these simple and sometimes clumsily told tales a quasi-illiterate, des-

perately poor and fear-ridden people was trying to work out a solution to the problems of good and evil, and to outface their fears with a jest. Deprived of the protection from the Devil possessed in Catholic days, they had to find support against the terrors of a power which to the Calvinists of those days appeared almost more effective than God. The Icelandic peasant daily saw the power of nature in her most savage mood. Forced to struggle for his existence against both man and nature, he fought despair by the only means left to him, and created the figure of the master magician.

These tales have not had the skilled hand of the re-shaper to fashion them in the best forms, with a very few exceptions such as the tale of Loftur, which is known to have passed through the hands of at least two story-tellers of distinction, Gísli Konrádsson and Skúli Gíslason (13), and the story of the woman taken by the trolls. In this respect it is interesting to compare them with some of the material used by the writers of the sagas in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. These sagas are crowded with highly suggestive anecdotes, many of which have the appearance of skilfully adapted pieces of local legend; some of these, as Professor Nordal showed in his study of *Hrafnkels Saga*, may have been made up by the author to furnish an explanation of some incidental place-name or to emphasize some trait of the hero. Thus what more natural for the author of *Egils Saga* than to show the great poet and warrior as a lore-master, in the anecdote of the farmer's daughter and the badly-cast runes? Again in the great sagas of Egill and Njáll we have the sinister figure of Gunnhildr, the witch-queen of Norway. The rune episode can be seen to have inspired the story of séra Snorri and the death-runes of the man from Horn (see below, Ch.VII, no.1), and other late legends could no doubt be traced back to some half-remembered or badly imitated episode in the

classical literature. In the section devoted by Jón Árnason to the symbols and spells of magic, there are strange distorted memories of the formulae of necromancy in the Eddas, and in the tales of the great northern magicians told in the thirteenth century by Snorri Sturluson, or the scribes of Oddi and other religious houses where the corpus of Iceland's family sagas was compiled and copied. This material became embedded in the new legendary lore which the people began to build up after the old lore, the sagas, verses and romances of the Middle Ages, had been driven underground.

The worthy Bishop Guðbrandur of Hólar little knew what a whirlwind the nation would reap from the wind of narrow Lutheran pietism which he sowed so sedulously during his long and active episcopate. The suppression of popular recreations led to its natural result, for once the ancient literature was banned as evil, it became treasured as a vast storehouse of magic. There was little chance for the new lore to reach the perfection attained by the old body of legends, for it was broken off in the latter part of the nineteenth century through the destruction of the conditions which could ensure its growth. We must now await a time when poets and novelists become sensible of where the living roots of their country's literature lie, and are willing to search the vast mound of material rescued by the great collectors, Gísli Konráðsson, Jón Árnason, Ólafur Davíðsson, Sigfús Sigfússon and Gudni Jónsson, to name but a few of the most assiduous, and to breathe life into these dry bones, as Snorri Sturluson and his fellows did into the bones of the legends of Iceland's golden age. Until this happens we must possess our souls in patience, our hopes strengthened by the force of the inspiration which a few of these tales have roused in writers of our own day.(14)

B.S.BENEDIKZ

I. SÆMUNDUR THE WISE

1. *Sæmundur at the Black School* Sæmundur the Wise travelled abroad and went to the Black School, and there he learnt strange arts. There was no schoolmaster to be seen in the Black School, but whatever the students might say one evening they wanted to know about, books about it would be provided by next morning, or else it might be written up on the walls. Over the doorway, on the inner side, was written: 'You may come in; your soul is lost'. There was a rule in that school that anyone who came must study there for three years. All those who were leaving in any one year must all leave the place together, and the Devil would always keep the one who was last to get out, and so they used always to draw lots to see who would be last out. More than once the lot fell on Sæmundur, and so he remained there longer than the rules laid down.

It so happened that Bishop Jón was travelling to Rome, and passed near this place. He learned that Sæmundur was still at the Black School for the reason we have said, so he went in and spoke to Sæmundur and offered to help him to get away, provided he would go home to Iceland and live as a good Christian, and Sæmundur agreed. Bishop Jón made Sæmundur walk out ahead of him, but was wearing his cloak loosely round his shoulders; and just as Jón was going out, a hand came up through the floor and grabbed the cloak and dragged it down, but Jón got away.

Then the Devil came to Sæmundur and made a compact with him, that if Sæmundur could remain hidden for three nights he would be free, but if not he would belong to him. The first night Sæmundur hid under a river bank, partly in the water and partly under the earth, so that the Devil believed Sæmundur had drowned in the river; the second

night he hid out at sea in a wreck which was drifting offshore, so that Satan believed that the river must have carried him out to sea; the third night he had himself covered over with consecrated earth, so that Satan believed that Sæmundur must have been washed ashore dead, and been buried in some churchyard, where he dared not go to seek him. All this was done on Bishop Jón's advice.

Others say this was how Sæmundur escaped: his fellow-students arranged with him that he would go out last; so now he got a sheep's leg stitched to the bottom of his cloak, and as he followed the group who were rushing out through the school doors something gripped at the cloak and caught the leg. Then Sæmundur dropped the whole thing and took to his heels, saying: 'He gripped, but off I slipped,' and so rejoined his comrades.

2. *Sæmundur's Daughter and Old Nick* Sæmundur the Wise had one daughter. One day that Sæmundur was not at home, Satan came to her and said he was going to carry her off. The girl was in one of the upper rooms at the time, making her father's bed. She said she would go with him if he was ready to count all the feathers in her father's bedding before he came home, but not otherwise. Satan agreed, and he proved pretty nimble in handling them, but at the very moment he was clutching the last one in his fist, Sæmundur came up the stairs. Satan did not dare stay and face him, and so he lost the girl.

3. *Old Nick Carries Water* One winter at Oddi when the snowdrifts lay thick, a maid who used to fetch in water for the house grew quite tired out with beating a path through the snow and carrying her buckets. One day as she was sitting by the well and blaming her master for setting her such

heavy work to do, a man came up and offered to carry the water home for her, if she would give herself to him in payment. She agreed. The man started carrying water fast and furiously. Sæmundur came out and saw what was going on; he told the man he'd never be through with carrying the water because the vessels were too small, and offered him two hampers, pretty big ones— and he took the middle rib out of the bottom of each one. The Old Fellow got slower and slower at the work, for the hampers were always empty by the time he got back to the farm from the well, and so he lost the servant girl.

4. *The German Witch* Sæmundur once promised some old witch in Germany that he would marry her, but when he returned to Iceland and stayed there, she saw he had been making a fool of her; and so, having given up all hope of his return, after some years had passed, she sent him a casket of red gold, to revenge herself for his having broken his word, with the message that nobody but Sæmundur could open the casket. The sailors who had this 'Sending' aboard ship made the crossing far quicker than one could possibly expect, and put in at a harbour on the south coast, from which they at once sent a man to Oddi with this casket. Sæmundur was in the church when the man arrived, and since this Sending did not catch him off his guard, he welcomed the man in a friendly way, but told him to lay the casket he had brought on the altar, which he did, and so there the casket lay all night. Next day Sæmundur rode off with the casket under his arm, right up to the summit of Hekla, and hurled it down into some crevasse there— and that, so they say, is how the fires of Hekla began.

5. *Old Nick Fetches Timber* Sæmundur ordered the demon who had undertaken to serve him to cut down the Landskógur forest, and then, when it was cut, to carry it home to Oddi, which indeed he did. But in carrying it home he found that the straightest way to Oddi was by way of Varmidalur. There are marks in that valley even nowadays which are supposed to have been caused by that work, namely trenches and hollows in the ground where the timber was dragged along, the damage being due to a too heavy load of trees; they are now called the Varmidalur Trenches. These marks are a fact, and can be seen to this very day.

6. *Old Nick Builds a Bridge* Sæmundur told the demon who served him to build a bridge over Rangá River below Bergvad, because it was often difficult to cross the river, especially for those who had to come to Oddi to church. As payment, the demon demanded to have as his own the first three who would cross the bridge on the first Sunday it was in use; this Sæmundur agreed to. Once the bridge was finished, Sæmundur, in order to keep his promise, had three puppies carried to the bridge and thrown onto it. The bridge-builder had to be content with this, for he got no other payment.

7. *The Cowman at Oddi* It so happened that a cowman at Oddi made an unholy pact with the Devil that he could hang him on an agreed date; what he got in exchange is not known. Sæmundur had some suspicion of this, questioned the cowman, and at length managed to get at the truth. So he gave the cowman his leggings, and told him to hand them to the man he had made the bargain with, to use as the noose. The cowman came at the appointed place and time, and gave Old Foxy the leggings; he looked at them and felt sure they were Sæmundur's, so he said that this was more than he could bear, threw the leggings away, and backed out of the bargain.

8. *Old Nick Mucks out the Cowhouse* One Saturday Sæmundur ordered the demon who served him to muck out the cowhouse at Oddi, at which, they say, the demon got angry. Early on the Sunday Sæmundur wanted to go to a church service; the whole heap of dung from the cowhouse had been shifted onto the pavement outside the church. (The cowhouse is about ninety yards from where the church now stands.) Sæmundur the priest summoned the demon and angrily ordered him to lick away all the muck he had brought. The priest thought him too slow at the job, and struck him with his hand. Then Old Nick drove his fist down on a stone, and the mark can still be seen on that stone, which is now used as a door-jamb for the east door of Oddi farm, and is known as the Devil's Fist-Print. So the upshot was that the demon got rid of the dungheap, and at the end he scraped his tongue against a stone, and this mark too can be seen like the other, five inches deep, in the paving-stone outside the east doorway of the farm at Oddi.

9. *Sæmundur Foretells a Calf's Colour* One day Sæmundur the Wise was on a ship coming home to Iceland, with a companion whose name, it is said, was Jón. They had come close to land, or had actually landed; there in front of them was a cow, big with calf. They started discussing whether the calf inside this cow was a cow-calf or a bull-calf. They both agreed it was a cow-calf, and then they discussed its colour, and both agreed it was black. Jón said it had a white fleck between the eyes; Sæmundur said this was not so — on the contrary,

it must be some white hairs which the calf had on the tip of its tail, which it had curled round its body and laid between its eyes. What Sæmundur had said proved true when the cow bore her calf, for it had white hairs on the tip of its tail, and the tail was lying between its eyes. One can judge by this what wisdom and powers he had—whatever spiritual source they may have come from, for there can be more than one view on that point.

10. *How Sæmundur got the Living of Oddi* When Sæmundur, Kálfur and Hálfdan all left the Black School, the living of Oddi was vacant, and each of them asked the King of Norway to bestow it on him. The King knew very well what kind of men he was dealing with, so he says that the one to have Oddi would be the one who could get there quickest. Then Sæmundur goes off straight away and calls up Old Nick and says: 'Swim with me to Iceland, and if you can get me ashore without wetting the skirts of my coat in the sea, you can have me.' Old Nick agreed, turned himself into a seal, and went off with Sæmundur on his back. But Sæmundur was deep in reading his Psalter all the way. After a very short time they drew near to the coast of Iceland. Then Sæmundur hit the seal over the head with his Psalter, so that it sank, and Sæmundur pitched headfirst into the water, and swam ashore. Because of this, the Devil lost his bargain, but Sæmundur got Oddi.

11. *Haymaking* One day Sæmundur the Wise had a lot of dry hay out on his meadow, but it was looking like rain, so he asks everybody on the farm to try and get the hay in before the rain. There was an old woman, very aged indeed, living in his household at Oddi; Sæmundur the priest goes to her and asks her to try to hobble out as far as

the homefield and rake up the scattered wisps. She says she will have a try. Then she takes her rake, and to the end of it she ties the hood she had on her head, and totters away to the homefield, but she also says Sæmundur ought to stay in the yard and cope with the hay as it comes, so that the workmen should not take so long binding it and getting it under cover. The priest says he will, for this will be the best.

The old woman pokes the end of her rake under each truss of hay, and says 'Up with you, and into the yard, to Sæmundur!', and at that the trusses went off up to Sæmundur. Then Sæmundur told Old Nick and his imps that they'd have to stir themselves now. And in a short while all the hay had come up to the farmyard, and it all escaped the rain.

Afterwards Sæmundur says to the old woman: 'You know a thing or two, my dear Thorhildur.'

'Little enough nowadays,' says she. 'It's almost all forgotten now, what I knew in my young days.'

12. *Old Nick Makes Himself Small* It happened one day that the Reverend Sæmundur asked Old Nick how small he could make himself. He said he could make himself as small as a mosquito. Then Sæmundur took a bore and bored a hole in a post, and tells Old Nick to get in there. Old Nick was not slow to do so, but Sæmundur drove a plug into the hole, and however much the Devil howled and screeched and begged for mercy, Sæmundur did not take out the plug till he had promised to serve him and always do what he wanted. That was the original reason why Sæmundur could always get Old Nick to do whatever he wanted.

13. *The Goblins' Whistle* Sæmundur the Wise owned a whistle, and the power of it was such that as soon as anyone blew it, one or more goblins would come to whoever had blown it, and would ask what work they were to do. One day Sæmundur had left the whistle in his bed, under the pillow, where he always used to keep it at night. That evening he told a servant girl to get things ready for him as usual, but he warned her that if she found anything unusual in the bed she must not touch it, but just leave it quiet where it was.

Now the girl went to get things ready, and when she saw the whistle she was more than a little curious. She picked it up eagerly, examined it all round and about, and finally she blew it. Immediately a goblin appeared before her and asked: 'What work must I do?'

The girl was startled, but she did not let it show. It so happended that ten of Sæmundur's sheep had been slaughtered that day, and their fleeces were all lying outside. So the girl tells the goblin he must count all the hairs on all the fleeces, and if he can do this faster than she can make the bed, then he can have her. The goblin rushed off and strained every nerve to count them, while the girl hurried to make the bed. By the time she had finished, the goblin still had one shank to count, and so he lost his bargain. Afterwards, Sæmundur asked the girl if she had found anything in the bed. She told the whole story, just as it happened, and Sæmundur was pleased with her presence of mind.

14. *The Goblin and the Cowman* At one time Sæmundur the Wise employed a cowman who, he thought, was too fond of swearing, and he often rebuked him for it. He told the cowman that Old Nick takes people's swear-words and foul talk as food for himself and his imps.

'I would never speak lightly again,' says the cowman, 'if I knew that would make the Devil lose his food.'

'I'll soon know whether you really mean that or not,' says Sæmundur, and he sends a goblin to the cowhouse.

The cowman was angry to have such a guest, for the goblin did all kinds of damage, and was such a sore trial to his temper that he found it hard to control himself and not to swear. However, time went by, and he managed well, and saw the goblin wasting away day by day. When he observed this, he thought it a most amazing thing, and now he never swore.

But one morning as he comes into the cowhouse he sees that everything has been smashed up and turned topsy turvy, and all the cows are tied together by their tails— and there were a great many of them. Then the cowman turns on that goblin, who was lying all wretched and miserable in a cowstall, and pours out all his anger at him with frightful and wicked words and the most alarming oaths. But to his fury and exasperation, he saw the goblin spring to life again and grow so fat and chubby all in a minute that he looked as if he was just about to grow a layer of blubber. So then the cowman took a grip on himself, and stopped swearing. He saw now that Sæmundur the priest had been telling the truth, and he never spoke a light word again. Indeed, that goblin who used to live on his foul and wicked language came to an sad end long ago. It would be a good thing if you and I could mend our ways, following the example of that cowman.

15. *The Stupid Lad and the Devil* There once came to work for the Reverend Sæmundur a lad who was thought to be quite unteachable because of his stupidity, so that one could not even teach him

Christian doctrine. The boy certainly was very stupid, and found it hard to learn anything at all; he was unhappy about it himself, and had long wished that he could become clever. One night he dreamed that a man came and asked him whether he would like him to give him the gift of cleverness. It seemed to the lad that he agreed. The man in the dream said that in return the lad must come to take service in his household on Holy Cross Day next spring. The lad agreed. Then the man in the dream disappeared.

Things changed after that, for the lad became so clever that Sæmundur the priest was astonished; but at the same time he became very different from how he had been before, for he grew gloomy and depressed. Sæmundur noticed this, and tried to find out why. For a long time the lad evaded his questions, but in the end he told the priest the whole story, just as it was. Sæmundur was rather startled, and said it could not have been a man that appeared in his dream, but rather the Devil, who wanted to lure him to come to him; but even so, said the priest, he must not be afraid, but must do just what he would tell him. So winter passed, and Holy Cross Day drew near.

On the eve of Holy Cross Day, Sæmundur told the lad to come out with him to the church. When they got there, the priest took him up to the altar, put Mass vestments on him, gave him the paten and chalice, and made him stand facing the nave. He told him he must not stir from there, and must offer the Bread and Wine to whoever came up to him, and if the person would not receive it, then he must not move towards him; even if it were Sæmundur himself who came, he must not move towards him unless he first received the Bread and Wine.

Thereupon Sæmundur went away, and the lad did as he was told. When he had been standing in front of the altar for some time, in came the same man

he had seen in his dream; he said he had come to fetch him, and ordered him to take off the vestments and put down what he was holding. The lad did not answer a word, but offered him the Bread and Wine. The other said he had not come there to receive Communion from his hands, and urged the lad to come with him; but the lad took no notice, and with that the man went away. Next, it seemed to the lad that many of his friends came in one after another and asked him, some gently, some harshly, to leave the spot where he stood. But he offered them the Bread and Wine, and they would none of them take it. Then it seemed to him that Sæmundur the priest came towards him and said he was angry with him for being there, and he must come away at once, put down what he was holding, and come outside with him. But for all that the lad would not move towards him, but offered him the Bread and Wine. Sæmundur the priest turned on his heel, saying he had not come there to receive the Holy Sacrament from his hands, and with that Sæmundur vanished from his ken.

Then all sorts of supernatural visions began appearing to the boy, and monsters, and even devils; he thought the church was shivering and shaking, and he believed it was about to sink into the ground then and there, or to come crashing down. He was so frightened by then that he was on the point of dropping the sacred vessels and trying to save his life, but at that moment he heard the bells begin to ring. Then all the wonders he thought he was seeing vanished at once; but Sæmundur the priest came into the church, walked up to the altar, and received the Bread and Wine. He told the lad that he was in no danger now, for no more attacks would be made on him. The lad rejoiced with all his heart to be free, and thanked Sæmundur as best he could. He was devoted to Sæmundur ever after, and it is said that he kept his cleverness all his life long, and became a famous man.

16. *Sæmundur on his Deathbed* Sæmundur had taken in a poor man's child to be his foster-daughter; he thought that some evil fate hung over her, and he loved her so much that he always kept his eye on her, and would not be parted from her. When he lay on his deathbed he made her put her couch at the foot of his bed, for it seemed that he trusted her most to be the witness of his death. While he lay sick he guessed this would be his last illness, and as time went on she observed that he was anxious whether after his death he would go home to Heaven, or to the other place.

On the evening before his death he told his foster-daughter to be on her guard that night, and to be sure not to fall asleep, for he said he had a feeling he would die that night, and if so one might see some tokens to show what would become of him in the next world; so he bade her keep awake and take good note of everything, so that she would be able to tell his kinsmen, with full proofs, to which place he had been allotted as fit for him. After this he stopped speaking, and lay back. But the girl loyally kept watch.

When much of the night had passed, she saw that the room where they were was filling with goblins. It seemed to her that by their words they were trying to coax Sæmundur into some evil, but she judged from Sæmundur's words and looks that he would have nothing to do with them. As soon as the goblins had failed in this, they tried to threaten Sæmundur into doing evil. But he bravely resisted all their threats, just as he had their coaxings. After this, the goblins vanished; but no sooner had they gone than the room filled again with mosquitoes, which attacked Sæmundur. His strength was failing by then, so that he could not defend himself or brush the mosquitoes off. But just when their biting was tormenting him most fiercely, the girl noticed a ray of light glide up from his mouth; she realized it must have been his soul

soaring up to its blessed home. And indeed, all the mosquitoes had vanished, and Sæmundur had passed away.

II. HALLA OF STRAUMFJÖRDUR

1. *Halla's Origins* Halla lived at the same period as the priest Sæmundur the Wise, and indeed there were three of them who were brother and sisters: Sæmundur, Halla, and Elín of Elínarhöfdi on Akranes. The two sisters were very like their brother in that they knew a great deal and practiced the old heathen lore. Nevertheless, Halla was a very religious woman, as can be seen from various things she did, such as the gifts she gave to the church at Álftanes.

2. *Halla Sends Men to Mow* One summer Halla sent her farmhands to mow the meadows up on Mýrar by Heyvatn (that is the name of a large lake there), and the place they were to mow is called Ljónsnes, and she had them pitch their tents there. There is a great rock standing there, called Grey Rock; on this rock, Halla told her men, they must lay all their scythes every evening when they had finished work, and then they would find them on it ready sharpened every morning; but she also ordered them to be very careful never to look at the cutting edge of the scythes at any time. The men did as they were told, and so for some time things went on just the same: every morning they found the sharpened scythes on the rock, and they seemed to bite as if they were just cutting water.

Now one of the farmhands began to suspect that Halla must have had some reason for it when she forbade them to look at the edges of the scythes, and he wanted to know what the effect would be if he disobeyed, and so he does look at the edge of his scythe. Then he sees that this scythe is nothing more nor less than a human rib, and at the same instant the same thing happens to all the other scythes— they all turn into human ribs. So

they had to give up their haymaking and set out for home, and Halla was very annoyed about it.

3. *Halla Goes to Market* One day, as often happened, a trading ship put in at a harbour on the west coast called Hraunshöfn; it is near where Búdarverzlunarstadur is nowadays. Halla wanted to visit these merchants and buy various things she needed for her household, for she always used to keep her home well stocked. She set out for Hraunshöfn to go to market, as usual, with a long string of pack-ponies carrying her wares, and in addition she had twelve old sheep driven along to sell to the merchants. She took the usual paths, first up under the fells, and then through open country. She came to the mouth of Hraunadal; her foster-son Ólafur used to live there at that time.

As soon as Ólafur sees Halla's pack-ponies and what was on them, he says: 'There's hard stuff in those packs, foster-mother!'

Then Halla says: 'Quiet, you rascal! I've taught you a bit too much.'

Halla went on her way; there is no more to tell about her journey till she reaches the trading-post and finds the merchants. There she offers them a whole heap of butter and tallow, and the sheep she had brought with her, and then picks out the goods she wanted from the merchants, as much as her ponies could carry. And when she has loaded her pack-train, off she goes. But as soon as she has left, it occurs to the merchants to look at the wares they had brought from Halla— and by that time, the butter and tallow had turned into stones, and the sheep into mice. Halla had worked a magic illusion, so that stones looked like butter and tallow, and mice like sheep.

As soon as the merchants understood the trick, they were most unpleasantly surprised, and they gathered men at once and set out in pursuit of

Halla. But as soon as Halla notices the pursuit, up comes a pitch-black fog, so that one could not see anything at all. Yet in spite of this the merchants did catch up with Halla and her pack-train at the river in Haffjördur, but she put a spell on their eyes so that they saw nothing but moors with great mounds and crags where her horses were. So they had to turn back without finding Halla and her companions, but she went on her way unhindered, and came home safe and sound to Straumfjördur.

4. *Halla as Midwife* Halla was a skilled midwife. One day she was sent for, as usual, to help a woman in labour. Bales of hay had been arranged to make a couch for the woman. When the pains got bad and she began screaming, her husband said: 'Behave yourself, wife. There's probably no need to make such a fuss, when you've been lying only such a short while on the hay.'

Then Halla prepares another couch in the hay, and says to the husband: 'Lie down there, and see how you like it.'

He maintained that it would not bother him much, and lay down; but then he began at once to howl and scream, but his wife stopped. When she was on the point of giving birth to the child, the husband's screams grew quieter, and he stopped shortly after. Then he stood up, and was quite all right.

Halla told the woman: 'I was able to make him bear the pains for you, but I couldn't make him bear the child.'

5. *Halla Fetches Angelica* It happened once that Halla held a great feast at Christmas time, to which she invited friends and relations. She entertained them magnificently, and was as cheerful as could be. Now she tells her guests to choose what-

ever food they fancied they would like, and she would serve it up for them. The guests thought it over, and decided, for a joke, to choose something which Halla would not find easy to get, and they mentioned fresh green angelica shoots. Halla says that they certainly mean to choose something that is not easy to find, but that she will try all the same, only they must wait a little while.

Then Halla goes off and swims out across the lake called Grœnavatn, out to a deep pit — how far down the bottom is nobody knows— which has been called Halla's Pit ever since; there she dives down, and is away for some little while. Then up she comes again with a bag of green vegetables and fresh shoots of angelica, and these she served to her guests. People believe it to be true that Halla fetched this angelica from the underworld.

III. THE REV.HÁLFDAN OF FELL

1. *Hálfdan's Character* Halfdan Einarson (or Eldjárnsson), the priest at Fell in Sléttuhlíd in the district of Skagafjördur, had studied in the Black School with Sæmundur the Wise. He knew much magic lore, and struck many a bargain with the Devil, but always tricked him in the end. He knew much more lore than other men, but he never used his art to harm others, but only to benefit himself and other people, and to amuse them, as will now be seen from various examples.

2. *Hálfdan and Ólöf* At Lónkot, in the parish where Hálfdan was priest, there lived an old woman called Ólöf. She knew a great deal about magic, and she and Hálfdan had had many a squabble. One autumn, Hálfdan rowed out fishing with his men, and they hooked a large flounder. The weather was bitter, and the rowers were cold. As soon as they complained of the cold, the priest said: 'What would you give me, lads, if I hooked a hot sausage now, to cheer you up?'

They said he could never do such a thing, however much he wanted to. But a little later, the priest turns to them with a blood-sausage, piping hot from the pan, on his fish-hook. All the rowers ate a share, and thought it very good. But meanwhile, the flounder disappeared out of the boat. Then says Hálfdan the priest: 'Well, the old woman must be paid for her spindle-whorl!' Hálfdan had magicked away this sausage from Ólöf, but in revenge she had taken the flounder from him.

One day Hálfdan the priest had many haycocks still out in his meadows. He strictly forbids anybody of his household to come outside the house all night, and says this is most important. Then he tells Ólöf that she must bind up all these hay-

cocks in the course of the night, while he himself would stack the hay in the barn. The old woman said to each haycock she bound: 'Up with you, up and home to Hálfdan's yard!' Then the haycocks flew through the air to Hálfdan, but he met each one and said: 'Down with you, down where you ought to lie!' They went on like this all night, till all the hay was dealt with. It is said that one old woman came out of the house during the night, and she went mad.

3. *The Woman of Málmey* It is said that there is a curse on the island of Málmey in Skagafjördur, so that no one can live on it longer than twenty years.

Once, in the days of Hálfdan the priest, a farmer named Jón lived there; he was a fine man, and well off too, and he was married when this story took place. Jón had set up house on Málmey and had lived there ever since, but now the twenty years that it was safe for him to be there were at an end— and nobody had ever had the courage to stay longer. But as Jón was a stubborn man and did not have much belief in superstitions (and besides, he had inherited Málmey from his father and had done well there), he absolutely refuses to go; and so the twenty-first year passes by until Christmas, and nothing particular happens. But on Christmas Eve his wife disappears, and nobody knows what has become of her, though they search far and wide.

Jón thinks this a most terrible loss, and wants to get some idea of what can have caused the disappearance of his wife, so he goes off on a journey to visit Hálfdan the priest at Fell, and when he gets there he asks the priest to see him, and tells him his trouble. The priest says he can certainly find out what has become of the woman and where she has gone, but there would be no point in it, for he would never have any joy from

his wife's company again. The farmer asks if he could at least arrange for him to get a glimpse of her, 'for I'll be much easier in my mind if I get a glimpse of her and know where she has got to,' says he. The priest says he does not at all like granting him his wish, but as he begged so persistently, he would, and so he must come back on an agreed day, as soon as everything had been arranged.

So now the farmer goes home again, thinking his affairs had taken a turn for the better; he returns to Fell at the appointed time, and the priest is ready, and dressed for a journey. The farmer sees that there is a grey horse standing on the north side of the churchyard, bridled and harnessed. The priest goes and mounts this horse, and tells the farmer to mount behind him, 'but I warn you,' says the priest, 'you must not speak one word, whatever may appear to you or attack you, for if you break this rule, you will pay for it with your life.'

The priest leaves his homestead, with the farmer riding at his back, and the farmer was amazed at how rapidly the horse covered the ground. They go as the crow flies, out across the sea itself, and rounding the headlands of Dalatá and Siglunes, heading straight for a great mountain that juts out to sea, the Mull of Ólafsfjördur. The farmer thinks this quite bad enough, and when at one moment the horse happens to give a sort of jerk and plunge sharply, he is frightened, and lets out a yell. The priest shouts over his shoulder: 'He slipped on a skate there. Hold your tongue!' It has since become a proverb, whenever a horse stumbles or puts a foot wrong, to say 'There he slipped on a skate!'

There is no more to tell of their journey till they came to land from the north at the foot of the Mull of Ólafsfjördur; there the cliffs are huge and steep. The priest dismounts, and so does

the farmer; the priest goes up to the rock and plucks a small green plant from the ground beside him; with this he strikes the mountain, and after a little the mountain opens, and out come two women dressed in blueish black, leading Jón's wife between them. She has changed so much one would hardly recognise her now, being quite unlike what she was before, swollen and black and blue in the face, and as like a troll as she could be. There was just one mark on the woman's brow, shaped like a cross, which was of the right flesh-colour; and Hálfdan the priest said later, when he was asked about this, that it was the cross drawn on her at her baptism, the only sign she still kept of her former existence.

As soon as the woman came out from the mountain, she speaks to her husband and says: 'So you've come, Jón. What do you want of me?'

The man stood speechless, so the priest asks him if he wants to take his wife home again, or whether he wants to say anything to her, but the farmer says he does not. Then the priest orders the women back into the mountain and closes it after them, and he did something to the doors so that no one would ever be harmed by these women again. Later on, Hálfdan said the reason he had not trampled them to bits was that he never intended to attack those who just lurked in the depths of the earth, only those who came outside. The place on the north side of the Mull of Ólafsfjördur where Hálfdan opened the mountain has been known as Hálfdan's Door ever since; men whose account can be trusted say it has a reddish colour unlike the rest of the mountain, and that there are huge doorposts to it, particularly towards the foot of the cliff, which Hálfdan did nothing to destroy.

So the farmer and the priest went home by the same road as they came, and reached Fell by the time people there were beginning to be up and

about. They dismount at the same place where they mounted, on the north side of the churchyard, and the priest takes the harness off the grey horse; but as he takes off the bridle, he strikes the grey across the rump with it. This the grey does not like, and he lashes out at the priest with his hind legs, but the priest jumps aside, and the kick lands on the churchyard wall, and a gap opens up in it under the horse's hoof. It is said nobody has ever been able to close this gap, whatever means they tried to find to plug it; it is also said that nobody has ever been harmed again on Málmey— though actually nobody has ever again had the courage to stay there more than twenty years.

4. *The Devil Goes to Grímsey* It happened at the beginning of one winter that Hálfdan the priest was short of dried fish for his household; nor was there any to be got in the neighbourhood, for in fact everyone was rather short of it. Now Hálfdan also owned a large estate on Grímsey island, as was common in those days, because Grímsey was a rich area for fish, and over there he had plenty of dried fish, but at that season it was impossible to cross, because of storms and heavy seas. So now the priest promises Old Nick that he can have his soul if only he will fetch him dried fish from Grímsey, and not let it get wet, otherwise the deal would be off. Old Nick thinks this a good offer and accepts the bargain, but stipulates that the priest must supply him with a boat. Then the priest gives him an ash-trug and says that that's the only boat he'll get; Old Nick sets off, though he hadn't been given a very fine send-off.

That was towards evening. Next morning Hálfdan's wife gets up early and has a look at the weather; she comes in again, and the priest asks what the weather is like, and she says that it's bright, and the sky clear, except that there's a

small dark cloud to the north-east, and it's coming on pretty fast.

'Then it's time to get dressed,' says the priest. 'The old fellow has travelled fast.'

The priest dresses as quickly as he can, and by the time he gets outside Old Nick is just coming to land. He is so startled when he sees the priest that he does not look where he is going, and a huge wave breaks over the boat, so that all the fish got wet, though actually it was only their tails that got wet. And when the Devil gives him his supply of dried fish, Hálfdan points out the tails to him, and says that the deal is off, by the terms they had agreed on. Old Nick could find nothing to say against this. It is said that Hálfdan the priest snapped off the thinnest part of the tail-flap of every cod in the pile and tossed it to Old Nick, and said he could keep this in payment for his journey. The thinnest part of a cod's tail has always been called Old Foxy's Flap ever since, and that is why people in some parts of Iceland will not eat it.

5. *The Devil Mows a Meadow* One day the Reverend Hálfdan made a bargain with the Devil that he was to mow the whole meadow at Fell in one night, and that he must have finished it by mid-morning— and that meadow is about eighteen acres. He promised to give himself to the Devil in payment if he could do this, but if he had not finished the whole meadow, then the deal would be off. So now Old Nick goes off to mow the meadow at the appointed hour. The priest keeps a wary eye on him, and thinks that the mowing is going amazingly fast. So the priest goes out to the church and takes the Psalter from there, and goes to the meadow and lays it on a hillock. Then he goes back indoors. At mid-morning, the priest goes out again to take a look at Old Nick. By that time he had finished

the whole meadow, except for the hillock on which the Psalter was lying. He was making little rushes at this hillock and hacking at it, but darting away again just as fast every time. Then the priest made his appearance, and Old Nick lost his bargain.

6. *The Death of Hálfdan the Priest* It is said that when Hálfdan's life was drawing to a close he grew very anxious as to his eternal welfare, and made careful preparations for his passing. When his death drew near— for he knew beforehand when it would be— he declared that he wanted his bed to be placed in the outbuilding where he used to spend his time every day. He had it all sealed up so tight that there was no cranny left open, except for one hole in the skylight.

Now Hálfdan the priest had a foster-daughter whom he had brought up out of poverty, and he loved her more than anyone else. He said that there must be nobody near him when he died except his foster-daughter, and that she must watch carefully whatever she would see. He arranged for there to be a ram with a russet fleece under his bed, and three candles on the table at the head of his bed; and this, he said, would be the sign of how he fared— if the candles went out at the moment he died, and if the ram lay quiet under the bed, it would go badly for him; but if some or all of the candles remained alight, and the ram disappeared, then all would be well.

As the night passed by during which the priest expected to die, his foster-daughter took her place at the foot of his bed, with the ram under the bed and the candles on the table. And when the moment came when he gave up the ghost, the girl sees that two candles are out but one is still alight, and the ram crawls out from under the bed and vanishes through the hole in the skylight, and

it was never seen again. After this, nobody ever doubted that Hálfdan the priest obtained a place among the blessed after his death.

IV. THORMÓDUR OF GVENDAREYJAR

1. *Thormódur and the Three Jóns* There are some islands in Breidarfjördur called the Gvendareyjar. For a long time there lived there a man named Thormódur Eiríksson; he was not only skilled in magic, but a poet whose verses had power, or so it was said. Many tales are told of his dealings with ghosts and apparitions which he tackled and overcame, whether on behalf of other people or for himself, and of how he sometimes got into a very tight corner. The great majority tell how he brought peace and quiet to people troubled by ghosts and Sendings, while only a few say that he ever sent any himself, at any rate if unprovoked.

In the north-west of Iceland, near the coast of Ísafjördur, lived a father and son who were both called Jón, so people say; they were at daggers drawn with a neighbour of theirs called Einar, because Einar had a marriageable daughter and the younger Jón wanted her as wife, but Einar would not give her to him because the father and son both had bad reputations, and the girl was thought to deserve a better match. The father and son swore they would be revenged on Einar and his daughter, and said the girl would never bring joy to herself or anybody else. Before long the girl was bewitched, and it was said that a demon of the air attacked her, so that she knew no peace by night or day, and lay there raving. Her father thought it a great misfortune, and blamed it all on the two Jóns, who were thought to be evil men, and magicians too.

Since Thormódur had a name for being skilled in such matters, Einar sent a man to him with some horses (for these are rare in the islands), to ask him for help. The messenger reached Thormódur and explained his errand. At first Thormódur replied coldly, saying he was not capable of opposing the

men of Ísafjördur, and that he would be biting off more than he could chew, he being an unknown man, with little learning. But as the messenger only grew more urgent the more he objected, in the end Thormódur promised to go.

They took the shortest route to Ísafjördur, and Thormódur brought a spare horse with him, fully harnessed, carrying nothing but a great bundle tied to the saddlebow. The messenger had no idea what could be the purpose of this, till they came to Thorskafjördur Heath; there Thormódur turned aside to a lake called Pike Lake, and fished for a while with a trailing-line; he had baited the hook with gold, and on his hand he had a glove made of human skin. When some time had passed, he drew in a lake pike; this creature is gold in colour, and deadly poisonous. Thormódur put the pike in a flask, then wrapped this in a cloak and then in all the skins and other gear he had tied to the saddlebow of the spare horse, and when he had dealt with it as well as he could, he tied the bundle back on the saddlebow of the spare horse, and so went on his way to Einar, who gave him a warm welcome. When the spare horse was unloaded, his back where the pike had lain was quite hairless, and looked as if it had been crushed, and he was never the same again; this was due to the power of that creature's poison. As soon as Thormódur arrived there, he took this pike and buried it under the threshhold of the outhouse in which he would be sleeping, and the girl too, in the other bed. Thanks to this, the attacks on her ceased during the first night, and during the second too, but on the third night one could hear some sort of rumbling noise outside the door. Then Thormódur got up, and at that the rumbling disappeared. Thormódur stayed there for a week, and cured the girl so well that she was never attacked again.

When Thormódur was on his way back south, he came to a church one Sunday, and as he knew nobody

there he remained alone outside, standing by the churchyard. There he heard two men in the churchyard talking, discussing who this stranger might be, and whether he could be the man who had healed the girl, and praising him to the skies— all of which Thormódur heard, as he stood under the eaves of the church. He felt sure that these must be the two Jóns, father and son, and that, being them, there must be some treachery at the bottom of it. They asked him his name, and he answered the truth. They praised him at every word, and said they would prove how much they valued such men as him, and offered him a guide who would see him safe home, as he did not know all the paths. Thormódur said he had already been given horses and a guide by Farmer Einar, and he thought it would be rather ridiculous of him to have more than one guide.

There is no more to tell about Thormódur's journey until he and his companion come to Klofning Fell, where the river Ballará runs down the mountain side. Then Thormódur told his guide to go on ahead to the farmstead at Ballará for the night, but he himself would get his night's lodging elsewhere, and that if he had not rejoined him by breakfast time next morning, then the guide could ride home to the West Fjords, for there would be no hope of seeing him again. With that, they parted.

There is a waterfall in that river, high up the mountain side, and an overhanging rock behind it; Thormódur went in there behind the waterfall, and prepared to meet whatever might come. He had not been there very long before a Sending sent by the two Jóns came to the river, but it did not dare go either over or under the waterfall to get at Thormódur; it is said that the father and son had not prepared any instructions for it on this point, if it should prove necessary. Thormódur asked the Sending what its errand was. 'To kill Thormódur,'

it said. Thormódur said that in that case it would have to come nearer, showed it the pike, and began to chant spells. By these means Thormódur put fresh strength into this ghost, once he had forced it to obey him, and ordered it to go back to the West Fjords and kill the élder Jón and attack the younger, which would be a little trick to play on them for the way they had afflicted the farmer's daughter and attacked himself. The ghost at once turned back westwards, and did what it had been instructed to do. But Thormódur rejoined his guide by breakfast time, and there is no more to tell about his journey, except that he came safe home. It is said that some time later a message reached Thormódur from the west, begging him to call off the attacks on the younger Jón, but there was nothing to be got from him until three years had gone by.

There was another man who was also called Jón, Jón Ólafsson; he was related to the father and son we have been speaking of, so he was known as 'Cousin Jón'. This Jón was a good blacksmith, and so powerful a wizard that there was a rumour about him that he had once told his acquaintances that he only needed to learn one more magic symbol in order to be able to think a man dead, and that he was on the way to learning it. As an instance to show that there was not much that could catch this Jón unawares, it is said that one day he was standing on the shore at Hagi on Bardaströnd, his home being at Látrar at the time, and he said that there was a man reefing in his sail at Látrar, and it turned out that what he said was true; indeed, some say he had a Speaking Spirit as his familiar.

It is said that Cousin Jón wished to avenge the other two Jóns on Thormódur, and declared he would not find this difficult to do, unless Thormódur's rhymes proved too powerful for him, for he was no poet. It is said that he sent a Sending against Thormódur, and it caught him off his guard and

choked one of his children before he could take steps to stop it. Thormódur had no chance to send this Sending back against Jón, for it had too much power in it for that; however, he managed to overcome it after a long and weary struggle. After this, it proved difficult for him to be always on his guard against the spiteful tricks of Cousin Jón.

Now it must be mentioned that Thormódur had a daughter called Gudrún, or Gunna for short, who had married long before all this happened; she had several children, among them a girl called Sigrún. It happened one Sunday that Gudrún was sitting indoors, when Sigrún thought she saw a tuft of black wool drift across her mother. All at once Gunna went mad and rushed out, and some say she flung herself over a cliff into the sea, but others say she was found on the beach with her neck broken. Some men from the next island found the children crying in the farm, and told Thormódur. He came over and arranged for them to be fostered, and took two himself. People thought there was something not right about Gudrún's tragic death, and some said it was the doing of a magician named Gudmundur of Hafnareyjar who was an enemy of Thormódur's, though he was dead by then, while others blamed it on Cousin Jón at Látrar, and it is thought that Thormódur believed that it was Jón who was responsible.

Shortly afterwards, men noticed that Gunna's ghost was walking; she had in fact never been buried, for though her body was certainly sighted, it was washed out to sea again just as some men were coming to carry it home. So then Gunna went to the other islands near by, chased and killed the livestock, attacked men and choked them, and killed a man on Bjarney by this means— and in fact, he did die suddenly. Also she would cause boats at sea to lose their way in broad daylight. So then Thormódur was urged to rid the people of this affliction;

but this caused him such distress that he is reported to have said he thought it the most cruel position he had ever been in, to be forced to treat his own child as he would his enemies. However, he did go, and he struggled hard against Gunna, and marked out an area in which he confined her; but no living creature could go near that area without being maimed or killed. So Thormódur came a second time, and this time he laid Gunna completely. Some say this happened on Stangley, and others on South Kidey; the latter must be right, for there is a cairn there called Gunna's Cairn. Some people say her body was washed ashore there and covered with a pile of stones, but not carried to the churchyard, because she had taken her own life.

It is not surprising that Thormódur should try to revenge himself on Cousin Jón for the harm he had done him, and the plan he adopted was to put magic power into a russet fox, so that it would kill Jón. This is what happened: One year, on Midsummer Eve, Jón went off with another man, whose name was Jón Thórdarson, in order to go catching sea-birds on the cliffs; this was at a place called Slakki. Now Cousin Jón used always to go down the rope without tying it round him, and would simply cross his hands over it and go down headlong; this was thought to be one of his magic tricks, and he was considered one of the nimblest men at catching birds on the cliffs. He had been doing this work a long time, and thought there was practically nowhere where he could not go, thanks to this knowledge of magic. But as soon as he had gone down on the rope at Slakki, Jón Thórdarson saw a russet fox come running along the edge of the cliff, sniff at the rope, and then leap down the face of the cliff. Just as this fox must have reached the bottom, Jón Thórdarson noticed that the rope was quite slack, and he peered over the brink; then he saw that Cousin Jón was lying on

the rocks at the foot of the cliff, and he felt sure he was dead, and so he went home. A boat rowed out to fetch Cousin Jón's body after the service on St John's Day; the body looked as if it had been all torn to pieces, not just bruised, and this was attributed to Thormódur's wizardry—he had avenged his daughter Gudrún. Jón's body was carried home and laid in a lamb-shed, and it is said there was no heart in it. Afterwards, the shed was said to be haunted. The place where he fell to his death has been called Jón's Hold ever since.

It is said that all this happened when Ólafur Árnason had just become sheriff of Bardarströnd in 1737, and that when he wrote the inventory of Jón's goods he said he had often seen spells, but never such devilry as there was there, and that if the corpse had not been buried already he would have had it burned. Jón's books of spells were burned on the open mountainside at Melaskard, near Látralæk, but Ólafur took one sheet from them, and kept it.

2. *Thormódur's Bell-Wether* It was the custom of farmers on the islands in Breidarfjördur to ship their sheep over to the mainland in spring, as soon as they had shed their fleeces, and leave them there to run free on the common pastures all summer. Thormódur used to do this too, for he owned many sheep, and among them a bell-wether with a russet fleece, called Móri, who was seven years old when the following incident occured. Móri had gone to the upland pastures every summer, and had always come back at the first round-up. In the autumn we are talking of, there were three round-ups, as was the custom, and still Móri did not appear. It is said that when Móri could not be found, Thormódur spoke this verse:

'Those who will against me war
Woes most sore upon me pour;
Doom's in store for Móri mine—
No dearer sheep, nor sheep more fine.'

Now he felt sure there was something wrong about the whole affair. One day that autumn he undertook a journey up to Stadarfell; this was on a Saturday, and the following day there was a Mass sung at Stadarfell, and a crowd of people in church. As soon as it was over, and before everyone had left church, Thormódur asked various people whether they had seen anything of Móri, and they all said no.

Then a man who was standing nearby and who heard Thormódur's words, shouted out, saying: 'It's obvious he's been stolen. It's nothing new round here in Fellstrand for people not to get their full tally of sheep back from the pastures. It would be a fine thing if all the blasted thieves round here were flogged and hanged!'

Then Thormódur said: 'Now bleat, my Móri, wherever you are!'

At that very moment there came a hideous bleating from inside that same man who had been loudest in denouncing the thieves on Fellstrand, for Móri went wild and bellowed from deep in his insides, as if he meant to make him burst. At this everyone was terrified, but Thormódur went straight up to the man and accused him of having stolen Móri. The man saw there was nothing for it but to confess the truth, and he added that he had eaten Móri's head that very morning before he came to church.

V. THE REV. EIRÍKUR OF VOGSÓSAR

1. *How Eiríkur Learned his Arts at School (I)*

At Biskupstungar there once lived an old cottager who was heathen in his ways; he did not mix with other people much. He owned two things which he valued more than all the rest of his possessions; these were a book, of which nobody else knew the contents, and a heifer which he fed lavishly. This old man fell ill, and send word to the Bishop of Skálholt to come and see him. The Bishop sets out in haste, thinking it would be best to have a few words with the old man, and goes to see him.

The old fellow said: 'The way things are going, my Lord Bishop, I shall soon be dead, and I want to ask you a small favour first.'

The Bishop agreed.

The old man said: 'I've got a book here, and a heifer which I love dearly, and I want to have them both in my grave with me. If not, it will be the worse for everyone.'

The Bishop says that this will be done, for he thought it only too likely that the old man would walk if it were not done. Then the old man died, and the Bishop had him buried with his book and his heifer.

Many years later, there were three students at the Cathedral School at Skálholt who undertook to learn magic. One was called Bogi, the second Magnús, the third Eiríkur. They had heard tell of the old man and his book, and very much wanted to get at the book, so one night they went off to raise the old man from the dead, but no one could tell them where his grave was. They therefore decided to go through the graves row by row, raising the dead from each in turn; by doing this they filled the whole church with ghosts, but the old man did not come. So now they lay them all again, and fill the church a second time, and then a third, and by

then there were only a few graves left, and still the old man had not come. When they had laid all the other ghosts they raised these, and the very last to come was the old man, and he had his book under his arm and was leading his heifer.

They all set at the old man, wanting to get at the book, but he fought back hard, and it was all they could do to defend themselves; however, they snatched a few leaves from the first part of the book, but gave up hope of the rest. Then they wanted to lay the dead who were still roaming around, and they managed it with everyone except this old man; they got nowhere at all with him, and in fact he was struggling to get back the fragment of his book. But they held their own, though they had their work cut out to do so, and this went on till dawn. But when daybreak came, the old man vanished into his grave, and they chanted their spells over it, and the old man never appeared again. As for the leaves from his book, the three companions kept them for their own use, and from them they compiled the manual of magic called Grey Skin which lay for many years on a table in the Cathedral School at Skálholt; Bogi had most to do with this, for he learned far more than the others.

Later on, these three companions were ordained, and Eiríkur became the priest of Vogsósar in Selvogur, but it is not said which parishes the others got... Though the companions had kept their magic learning secret, it was not long before a rumour got around that Eiríkur was versed in witchcraft, so his Bishop summoned him and showed him Grey Skin, and ordered him to state plainly whether he knew what was in it. Eiríkur flicked the pages, and said 'I don't know a single one of these signs in here,' and he swore to this, and went home again. But afterwards he told his friends that he knew all the signs in it, except just one single one.

2. *How Eiríkur Learned his Arts at School (II)* When Eiríkur was at school at Skálholt, a number of the boys decided to raise the ghost of an old man buried in the churchyard there, who had once owned a magic book of great power. They raised and cornered him eventually, but none of them could shift the book from under his arm until Eiríkur went up to him, when the book became loose at once. Eiríkur read in it till a little before dawn. Then he closed it and gave it back to its owner, who seized it and sank into his grave at once. Later the other boys asked him what he had read. 'Enough,' he said, 'to know that if I had read any further I would have lost my soul to the Devil.'

3. *Eiríkur's Pupil and the Book* Many young lads used to go to Eiríkur and ask him to teach them; he would set them various tests, and teach the ones who satisfied him. Among others, there was a boy who requested to be taught magic.

Eiríkur said: 'Stay with me till Sunday, and then accompany me to Krýsuvíkur; I'll tell you afterwards whether I will or not.'

On the Sunday they ride off, but when they have got as far as the sands, Eiríkur says: 'I've forgotten my handbook; it's under my pillow. Go back and fetch it, but don't open it.'

The boy goes and fetches the book, and rides back across the sands. Now he feels a great longing to look inside the book, and does so. An innumerable host of goblins come to him, asking: 'What needs doing? What needs doing?'

He answers quickly: 'Make a rope from this sand!'

They set to work, but he goes on his way, and catches up with Eiríkur out on the lava fields. He took the book, and said 'You've opened it,' but the boy denied it. Then they went on their way, as planned, but on the return journey Eiríkur saw the

goblins sitting on the sands.

Then he said: 'I knew you had opened the book, my good fellow, though you denied it; but you hit on the best possible plan, and it would be worth while teaching you.'

And it is said that he did teach him.

4. *Raising Ghosts* Two boys once came to Eiríkur the priest and asked him to show them how he would set about raising ghosts. He told them to come with him to the churchyard, and they did. He muttered something between his teeth, and the earth began gushing up out of a grave. The boys reacted differently, for one laughed but the other burst into tears.

Eiríkur said to the latter: 'Go home again, my good fellow, and thank God you did not go out of your mind. As for this other boy, it would be a pleasure to teach him.'

But it is not said whether anything came of this.

5. *The Old Beggar Woman* On one occasion, as often happened, two men came to Eiríkur and asked him to teach them magic. He says he knows no magic, but they can stay the night with him, and they agree. Next morning Eiríkur asks his guests to come riding for pleasure in the homefield by his farm. They had only gone a little way from the farm when an old woman came towards them; she was carrying a child in her arms, and she begged Eiríkur to give her something. Eiríkur grew angry and said he knew of no reason why he should give her anything. She said she was a widow, and very hard up, and she pleaded pitifully. Eiríkur was all the sharper with her, and said he was getting sick and tired of listening to this bleating and whining, 'and it would be a good thing if you were

all killed off, you wretches who go begging from door to door.'

He said all this and more to the old woman, but she only pleaded more urgently. Then says Eiríkur to the men: 'You'll have to kill this wretched old woman for me, if I am to teach you.'

Then says one of his guests: 'I would never have guessed that you were such a godless man, Eiríkur, and I'll never do such a wicked thing, whatever the reward for it might be.'

'I don't think I'll let a little thing like this come between me and the Rev.Eiríkur,' says the other guest. 'In fact, I'm very willing to kill this old woman, for it is quite right to kill them, these wretches who beg from door to door. I should think they'd be thankful, poor devils, to be rid of their lives at last.'

Eiríkur drove this man away, and said he utterly refused to teach such an evil man, but the other one he took into his household and taught. Eiríkur had conjured up an illusion to test the two men, for in fact they never saw any old woman at all.

6. *The Horse Thieves* The Rev.Eiríkur forbade the shepherds and other youths in Selvog to take his horses without permission, and said they would be in trouble if they did. All the shepherds were indeed very careful not to touch his horses. Two lads, however, broke this rule. But the moment they had mounted, the horses broke into a gallop and headed straight home for Vogsósar, and the lads could not master them at all. Then they thought of flinging themselves off, when they found they could not quieten the horses, but that was out of the question too, because their breeches had stuck fast to the backs of the horses.

'It's no good,' says one of them, 'we'll have to cut ourselves free, or else we'll fall into the

Rev.Eiríkur's hands— and that's something nobody would envy us!'

Then he takes out a knife he had on him, cuts away the whole seat of his breeches, and so flings himself off the horse. But the other one either got no chance to try this trick, or else did not dare spoil his breeches.

The horses galloped home to Vogsósar, one carrying this boy, who was howling, and the other with the seat of a pair of breeches stuck fast to his back. The priest was outside as the horses came to his door; he stroked the breeches off the back of the loose horse, and then said to the boy who was riding the other; 'It is not a good idea to steal horses from Eiríkur of Vogsósar. Get down now, and never take my horses again without permission. Your friend knew better than you did how to get out of trouble; he would have the brains for it if he were shown a spell, for he has the makings of a fine man in him.'

Some time later this boy too came to see the priest. Eiríkur showed him the seat of his breeches, and asked if he recognised it. The lad was not at all put out, but told the priest just what had happened. The priest smiled, and invited him to stay, and this he accepted gratefully. He remained a long time in the priest's household, and was very devoted to him, and it is said that the priest taught him a great deal of ancient lore.

7. *The Snow Bridge* One day some men came to Vogsósar with a string of pack-ponies; they had come up from the trading-post, but could get no further because the river-mouth was impassable just then, so they would have to bait their horses at mid-day. Now Eiríkur was fond of a nip of brandy. So he comes up to these travellers, and asks if they could give him a bit of good cheer. They all say no, except one, who takes out his

flask and lets the priest take a pull.

Then Eiríkur says to him: 'You must go straight down to the mouth of the river, ride slowly, and don't dismount. When the others are about to dismount and hobble their ponies, you must pack up your goods quickly, and I'll try to get you across the water.'

The man does all this, and as soon as he has finished packing up, Eiríkur arrives, for he had gone back home between whiles. Eiríkur then set out ahead of the man, and tells him to follow. They come to the river-mouth at the very point where there is a bridge of snow spanning it, and Eiríkur says it will be quite safe to cross by the snow-bridge, though it is not thick. Then he goes ahead, and the man after him, and they get across quite well. Then Eiríkur goes home again.

When the other travellers see this, they gather their horses and re-load them, meaning to use this same bridge of snow. But by the time they reach the river-mouth there is no snow-bridge there at all, and the river is as impassable as ever, and so they must just turn back, unload the packs, dismount, lead their ponies to grass and hobble them, pitch tent and wait patiently.

The reason Eiríkur had played this trick on them was that he knew they had refused him brandy out of meanness, not because they had not got any.

8. *The Roll of Tobacco* It is said that once upon a time some peasants who were going to the trading-post passed by the home-meadow of Vogsósar, and there met Eiríkur, who asked them to give him a piece of tobacco as he had run out of supplies. They all refused except one, who cut the end off his roll and gave it him. Eiríkur thanked him and said he need not regret this.

The trading party returned without incident, and nothing more happened for some time. But dur-

ing the following winter all the peasants seemed to have run out of tobacco extraordinarily quickly, except for the one who had given Eiríkur a bite. His roll never seemed to get any shorter. This miserable state of affairs lasted until the spring ship arrived at the trading-post with supplies, whereupon all the farmers rushed off to replenish their stock— except the generous one. Sure enough, they met Eiríkur at the edge of his meadow, and he asked them to give him a bite of tobacco. They told him that not one of them had tasted a bite of tobacco all winter, and that they were all in the direst straits. He let that pass.

Some time later, while making his round of parochial visitations, Eiríkur came to the home of the generous farmer, where, as always, he was hospitably received, and the farmer offered him tobacco.

'They tell me that you didn't buy any when all the others did this spring,' said Eiríkur to him.

'No, I had no need to,' the other answered. 'My roll has lasted me all the winter and spring without shrinking.'

'Mm— yes,' Eiríkur replied, 'it was a good bit of tobacco.'

A later rumour maintained that Eiríkur had revenged himself upon the mean travellers by magically transferring their stocks of tobacco to the generous one's roll.

9. *The Barrel of Salt Meat* One day, as often happened, some men on their way down to the fishing-grounds came past Eiríkur's home at Vogsósar, after his own workmen had already gone down to the sea. Now a barrel of salt meat which one of Eiríkur's men ought to have taken with him had been left behind at Vogsósar, so now Eiríkur asks one of these fishermen to carry the barrel down for him. He does so, takes the barrel and ties it on

to the pack on his own horse, and goes on his way with his companions. His was the last pony in the pack-train, and so he thinks to himself he might just as well have a peep inside that barrel. He takes the lid off, gets out a knife from his pocket, and cuts himself a slice— but he cannot get it to his mouth, for sometimes the knife stuck to the barrel, and sometimes his hand stuck to the knife. So he drives his horse along and walks behind it, all the time trying to get himself free, until, before he knew what was happening, he finds himself back in front of the door at Vogsósar.

The priest was standing outside, and said: 'So there you are, my good fellow. Don't ever do that again, my friend. Just remember that that barrel comes from old Eiríkur, and now you can be on your way.'

10. *Hay from Vogsósar* One day, as often happened, some fishermen on their way down to the fishing-grounds came to the Rev.Eiríkur's home and stayed the night there. They were given hay for their horses, but they thought they had not been given enough, so they stole some of the best hay from Eiríkur's homefield to add to it. Next morning they went on their way. There was a river they came to, not far from Vogsósar, and there their horses began to drink; the fishermen could not shift them from that spot, and the horses remained there drinking all the livelong day. In the evening the men returned to Vogsósar, and asked Eiríkur to let them spend the night there once again. He did, but remarked in passing: 'Don't you find the hay from Vogsósar is amazingly salty, my lads?'

11. *The Brown Carthorse* One day two good friends of Eiríkur the priest arrived at his house. They had come all the way from Grindavík in the south,

and were meaning to go east to Flói, but they were on foot. They mentioned to Eiríkur how nice it would be to have a horse, to spare their legs. Eiríkur said he had a brown carthorse grazing on the left side of the homefield, and that they could take him; it would be quite all right for them both to ride at once, for this old horse had tough muscles, even if he did not look very fat. He said they must let the carthorse go free once they had reached the Ölfus river, and need not worry about him afterwards, for old Brownie would look after himself. They thanked the priest heartily for the loan, and went off.

They found the horse, and he was indeed incredibly thin. All the same, they both mounted him together. Then the carthorse went off at a gallop, and so fast, at that, that it left them breathless, and they reached that river in the east faster than they would have thought the finest horse could go, for they were hardly aware of the journey at all, that horse was so spirited and swift. At the river they dismounted, and left the horse behind. But when they looked back, they saw there was no horse there at all, only an old horse-skull gleaming white; so now they realized that Eiríkur had used his art to help them.

12. *Eiríkur Rescues a Woman from the Otherworld*
A newly married farmer on the Vestmanna Islands, a young and promising man, lost his wife in this way: One day she got up early, as she often did, while her husband was still in bed; she went as usual to relight the fire, but stayed out of doors longer than she generally did, so that her husband got tired of waiting. So up he gets, and goes and looks for her, and cannot find her anywhere on the farm. Then he goes round various cottages asking news of her, but nobody has seen her that morning. A search party is sent to look for her that day,

and on the following days too, but she is not to be found.

Her husband was so distressed by her disappearance that he took to his bed and could neither sleep nor eat; and so time went on, and he grew more and more wretched the longer he lay there. The thing that weighed on him most was not knowing what had killed his wife— for he felt sure she was dead, and very likely in the sea. People thought he would pine away and die, for the more they tried to comfort him, the more heavy-hearted he became.

Finally, a friend of his came to him and said: 'Don't you think you might try to get up if I gave you a piece of advice which we could hope might lead to your finding out what has become of your wife?'

'I would willingly try, if I thought I could,' said the farmer.

'Then pull yourself together,' said the other, 'and get up, and get dressed, and eat. Then go to the mainland, go to Selvogur to see Eiríkur the priest at Vogsósar, and ask him to find out what has become of your wife.'

The farmer grew a little more cheerful at this, then he dressed and ate, and little by little he pulled himself together till he was strong enough to go over to the mainland; and there is nothing to say of his journey until he comes to Eiríkur at Vogsósar. Eiríkur is standing at the door, welcomes him, and asks him his errand, and the farmer tells him about it.

Eiríkur says: 'I don't know what has become of your wife, but stay here for a few days, if you like, and we'll see what happens.'

The farmer accepts. Now two or three days go by, and then Eiríkur has two grey horses brought up to the house; one was a very fine beast, the other ugly and thin. Eiríkur has the latter saddled for himself and the other one for the farmer, and says:

'Now we'll go for a ride along the shore.'

The farmer said: 'Don't ride that old bag of bones; this one will carry you better.'

Eiríkur pretended not to have heard. So they ride off from the farmstead, though there was a storm, and heavy rain. When they came to the mouth of the river, the lean horse lengthened his stride, and rapidly drew ahead. The farmer followed as best he could, but Eiríkur soon disappeared in the distance. Still, he went on and on till he came to the foot of Geitahlíd, to the rocks which mark the boundary between the districts of Árnes and Gullbringa. Eiríkur is there, waiting for him, and he has laid a very large book open on the biggest rock. Not a drop of rain fell on it, and not a page of it shook, though there was a great wind blowing.

Eiríkur went widdershins round the rock, and muttered something between his teeth, and then he says to the farmer: 'Look carefully whether you see your wife coming.'

Now a crowd of people comes out from the rock, and the farmer walked round and round each one, and he did not find his wife. He told Eiríkur so, and Eiríkur said to these people: 'Go in peace, and thank you for having come,' and they vanished at once.

Eiríkur turned a few pages of his book, and the same thing happened all over again. He tried a third time, and it was just the same. When this last group had gone, Eiríkur said: 'Was she really not among any of these bands?'

The farmer said she was not.

Then Eiríkur grew red, and said: 'Things are getting difficult, my good fellow. I have summoned all the Otherworld beings I know of, whether on the earth, under the earth, or in the sea.'

Then he takes a single sheet of parchment from his breast, looks at it, and says: 'Ah, there's still the couple who live inside Hauhlíd Mountain.'

He lays the parchment, unfolded, on the open book, goes widdershins round the rock, and mumbles as before. Then along come a troll and his wife, carrying a glass cage between them; inside it, the farmer sees his wife.

Eiríkur says to them: 'You did wrong to take a man's wife from him. Go back home, and no thanks to you for what you've done. And never do such a thing again!'

At once the trolls depart, but Eiríkur breaks the glass cage, takes the woman out, and remounts his horse with her and his book as well.

The farmer says: 'Let me take my wife up behind me; that horse will never carry you both.'

Eiríkur answered that that was his own affair, and disappeared in the distance across the lava outcrops to the east. The farmer goes on his way and comes to Vogsósar, where Eiríkur had already arrived, and that night Eiríkur made the woman sleep in his own bed, while he lay on a pallet near the door.

Next morning the farmer prepared to go home again. Eiríkur said: 'It's not wise to let your wife go off with you like this; I'll get her safe home for you.'

The farmer thanks him. Then the priest mounts the old carthorse, sets the woman on his knee, and sets out. The farmer followed after, but he saw no more of Eiríkur till he reached his own home in the islands, where Eiríkur and the woman had arrived already. That evening the farmer took his wife into his bed, but Eiríkur kept guard over them for three nights running, after which time he said: 'I don't suppose many people would have enjoyed keeping guard these three nights, and last night least of all. But your wife will be in no danger from now on.'

While Eiríkur was guarding the woman he gave her a drink every morning, and so she got her memory back, which otherwise she would have lost

for ever. Then Eirıkur went home again, but first he received fine gifts from the farmer.

13. *The Convict* North-east of Vogsósar is a cave under a jutting rock among the outcrops of lava, not far from the highway; it is called Gapi. Travellers often spend the night in this cave, just as one does in a mountain hut. In this cave Eiríkur once kept a convict hidden all one summer. This man had come from Sída in the east, where he had killed a man, so that he was under sentence of death. Those who travelled by that road never saw the cave Gapi that summer, for Eiríkur had cast a spell of concealment over it, and also over the cairn which stood on the hill beside it, though many people remembered them both.

The convict lived there in the cave all summer, while notices about him were being sent round all the districts, with orders to seize him wherever he might be found. Eiríkur the priest received one of these proclamations. Then he sent the convict himself back to Sída with it (but nobody recognised him), and told him to explain that the man had been caught at Selvogur and was being kept under guard in the church at Strand, and that they were to come and fetch him without delay. So off went the convict, gave this message, and then went back to his cave again.

But the men of Sída set out in all haste, and came south to Strand church. There they found a man sitting in fetters. He was taken back to the east, and now the thing to do was to behead him, for that had been the sentence passed on him. But when it came to the point the axe would not bite, and the edge was turned at every stroke. Then the men of Sída gave up, and took him on board a ship, meaning to send him to Denmark, because they reckoned that the axes would bite out there. But as soon as they got him aboard he vanished, and there

was nothing there but a standing stone with fetters on it. The sailors were angry with the men of Sída and chased them away with insults, and threw their deadly enemy overboard.

The men from Sída realized now that Eiríkur had made them a laughing-stock, and they wanted to get their revenge. They got a man from the Western Fjords to do it, and he sent Eiríkur a Sending in the form of a cat. Eiríkur was standing at his door when this cat came and tried to leap at his throat and kill him. But the man who had once opened Eiríkur's magic book was standing beside him, and he helped Eiríkur to kill the cat. It is said that Eiríkur himself then sent a ghost against the man from the Western Fjords, which was the death of him.

14. *The Turks Come to Selvogur* One day Eiríkur was standing in one of the merchants' booths at the trading-post at Hafnarfjördur. He looked out of the window, and said to the merchant: 'Well, well, my good fellow! Some unpleasant guests have just arrived at Selvogur.' Then he ran out, jumped on his horse, and rode off east to Selvogur.

What had happened over at Selvogur was that a Turkish ship had anchored off shore, and then a boat makes for the land, and lands at the place called Sigurdarhús Bay. The farmer living at Sigurdarhús, which is east of Strand, was called Jón. Jón went down to meet the foreigners. They seized him and stripped him naked, crowded round him and jostled him, but did not injure him.

Now a gale begins to blow up, so the Turks go back to their boat, and let Jón go free. They row out as far as Strandarsund, and there they heave to for a while. Meanwhile their ship had dragged her anchor and been driven out to sea; then the men in the boat row out after their ship, but they did not catch up with it while they were still in

sight, Jón puts on his clothes again, and looks about him. He sees Eirikur the priest walking up and down the path in the churchyard at Strand. Jón goes to him, and they exchange greetings, and Jón tells Eiríkur about his rough handling.

Eiríkur said: 'You need not have gone out to meet them, my good fellow; you had no reason to have anything to do with them. The only reason they didn't kill you was that they never thought of it till they were at sea again; even then some of them wanted to turn back and kill you, and that made them argue and waste time. Finally they decided to continue on their way, but it is not sure whether they ever reached their ship. Now go home, my good fellow, and never go out to meet foreign strangers again.'

Jón went home, but Eiríkur climbs to the top of the cliff called Svörtubjörg and raises a cairn of stones there, and prophesies that as long as that cairn stands there the Turks will never do any harm in Selvogur again. This cairn is still standing on Svörtubjörg, and it is built of drystone like the walls of a lambing shed, and roofed over with rough slabs of stone; its side wall faces the edge of the cliff, and it is very near the brink. It is overgrown with moss, and looks as if it has been there a long time, though it is such a windswept spot up there— and in fact, no Turks have come to Selvogur since then.

15. *Eiríkur's Debts* The merchants at Hafnarfjördur once sent Eiríkur the priest a summons ordering him to come and pay eighty rixdollars which he had long owed them. At this he was in a quandary, for he had nothing to pay them with. He rode south all the same, and goes to the merchants and asks them how it comes about that he is in debt. They told him to take a look at their book. He took it and looked at it, and said: 'I can't

see this, my good fellow; my sight is so bad. I must go over to the window.'

They let him do this. He turns towards the window with his back to them, bends over the book for a little while, and then says: 'I knew it! I have eighty rixdollars to my credit here, and I owe you nothing at all. Now I'm going to sue you for this lie, unless you give me compensation.'

They look at the account book, and are very startled to see that the figures have shifted round, so that what the priest says is now true. They took fright, and offered him a hundred rixdollars not to sue them. He accepted, but then later on he gave them back half the sum.

16. *The Ghost of Gunna* In the old days, a notable man named Vilhjálmur lived at Kirkjuból. At the same period there lived in a nearby cottage an old woman named Gudrún Önundardóttir, called Gunna for short. She owed money to Vilhjálmur, but she had nothing to pay her debt with. Then Vilhjálmur is said to have taken away her cooking-pot to pay the debt. A little later, Gunna came to his house at Kirkjuból and asked for something to drink. People could see that she had been taken very ill, and so offered her Communion Wine. She asked what the devil she was supposed to do with that, and poured it on the floor, but grabbed a barrel of water and drank so much from it that everyone was amazed, and then went home.

The man who lived with her had rowed out fishing, but when he got home Gunna was lying dead on her bed. A coffin was made for the old bitch, and she was carried to the church at Útskálir. When the coffin-bearers were about half way there, it seemed to them that the coffin grew unnaturally light, but no one took much notice. But while the grave was being prepared, she is supposed to have been seen sitting on some piles of seaweed at

Útskálir, and to have said: 'No need to dig deep; I won't lie there long.' After this, the rumour spread that a place called Skagi was being badly haunted, and all the area around it too.

Later, the Vilhjálmur mentioned already was at a gathering at Útskálir; he stayed till evening came on, and then wanted to go home. Because of the rumour, he was offered an escort, but he was a brave man, and knew a thing or two, and so he refused the escort—but he never got home that night. Next day he was found at Skagi, badly battered, and dead. He was carried to the mortuary shed at Kirkjuból, and two men were fetched to keep watch by his body. Towards midnight they came back into the house, and could not be persuaded to go out to the shed again. Next night, two different men were fetched; they came out again the same night, and could not be got to go back. Then the priest was fetched from Útskálir, and he has said it was the most exhausting night he ever lived through. After this the body was buried without anything particular occurring, but the hauntings increased, and everybody saw Gunna plainly; she would ride the roof-ridges, and kill livestock.

After this, two of the most fearless men were chosen and sent to see the Rev.Eiríkur at Vogsósar, and he was asked to help. He greeted them curtly and refused their request, until they offered him a two-gallon cask of brandy which they had brought. After that, he gave a different answer; he gave them a ball of wool and a slip of paper with two knots in it, and told them to give this to Gunna. They did as they were instructed, and Gunna took it, undid the knots, and looked at it. She is then supposed to have said: 'Satan I did expect, but not this old fellow from Vogsósar; it's no use trying to resist.' She rolled the ball of wool ahead of her and ran after it till she came to the deep hot spring which there is on Reykyanes, and then she ran round and round without stopping till

the ball was quite unwound, and then flung herself into the spring.

17. *The Ling-Fish* One day a dead ling was washed ashore on the beach that belonged to the Selvog men. Then they laid a plot, for they wanted to put Eiríkur's arts to the test, and see whether it might not be possible to hoodwink him. They went to him and told him that one of the old pauper women of his parish had died, and asked him to take her funeral service. He willingly agreed. Then they made a coffin and put the ling in it, laying it out just as one usually lays out a corpse. Then they carried the coffin to the church at Strand, and started digging the grave.

Now Eiríkur the priest arrived, and he intended to speak a few words over the coffin before it was carried out from the church. But no sooner had he uttered a word or two than he turned to the coffin-bearers and said:

'Seed has sprung from salty tide;
A soul I cannot find inside;
'Tis a ling-fish—long, not wide;
No old lady here has died.'

He turned his back on them, and that was the end of the funeral service, and the farmers went back home. But from now on they clearly understood that Eiríkur did not need to be told things in order to know them.

18. *Eiríkur's Death and Funeral* It is said that before his death Eiríkur the priest buried his magic books under a cairn in Kálfsgil, a ravine among the Urdarfellir mountains which lie to the north of Svörtubjörg. Before he died he ordered that his body should be carried into the church at once and laid in its coffin, and that men should

keep watch by his body the first night. They were to light three candles as they shut the coffin lid, and these would not remain long alight; but he told them to take care to relight each one immediately if it went out, so that there would always be one alight— otherwise the evil spirits would take him. But if one candle remained alight all through the first night after his death, then they would have no power over him. This was done, and one or other of the candles was always alight, right until dawn. Eiríkur had also said that if there was any hope that his soul could be saved, then raindrops would fall from a clear sky while his body was being laid in the ground, and it is said that this did happen.

19. *The Burial of Eiríkur the Priest* As soon as Eiríkur the priest came near the point of death, he made arrangements as to who would be his coffin-bearers. He said that there would come a great storm of hail as soon as he was carried out from his house to the church, but he gave orders that once the coffin had been picked up it must not be put down again till it was inside the church, after which, said he, the storm would stop. But then one would see two birds above the church, one white and one black, and they would claw fiercely at each other. He said that if the white bird won and managed to perch on the ridge of the church roof, then they were to bury him in the churchyard; but if the black bird was victorious and perched on the church, then his orders were that he should simply be laid under a cairn outside the churchyard, for in that case there would be no hope for him. All this turned out to be true when Eiríkur died, both about the storm and about the birds, and the white one was victorious over the black, and so Eiríkur was buried inside the churchyard.

VI. LOFTUR THE MAGICIAN

1. *Bishop Gottskálk's Book* Bishop Gottskálk the Cruel was the greatest wizard of his day; he gathered together all the black spells, which had never been used since the heathen times, and wrote them all down in a magic book called Red Skin. It was written in gold letters, and looked most magnificent in every way; it was written in runes, like other books of spells. The Bishop grudged that this book should pass to anyone else after his time, and therefore he had it buried with him, and he taught nobody all his lore.

2. *Loftur the Magician* Two hundred years after Bishop Gottskálk's time, there was a scholar in the Cathedral School at Hólar named Loftur, who spent all his time studying magic, and who made the other boys take to practising it with him, even though they only got as far as some elementary rigmaroles. Loftur incited his fellow-students to play magical pranks on other people, taking the lead in these himself. Thus he once went home to his parents' house for his Christmas leave, and took a servant maid in the bishop's residence for the journey; he shod her with horse-shoes, placed a bridle on her, and so by his magic rode her all the way there and back. For a long time afterwards she was bedridden from sores and exhaustion, but as long as Loftur lived she could tell no one what had happened to her.

On another occasion Loftur got a maidservant with child, and then killed the mother of his child by sorcery. He caused a wall to open up in front of her as she was coming down a passage on her way to the kitchen— for one of her duties was to carry food-bowls to and from the kitchen, for which she would use a kind of tray known at the

time as an 'ash-float'. She stepped into the opening that had appeared, but because she then became frightened and hesitated, the enchantment worked and the wall closed round her. A long time afterwards, when that wall was pulled down, a woman's skeleton was found in it, standing upright, with a pile of bowls in her arms and the bones of an unborn child in her womb-space.

The Rev.Thorleifur Skaftason, who was the Rural Dean and the Cathedral Vicar at the time, rebuked Loftur for his ungodliness, but Loftur did not mend his ways— indeed, Loftur now began to attempt to harm the Dean, though, because of the Rev.Thorleifur's piety and wisdom, he was unable to hurt him, for nothing evil could touch him. Thus once, when the Dean was on his way to church and had to cross the Hjaltadal River when it was in full spate during the spring thaws, his horse took fright in mid-stream and stalled, whereupon he seized his bag with his cassock in it, got off the horse and waded ashore. He took no harm from this, and was able to officiate later in the day. The following verse was composed about this incident:

On his own two feet he came
(Such news is a bad shock!),
Came to Hólar home again,
Carrying his cassock.

Loftur did not let up till he had learned everything there was in the magicians' manual called Grey Skin, and knew it thoroughly; he then made enquiries from other magicians, but no one knew more than he did. He now grew so sour and evil in temper that all the other boys in the school were frightened of him and dared not oppose anything he wanted, however much they might shrink from it.

One day in early winter Loftur spoke to a boy whom he knew to be courageous and asked him to help him raise all the ancient bishops of the see from the dead. The other hedged, at which Loftur

threatened to kill him, and so the lad asked how he could possibly help him, as he knew no magic. Loftur replied that he need only stand motionless in the bell-tower with his hand on the bell-rope, and stare steadily at him until he gave him a signal with his hand, and then ring the bell straight away.

'I,' said Loftur, 'will now explain my plan to you. Those who have learned as much magic as I have can only use it for evil, and must all be lost whenever they die. But if a man knows enough, then the Devil will have no power over him, but must serve without pay as he served Sæmundur the Wise, and whoever knows as much as that is also his own master, free to use his arts for any purpose he wishes. It is not possible to attain to this degree of knowledge nowadays, since the Black School closed down, and Gottskálk the Cruel had his book Red Skin buried with him. That is why I want to raise him up and force him by spells to let me have Red Skin. But the old bishops will all rise with him, for they will not be able to resist such powerful enchantment as well as Gottskálk, so I will make them tell me all the sorcery they knew in their lifetimes— that is no trouble to me, as I can tell by their faces whether they knew magic or not. I cannot touch the later bishops, because they were all buried with the Bible on their breasts. Serve me well and do as I bid you, ring neither too soon nor too late, because my life and my eternal welfare both depend on it, and I will reward you so well that no man shall be your superior.'

They agreed on this, and rose up soon after bedtime and stole out into the cathedral. The moon was shining, and the church was bright inside; the other boy stopped in the bell-tower, while Loftur went into the pulpit and began to conjure. Shortly afterwards, a man rose through the floor; his expression was mild, but serious, and he wore a

crown, and the boy felt sure that this must have been the first Bishop of Hólar.

He said to Loftur: 'Cease, miserable man, while there is time, for my brother Gvendur's prayers will weigh heavily against you if you disturb him.'

Loftur took no notice, but went on conjuring. Then one by one all the ancient bishops rose up from their graves, all in albs, with pectoral crosses, and carrying croziers; they all spoke briefly to Loftur, though the tale does not record what they said. Three of them wore crowns, the first, the last and the middle one; none of them secretly possessed any magic lore.

Still Gottskálk resisted, and Loftur now began to conjure in earnest, addressing his incantations to him alone. He turned the penitential psalms of David to the Devil's name, and made a confession of all the good he had ever done as if it were a sin. The three crowned bishops stood now at the end of the sanctuary farthest from him with uplifted hands, their faces turned sternly towards him, while the others looked away from him and at them. Then a tremendous rumbling was heard, and a man rose up through the floor with his crozier in his left hand and a red book under his right arm; he wore no pectoral cross. He gave the other bishops an unfriendly glance, and then turned and grinned at Loftur, who was now conjuring with all his might.

Gottskálk moved a little closer, and said sarcastically: 'Well sung, son, and better than I expected, but you won't get my Red Skin.'

At this Loftur fell into a berserk fury, and conjured as if all he had done till then was nothing. He recited the Lord's Prayer to the Devil, and gave the blessing in the Devil's name, till the whole church shook and rocked as if in an earthquake. The other boy felt that Gottskálk edged nearer to Loftur, and unwillingly reached a corner of the book out to him. Up to then he had

been frightened, but now he shook with fear and everything went black in front of his eyes, but it seemed to him that the bishop held up the book and than Loftur put out his hand to take it. At this point he thought Loftur gave him the signal, and he pulled the bell-rope— and at once all the dead sank down through the floor, with a great rushing sound.

Loftur stood for a moment in the pulpit as if paralyzed, with his head in his hands, and then he staggered down and came to his comrade, sighed, and said: 'This went worse than I intended, but I don't blame you. I could well have waited for the dawn, when he would have had to give the book up, and would have laid it on the pulpit himself for me to take, since he would not have paid for it by being kept out of his grave, nor would the other bishops have allowed him to do so. But he won the contest between us, because when I saw the book and heard his mockery I went mad and thought I could get it at once by force of conjurations; I came to my senses when, if I had chanted just one verse more, it would have sunk the whole cathedral into the ground, which was what he intended. In that moment I saw the faces of the crowned bishops, and so stumbled, but I knew that you would turn faint and grasp the bell-rope to sound the bell, while the book was so close to me that I felt I could grasp it. As it was, I touched one corner, and I really did think I had got a grip on it and would never drop it! But what must be, must be, and now my salvation is lost for ever— and your reward too. We must both keep quiet about it.'

After this, Loftur was very silent, and his mind grew so troubled that he could not bear being alone, and lights had to be lit for him as soon as it grew dark. He took to muttering to himself: 'On the Sunday in mid-Lent I shall be in Hell and its torments.' He was therefore counselled to flee to the priest at Stadarstadur on Snæfellsnes, who

was an elderly man, a man of powerful faith and an excellent cleric; all those who were out of their minds because of magical assaults recovered through his ministry if he laid his hands on them. Loftur sought refuge with him, and the priest had pity on him and never let him leave him by night or day, indoors or out. Loftur now recovered considerably, but the priest was always afraid for him, and was particularly distressed because Loftur would never pray with him; nevertheless, when he visited the sick or the tempted, Loftur went with him and was present at his ministrations. This happened often, and the priest would never leave home without taking his robes, the Bread and Wine, and the chalice and paten with him.

So time passed, till it came to the Saturday before Refreshment Sunday. That day Loftur was ill, and the priest sat by his bed and comforted him with Christian conversation. Shortly before dawn a messenger came to him from a friend in the parish who was near to death, and asked the priest to come and bring him the Holy Sacrament, so that he could make a Christian end. The priest neither could nor would refuse, and asked Loftur if he would accompany him, but Loftur said he could scarcely move for weakness and pains. The priest said he would be safe enough if he did not go out of doors while he was away, and Loftur promised. The priest then embraced him, blessed him, knelt down in the doorway of the parsonage and prayed, and made the sign of the Cross in it. People heard him murmur: 'God alone knows whether this man can be saved, or whether there are not more powerful prayers than mine working against him.' After this he went and saw the dying man, ministered to him and was present at his death; thereafter he hurried out and rode home in haste, which was not his custom on such occasions.

As soon as the priest had gone, Loftur began to feel better. As the weather was excellent, he in-

sisted on going out. The men of the household were away fishing, and at home there were only women and children who were incapable of stopping him, so he walked to another farm where there lived an elderly farmer who was rather unpopular. This man had long since given up fishing, but Loftur persuaded him to set a small rowing-boat afloat and to go a little way out from the shore to run a line into the sea for amusement, and the farmer agreed. There was a dead calm all day, but the boat was never seen again, and it was thought most strange that not so much as the blade of an oar ever floated ashore from it. A man said that he had observed from the shore how a grey, hairy hand came up out of the sea as the boat cleared the inshore shallows, took hold of the stern where Loftur was sitting, and dragged the whole thing, men and boat, down into the depths.

VII. THE REV.SNORRI OF HÚSAFELL

1. *Snorri and the Men of Hornstrandir* It is said that the Rev.Snorri of Húsafell was a man of many arts, and had mastered them even in his schooldays. His fellow pupils envied him for his strength and his skill in wrestling and his other accomplishments; on one occasion they attacked him unfairly, and managed to push him over a cliff into the Hvítá River. But the same evening he walked back into the school; the boys were terrified, thinking it was his ghost returning, but he just answered jokingly by thanking them for their kind attentions.

He was chosen to be priest at Stad in Adalvík because the farmers out there in the northwest were all magicians, and used to give their parish priests a rough time if they rebuked them for their wizardry. Some of these farmers were such heathens that never took any notice of the church and the services; they used to gather on the cliff-top called Hornbjörg once a year, and there absolve one another of their sins. Their formula for confession was: 'I'm just as I used to be, and no better.' Many would not even let their bodies be brought into the church when they were dead, or have a funeral service sung for them. If their priests complained, they killed them by magic, so very few priests prospered there for long.

As soon as the Rev.Snorri arrived in the northwest, he set about reforming the habits of these farmers, but they did not take it kindly. They killed his cattle, and attacked him himself. But as far as manly arts and courage was concerned, they were always inferior to him, and indeed he often played tricks on his enemies, such as capsizing their boats and then saving their lives, or keeping them sitting motionless and helpless. He overcame all the ghosts they sent to attack him,

till in the end they ran short of ghosts to send.

There was one man among his adversaries who was the worst of them. One day this particular farmer was at work down by the shore in front of his farm, and so was Snorri the priest. The farmer carved some runes on a stick, and the nature of them was such that whoever read them would go blind; then he caused this stick to float ashore just where the priest was standing. The priest was not on his guard against mischief of this sort, and read the runes, and went blind; but then he called upon his powers as a poet, and composed a verse which rhymed away his blindness. Next, he whittled off all the runes from the stick and flung it back into the sea, saying: 'Go back to your master, and if he tries again to turn you to an evil use, then be the death of him.' The farmer soon saw the stick, picked it up, and decided that this time he would cut such runes on it as would utterly destroy the priest. But the knife slipped on the stick and plunged deep in the farmer's own breast, and that was the death of him.

In the end, however, when some years had gone by, the Rev.Snorri left the West Fjords, chiefly because it went against the grain for him to be forced to practice wizardry himself, for indeed no spell ever took effect on him after that one. The people of Hornstrandir missed him greatly, and they treated their priests far better afterwards.

2. *The Ghost who was Only Half Dead* The men of Hornstrandir did not give up playing their tricks on the Rev.Snorri after he had moved to the south. Once, towards dusk on Christmas Eve, Snorri was sitting in his usual seat in the main room at Húsafell, but as the daylight began to fail, he gave orders that his Mass vestments should be brought from the church, and then that lamps should be lit and the whole room illuminated till

there was no shadow anywhere. When this had been done, the priest arranged the table just like an altar, put candles on it, and robed himself in all his vestments— cassock, alb and chasuble. Next, he laid the paten and the Bread on the table, and the chalice too, and poured consecrated Wine into the chalice, just as if he were about to administer the Sacrament; then he seated himself in a chair by the table, facing the door.

No sooner had the priest completed these arrangements, and darkness had fallen, than there came a knock at the outer door. Someone went to open it, but could see nobody, and came in again. Shortly afterwards there came another knock, and this time no one wanted to be the one to go to the door, for they all maintained that something uncanny was going on. Then the Rev.Snorri ordered his daughter to go to the door, but she was reluctant.

'Go all the same,' said the priest, 'it won't harm you.'

So now Gudný went to the door, but saw no one; she had a good look round the farm, but it was the same everywhere, and she saw nothing at all. So she came back into the room and explained how things were. Then once again there came a knock, and the priest ordered Gudný to go to the door again, but she absolutely refused.

'Go all the same,' said he, 'and take a lamp with you. Open the door wide, then quickly jump behind it with your lamp, and call out,"If there's anyone there who wants to see the Rev.Snorri, will he come in, please?"'

So Gudný went and opened the house door, hid behind it, and called out as she had been told; there rushed past her into the house a man dressed in oilskins, all wet from the sea. He ran straight ahead till he came into the main room and saw the Rev.Snorri.

'What are you up to?' the Rev.Snorri asked the

man.

'I've got to find the Rev.Snorri,' he answered.

'What do you want with him?' asked the priest.

'I've got to kill him,' answered the man.

'Who sent you?' asked the priest.

'The men of Hornstrandir,' he answered.

'Is it long since you set out from home?'

'I set out earlier today, just as dusk was falling.'

'How did you travel, to get here so quickly?'

'First I flew, then I leaped, and once I had reached your farm here, I did no more than walk,' answered the man.

'Why are you so wet with sea-water?' asked the priest.

'Because I was drowned this evening in the surf,' answered the ghost. 'They put magic strength in me while I was still warm, and sent me here to kill you.'

'Were you quite dead when they put this strength in you?' asked the priest.

'There was still a spark of life in my breast,' replied the ghost.

'In that case, do you wish me to give you the Last Sacrament before you die?' asked the priest.

'I do indeed wish it,' answered the ghost.

Then the priest made his daughter Gudný help the man out of his oilskins, lay him on his bed, and get him warm, after which he gave him the Sacrament. When all was done, the man fell off the bed, and he was dead. He was buried in the churchyard at Húsafell, and it is not said that the men of Hornstrandir ever tried to play tricks on the Rev.Snorri again.

There are various other stories which go to show that the Rev.Snorri knew a good deal about magic, but his daughter Gudný would never let anyone say that her father had been a magician, for she said he had overpowered ghosts and done various other strange things simply by the power of God.

3. *The Spectre* Tómas, the father of the Rev. Páll at Knappstadir in the Stífla district, used in his younger days to leave Skagafjördur every autumn and go south, and come back north in the spring. When on these journeys he would often stay the night at Húsafell, and he and the Rev.Snorri were very good friends. One spring when Tómas was on his way north he stayed at Húsafell as usual, and the conversation turned to ghosts and hauntings. Tómas maintained that there were no such things.

'There are,' said Snorri, 'and you'd think differently if there was a ghost on the road in front of you.'

'I'd complete my journey in spite of him,' answered Tómas.

Now Tómas continued on his way to the north country, and nothing particular happened.

Next autumn he headed south again, and reached Húsafell late one evening. Just as he was about to ride up the path past the smithy to the main door, a white spectre came towards him and barred his way. Then Tómas turned his horse round by the smithy, made a detour behind it, and took the narrow passage-way between the smithy and the farmhouse. The spectre was standing before him in the passage, and Tómas had to turn back. So now he went all the way round the south side of the farm, approached the path from the southern end, and thought he would reach the door by going up the path between the house and the churchyard. There stood the spectre, waving its arms at him and barring the way to the house. Tómas saw things could not go on like that much longer, so what he did was this: he set his back firmly against the wall of the house, opened his arms wide and stretched them out towards the spectre, and in this attitude worked his way sideways along the wall right up to the door of the farm. The spectre was facing him all the time and waving its arms at him, but it

never actually attacked him, and did not prevent him reaching the door. So now Tómas got inside, and went into the main room, where the Rev.Snorri was sitting, and Tómas greeted him.

'Didn't you find him rather aggressive, the fellow out there?' asked the priest.

'I completed my journey,' answered Tómas. 'I knew you were having one of your jokes.'

The priest had sent the spectre to test Tómas's courage, and he thought Tómas had come out of it very well.

4. *Snorri Fetches Home his Sheep* One autumn at Húsafell it happened that all the sheep were missing at the autumn round-up, and though they were searched for, they were not found. Snorri the priest said the search should be called off, for the sheep must have got somewhere where it would not be easy to find them. Some time later he had his horse saddled and rode away, heading eastwards, straight for the glacier. He refused to take anyone with him. He was away all day, and late that evening he returned, and he had the whole flock with him. He did not say much about his expedition, only that he would not advise any friend of his— or any enemy either, come to that— to go where he had gone; but that all the same they handed over his sheep to him in the end, and set him back on his right path again. People believed that he must have gone eastwards into the heart of the glacier, to the place called Jökulkrókur, and must have encountered outlaws there, for such men have the power to steal away one's sheep or to let them go free again.

5. *The Death of Snorri* The Rev.Snorri grew very old. On his death-bed he repented whole-heartedly of his use of black magic in his younger days, and

feared greatly for the fate of his soul. Accordingly, he asked his daughter Gudrún, who was as courageous as himself, to watch over his body during the three nights it lay on the bier, and to put three candles on his coffin every night and light them. If any of them went out she was to relight it immediately, for if all three of them were to be extinguished simultaneously, his soul would be lost for ever. His daughter obeyed him, and kept constant watch all these nights. On the first night she was barely able to keep one candle alight at any time, but on the second two burned more or less constantly, while on the third all three burned brightly throughout the night. By this Gudrún knew that her father's soul was saved.

NOTES TO THE INTRODUCTION

THIS INTRODUCTION IS abridged and adapted from B.S.Benedikz, 'The Master-magicians in Icelandic Folk-legend', *Durham University Journal*, N.S. 26, 3 (1964) 22-34, and appears by kind permission of the Editor of that journal.

1) A major study of the Icelandic folktale, E.Ó. Sveinsson, *Um íslenzkar þjóðsögur* (Reykjavík 1940) deals in detail with this class of story on pp. 171-97; a revised edition in English by the author, in collaboration with B.S.Benedikz and J.Simpson, is almost complete.

2) For a masterly study of all the factual and legendary evidence concerning Sæmundur, see the *Vita Sæmundi multiscii* by Árni Magnússon, printed in the *Edda antiquior...* (Hafniae, 1787-1828) I, i-xxviii, and also in *Árni Magnússons Levned og Skrifter*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (København 1930) 89-108.

3) For a rare instance of how such a dramatic tale can exert a powerful creative influence on a modern author, see G.Magnússon, *Kvaeðabók* (Reykjavík 1922) 90-110, 'Jón Trausti'.

4) Halldórsson, J., *Skólameistarasögur* (Reykjavík 1916-18) 260-63.

5) Nielsson, S., *Prestatal og prófasta á Íslandi* (2nd. ed., Reykjavík 1949-51) 94-95.

6) *Annales Islandiae... 1400-1800* (Reykjavík, 1922-) II, 397 and IV, 330.

7) Letter in the National Archives, Reykjavík, kindly communicated to B.S.Benedikz by Dr.Jónas Kristjánsson, now director of the Manuscripts Institute, Reykjavík.

8) Þorsteinsson, H., 'Galdra-Loftur', *Ísafold* 62 (1915) nos.3 and 5; reprinted in *Huld*, 2nd. ed.

(Reykjavík 1936) 214-32.

9) This tale was the source of Jóhann Sigurjónsson's masterly play *Ønsket* (København 1917), known in Icelandic as *Galdra-Loftur* and printed in *Rit* (Reykjavík 1940-42) II, 7-78. In English it has appeared as *Loftur*, trsl. J.I.Young and E.Arkwright (Reading 1939) and as *The Wish*, trsl. B.S. Benedikz (Durham 1963). There is also an American translation (London, Wisconsin U.P. 1967), but this is very misleading and undramatic in quality.

10) Thomsen, G., 'Snorratak', *Ljóðmæli* (Reykjavík 1934) I, 61-62.

11) For a summary of the available biographical information, see S.J.Þorsteinsson, *Upphaf leiklistar á Íslandi* (Reykjavík 1943) 12-19; P.E.Ólason, *Íslenzkar Æviskrár* (Reykjavík 1941-52) IV, 300-1; J.Halldórsson, *Skólameistarasögur* (Reykjavík 1916-18) 300-12. There is also a biographical article by Sighvatur Grímsson in *Merkir Íslendingar* (Reykjavík 1962) N.S. I, 61-103, but this is as much folklore as fact. Dr.Jónas Kristjánsson has also communicated to B.S.Benedikz a number of unpublished letters and other references by notable contemporaries such as Bishop Harboe and Ólafur Gíslason and Sveinn Pálsson the naturalist and physician, all of whom speak highly of his piety, learning and ability.

12) The text of séra Jón's apologia, the *Píslarsaga*, was edited by S.Blondäl (København 1914). Two excellent studies on it are found in O.Davíðsson, *Galdrur og galdramál á Íslandi* (Reykjavík 1940-43) 151-229, and S.Nordal, *Trúarlíf séra Jóns Magnússonar* (Reykjavík 1941).

13) E.Ó.Sveinsson, *Um íslenzkar þjóðsögur* (Reykjavík 1940) 191-97. There is a further discussion of séra Skúli, the prince of Icelandic storytellers, in S.Nordal (ed.) *Sagnakver séra Skúla Gíslasonar* (Reykjavík 1946).

14) We can see one powerful example of the obsessive influence of one of these great wizards on a distinguished modern writer. Séra Snorri appears to have exerted a great fascination on Halldór Laxness, who brings him into his novel *Íslandsklukkan* (Reykjavík 1943-45) with immense effect; he also takes up a whole chapter of his semi-autobiographical novel *Brekkukotsannáll* (Reykjavík 1957; in English, *The Fish Can Sing*, trsl. M.Magnússon, London 1962) with a folk-biography of the wizard. There are also unmistakeable touches of Snorri's character in at least one of Halldór Laxness's later novels, *Kristnihald undir Jökli* (Reykjavík 1968), although séra Jón Prímus lacks both the stature and the memorability of the greater creations. Apart from his magnificent gallop in *Konan í Hvanndalabjörgum* (see n.3 above), Hálfdan does not appear in modern literature. More surprisingly, no one has thought of using Eiríkur, Þormóður or Halla as characters in recent fiction, poetry or drama; possibly this is because the dry, caustic wit woven into the tales frightens off the present generation of writers.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

1. Árnason, Jón, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og Aefintýri*, 2nd. edition by Árni Böðvarsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavik 1954-61, six vols.) I 469-70. References throughout will be to this edition of Jón Árnason's work, hereafter abbreviated as J.Á.

This is one of the earliest folktales about Sæmundur, being taken from a manuscript compiled by Árni Magnússon from accounts by three informants, Bishop Björn Þorleifsson (d.1710), Captain Magnús Arason (d.1728), and Halldór Þorbergsson (d.1711). The story has much in common with an episode in the thirteenth-century life of Saint Jón Ögmundsson (Bishop of Hólar 1106-21) telling how the saint saved Sæmundur from an evil astrologer, his master, and how Sæmundur baffled pursuit by filling his shoes first with water and then with blood, thus making the astrologer think he was dead (*Jóns saga helga*, chs.15-16; trsl. Simpson, J., *The Northmen Talk*, London 1965, 70-73). Later folktale versions of Sæmundur's escape from the Black School omit the saintly bishop and give credit to Sæmundur alone (J.A. I 475-8); in some the trick of the shoes recurs, in others he tricks the Devil into seizing his cloak or his shadow. All are variants of the international migratory legend ML 3000 'Escape from the Black School', British examples of which are particularly common in Scotland, where it is told of Michael Scot and various lairds and noblemen reputed to be wizards. Sæmundur's trick at the bank of the stream is parallelled in a legend about Gerbert (Pope Sylvester II), whom William of Malmesbury and others represented as a magician; Gerbert, fleeing from an Arabian astrologer and sorcerer from whom he had stolen a book, suspended himself under a bridge in such a way that he touched neither land nor water, thus baffling pursuit. This legend probably was an influence in the early

stages of the growth of stories about Sæmundur.

For the life of Sæmundur (1056-1133), an important figure in Icelandic history, see the works cited in n.2 to the Introduction, and also Hermansson, H., *Sæmund Sigfússon and the Oddaverjar* (Ithaca 1932), and Turville-Petre, E.O.G., *The Origins of Icelandic Literature* (Oxford 1953) 81-7.

2. J.Á. I 470; sources as for no.1. Compare no.13 below.

3. J.Á. I 470-1; sources as for no.1. This story is further elaborated in a nineteenth-century version (J.Á. I 482); there is also a variant with Hálfdan of Fell as the hero.

4. J.Á. I 471; source as for no.1. The word *sending* literally means 'gift, present', but in tales of sorcery it always refers to a malignant ghost raised by conjuring a corpse from its grave (or at least by using a bone or other material object), and sent to destroy an enemy; cf. ch.IV no.1 and ch.VII no.2. These ghosts can be magically reduced in size and enclosed in bottles or bones; see Simpson, J., *Icelandic Folktales and Legends* (London 1972) 149-60.

5. J.Á. I 471-2; source as for no.1. For a later variant attached to a different locality, see J.Á. I 479-80.

6. J.Á. I 472; source as for no.1. There are numerous international tales of the Devil as bridge-builder, and the trick by which he is cheated of his reward, which is often the same as here; one example is the legend of the Devil's Bridge at Kirkby Lonsdale, Westmoreland.

7. J.Á. I 473; source as for no.1. For a more elaborate tale in which a boy is saved from a pact with the Devil, see no.15 below; there is also a variant (J.Á. III 491-2) where the Devil is foiled by challenging him to play see-saw and hiding con-

secrated earth under his end of the see-saw, so that he cannot bear to touch the ground.

8. J.Á. I 473-4; source as for no.1. This too has a later version (J.Á. I 481), and also a variant with Hálfdan as hero (J.Á. I 500).

9. J.Á. I 474; source as for no.1. The X-ray vision described here was regarded as a preternatural power akin to Second Sight, and several magicians were credited with it; cf. ch.V no.17.

10. J.Á. 478; collected by séra Magnús Grímsson from stories current in Borgarfjörður. The tale was already known in Árni Magnússon's time, for he alludes to it (J.Á. I 474); for a variant in which Sæmundur and his daughter ride to a feast on the Devil's back, see J.Á. I 485. The 'history' in the present tale is quite wrong; Sæmundur (d.1133) was not a contemporary of Hálfdan (d.1568), for whom see ch.III. In Sæmundur's time Iceland was a republic, where the King of Norway would have no say in the appointment of priests, and in any case Sæmundur held the living of Oddi in his own right. For another story about the Devil's fear of the Psalter, see ch.III no.5.

11. J.Á. I 478-9, from séra Þorsteinn Þórarinsson; a tale from the Múlasýsla district. Magical hay-making is a favourite theme in Icelandic legends (cf. ch.II no.2 and ch.III no.2), which is not surprising in view of the importance of the crop. The old woman's use of her hood recalls several accounts of witches' spells in medieval sagas; see Davidson, H.R.E., 'Hostile magic in the Icelandic sagas', *The Witch Figure*, ed. V.Newall (London 1973) 23, 24, 36, 38.

12. J.Á. I 479; source as for no.10.

13. J.Á. I 479; collected by séra Magnús Grímsson from a printer, Helgi Helgason. Though this tale is related to no.2 above, it is nearer to the in-

ternational migratory legend ML 3020 'Inexperienced use of the Black Book', a perfect example of which will be found in ch.V no.3.

14. J.Á. I 481; source as for no.10. The idea of a Devil collecting and feeding on human sins was widespread in medieval preachers' exemplary tales; see Tubach, F.C., *Index Exemplorum* (Helsinki 1969). For a similar instance of a humorous *exemplum* adopted into Icelandic folklore, see Simpson, J., *Icelandic Folktales and Legends* (London 1972) 192-4.

15. J.Á. I 483-4; collected in 1848 from a schoolboy, Markús Gíslason, in Múlasýsla. This story shows Sæmundur as priest rather than magician, which is historically true, but also reflects a frequent tendency in these legends to confuse the religious authority of the priesthood with less creditable forms of supernatural power.

The significance of May 3, the Feast of the Finding of the Holy Cross, was that it was the date on which servants changing jobs would move to their new master's home; the boy has pledged himself to be the Devil's servant.

16. J.Á. I 485-6; from Dr Hallgrímur Schleving. Tales of such portents at the deaths of magicians are numerous; cf. ch.III no.6, ch.V nos.18 and 19, ch.VII no.5; also J.Á. I 488-9. They dramatize an ambivalent attitude towards magic, which is seen as intrinsically evil, but pardonable if used for good ends. The mosquitoes here are equated with demons; the notion that flies and mosquitoes are evil occurs elsewhere in Icelandic lore, and might be connected with the title of the demon Beelzebub, 'Lord of the Flies'.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. J.Á. I 494; from séra Þorkell Eyjólfsson. It is unusual for a woman to take the leading role in these legends; the only other notable example is Dísa of Stokkseyrar (J.Á. I 566-8), whose magic is of the black variety. Halla was not historically Sæmundur's sister; she lived early in the fifteenth century, whereas he died in 1133. Her alleged sister Elín probably never existed at all but was evolved from the place-name Elínarhöfði. The gifts Halla is traditionally said to have given to Álftanes church were the fishing-rights at a certain skerry, and also a magic cooking-pot, long since lost; it was said this pot would supply food for every priest who came to say Mass at Álftanes, provided it was never removed; but a greedy priest stole it, and it broke at once (J.Á. I 497).

2. J.Á. I 495; source as for no.1. There is also a tale telling how Halla and Sæmundur competed in haymaking, and Halla sent the haycocks home by waving her apron at them (J.Á. I 495); cf. above, ch.I no.11. The use of human bones is frequent in Icelandic lore; witches' milk-sucking familiars were made from human ribs— see Simpson, J., *Icelandic folktales and Legends* (London 1972) 171-4.

3. J.Á. I 496-7; source as for no.1. A close variant has Dísa of Stokkseyrar as heroine (J.Á. I 566). Such tales reflect the Icelanders' hate for the Danes whose monopoly trading reduced them to poverty; to outwit the exploiters would be thought fair play; cf. ch.V no.15.

4. J.Á. III 539; from Brynjólfur of Minnanúpur.

5. J.Á. III 541; from Jón Sigurðsson of Gautland. The motif of green vegetables brought from the Underworld in midwinter by a woman of supernatural powers occurs already in the early thirteenth century in the legend of the hero Hadding, as told by

Saxo Grammaticus (*Gesta Danorum*, Book I). The name of the lake, Grœnavatn, has no doubt been the decisive factor in attracting to it this tale concerning *green* shoots.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. J.Á. I 500 and 689; from séra Magnús Grímsson and Jón Sigurðsson of Gautland. Hálfdan was not in fact contemporary with Sæmundur, for he died at an advanced age in 1568; the stories told about him, however, are often closely modelled on those about Sæmundur, and this similarity may have led to the idea that they were fellow-students.

2. J.Á. I 500-1; collected by séra Magnús Grímsson in 1845 from a schoolboy. Variants of the first part of the tale can be found in J.Á. III 536-7 and Ólafur Davíðsson, *Þjóðsögur* (Akueyri 1945) II 109. Hálfdan's remark about the spindle-whorl is a proverb which alludes to a folktale about a greedy woman demanding ever-increasing compensation for a spindle-whorl stolen from her by an elf; see Simpson, J., *Icelandic Folktales and Legends* (London 1972) 60-3. The second part of the tale is a variant of one told of Sæmundur (ch.I no.11); other versions with Hálfdan as hero may be found in J.Á. I 503-4, III 530-1, 532, and in Ólafur Davíðsson II 109-10.

3. J.Á. I 501-2; from Jón Sigurðsson of Gautland; four variants are given in J.Á. III 533-5. It was widely believed that trolls and elves might abduct people into the mountains, where they would rapidly lose all human semblance; even those who escaped in time would have an indelible blueish-black mark on their faces (J.Á. I 45-56, 178-84). Attempts to rescue them rarely succeeded, though magicians might be called upon to try; in one such tale a child rescued alive from elves grows up an idiot, while in others only the child's corpse can be found (J.Á. I 595-6, III 570 and 586-8). There is a very close parallel to the present tale with elves, not trolls, as the villains; see J.Á. I 55-6, trsl. in Powell, G. and Magnússon, E., *Icelandic Legends* (London 1864) 44-6, and in Craigie, W.,

Scandinavian Folklore (London 1896) 150-1. For a similar tale with a happy ending see below, ch.V no.12.

The curse on Málmey is mentioned by others among J.Á.'s informants, one of whom specifies that any woman living more than nineteen years on the island would vanish into a particular mountain. Twenty years is often a significant time-unit in Icelandic tales.

The horse that can ride over water is the *nykur*, the water-horse or kelpie of Icelandic lore, which can be temporarily tamed by those who know how to bridle him. The *nykur*'s kick which breaks a churchyard wall is a common motif; see J.Á. I 130-1, trsl. Simpson, J., *Icelandic Folktales and Legends* (London 1972) 99-100. Tales of Hálfdan taming a *nykur* were already current in the seventeenth century, as J.Á. mentions in the Introduction to the original edition of his collection.

4. J.Á. I 502-3; source as for no.3; for two other versions see J.Á. III 529-30. Stories showing Hálfdan as the Devil's master are often very like, or even identical with, those about Sæmundur and the Devil; he too makes him lick up the muck he has dumped on the church path (J.Á. I 500), and carry water in a leaking vessel (J.Á. III 536). Ólafur Davíðsson has a version of the present tale (*Þjóðsögur* II 110) involving two groups of demons, the first being ordered to keep the fish dry and the second to soak it thoroughly; neither group succeeds entirely, so Hálfdan's soul is not forfeit to either.

5. J.Á. III 531. Another instance of the power of the Psalter; cf. ch.I no.10 above.

6. J.Á. I 504-5; source as for no.3. There is another anecdote about Hálfdan's death which is even closer to that about Sæmundur's death (ch.I no.16); it mentions a cloud of flies round his deathbed,

and a ray of light appearing at the moment of his passing (J.Á. III 538; cf. Ólafur Davíðsson II 114).

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. J.Á. I 532-5; from Sveinn Ögmundsson and Gísli Konráðsson. Þormóður Eiríksson (c.1688-1741) was a farmer and poet, a gentle and well-liked man, who was believed to have great powers against ghosts and black magic. The present tale is typical of many traditional accounts of feuds between good and evil magicians, and shows how readily Icelanders interpreted illnesses, accidents and madness as the effects of sorcery. Some genealogical details about Þormóður's family have been omitted from the latter part of the tale. It is noteworthy that Þormóður's three enemies are all from the north-west of Iceland, traditionally regarded as the worst part of the country for sorcerers. For other traditions about his encounters with ghosts sent by sorcerers, see J.Á. I 535-7 and III 586-8.

Þormóður's counter-spells have many points of interest. Human skin (like human bones and fat) was thought to have many uses in magic and to be proof against tearing and injury, provided it never touched consecrated earth (J.Á. I 429-31). Standing behind a waterfall may be a relic of pre-Christian rites, for a thirteenth-century Bishop of the Orkneys, Bjarni Kolbeinsson, alludes cryptically to heathens who 'grow wise under waterfalls'. The fox that followed Cousin Jón down the cliff is, so the tale implies, a *stefnivargr*, i.e. a living animal (not a Sending) which is acting on a wizard's orders to harm his enemies (J.Á. I 425, trsl. Simpson, J., *Icelandic Folktales and Legends*, London 1972, 178-80).

The 'Speaking Spirit' which it said Cousin Jón was thought to have at his command was a species of ghost which could be caught and kept in a box, and would tell its master anything he wanted to know (J.Á. I 422, trsl. Simpson, J., *Icelandic Folktales and Legends*, London 1972, 174-5). Jón's

ability to 'see' from Hagi to Látrar is a type of Second Sight; cf. ch.V no.14.

2. J.Á. I 538, from séra Páll Jónsson and Sveinn Ögmundsson. The magic detection and punishment of thieves is a frequent theme in Icelandic tales of magicians (cf. ch.V no.9), for theft was a crime much despised and feared in poverty-ridden communities. Making the stolen sheep bleat inside the thief is a magic trick referred to in the tales of other countries too.

Þormóður's verse given here is a good instance of the verbal ingenuities admired in Iceland; each line contains, in addition to the normal alliteration and end-rhymes, at least one word rhyming with the first syllable of 'Móri'. Such clever devices were thought to increase the magic power of a verse. Þormóður had a great reputation as a *kraftaskáld*, a 'poet of power'; for a group of anecdotes about such men, see J.Á. I 447-57.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1. J.Á. I 543-5; from Brynjólfur of Minnanúpur, from stories current in Selvogur. For details of the life of Eiríkur, see the Introduction, above. The other two boys mentioned, Bogi and Magnús, are probably not historical figures; and anecdotes about rivalry between them have been omitted.

Popular fear and suspicion of 'book-learning' is seen in these tales which allege that students and schoolboys, especially at the two Cathedral Schools of Hólar and Skálholt, engaged in the study of sorcery. Both schools were said to possess manuals of magic, in each case named *Gráskinna*, 'Grey Skin'. That at Hólar was said to be in two parts; the first, in plain runes, contained harmless stuff such as palmistry and tricks for use in wrestling, but the second part, in secret runes, contained evil spells which only wicked men would use (J.Á. I 493). But far more virulent than either of the 'Grey Skin' manuals was 'Red Skin', for which see ch.VI below. It is characteristic of Icelandic tradition that the books are not obtained directly from the Devil, but from the dead, who are thought of as repositories of old heathen lore. The old man's devotion to his cow in the present tale is to be seen as an indication of heathenism, for the pre-Christian Scandinavians were believed by their descendants, quite erroneously, to have worshipped cattle as idols.

A variant of this tale tells how Eiríkur, in adult life, raised a corpse from his own churchyard at Vogsósar and took from him one page of his book, from which he learnt more than all his studies had taught him; had he obtained the whole book, said he, it would have been more than he could bear (J.Á. I 545; cf. no.2 below, and also J.Á. III 499-500).

2. B.S.Benedikz, from Kristín Þórarinsdóttir of Ós in Brieðdalur (d.1938). The story was first pub-

lished in English in *Durham University Journal*, New Series 26:3 (December 1964) 30, and only later in its original language in *Lesbók Morgunblaðsins* (October 1967). There is a similar anecdote in Ólafur Davíðsson, *Þjóðsögur* (Akueyri 1945) II 88-9.

3. J.Á. I 545; source as for no.1. This tale, a fine example of ML 3020 'Inexperienced Use of the Black Book: the Ropes of Sand', has four other variants in Jón Árnason's collection (III 513-14, 520); in three, however, the rash act is not opening a book but opening a bottle in which the Devil is confined in the form of a fly. Compare, too, the story of Sæmundur's whistle, ch.I no.13, above. Setting devils to make sand ropes to keep them busy is a trick known also in Scottish stories about wizards, e.g. Michael Scot, Lord Reay, and Sir Patrick Duncan of Glenorchy; see Swire, O., *The Highlands and their Legends* (London 1963) 119.

4. J.Á. I 546; source as for no.1. There are many tales of Eiríkur testing the courage of would-be pupils by setting them gruesome tasks or causing illusory apparitions to alarm them (J.Á. I 546-8, III 506-7).

5. J.Á. I 548; from séra Magnús Grímsson. Traditions about Eiríkur's kindness have inspired this unusual test.

6. J.Á. I 548-9; source as for no.5. There are many variants of this, one of the most popular tales about Eiríkur (J.Á. I 549, 692; III 511; Ólafur Davíðsson II 93-4). It combines two popular themes, the testing of pupils and the punishing of thieves.

7. J.Á. I 550; source as for no.5. Similarly, some Scottish wizards, e.g. the Laird of Skene and Sir Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun, are said to have crossed a flimsy sheet of ice in a coach and four. It is typical of legends about Eiríkur that his

motive was to reward someone who had been generous to him (cf. J.Á. I 549-52, III 517-18).

8. B.S.Benedikz; source as for no.2.

9. J.Á. I 551; source as for no.5. Punishing thieves was a common activity of magicians, and causing them to stick to the stolen object was the usual method. Thus Eiríkur is said to have kept an old woman stuck to a haystack all night (J.Á. III 518); Jón the Old fixed a thief to the door of his store-shed (J.Á. I 517); Fúsi of Leiruvík made a sack stick to a thief's back till he confessed (J.Á. I 523). Others are said to have forced thieves to walk round and round in circles, or to walk miles through a storm to restore the stolen goods (J.Á. III 566-7, 569-70). All these motifs could be readily parallelled in other lands, including the British Isles.

10. J.Á. III 519; source as for no.5. Four variants may be found in J.Á. III 519-20, and another in Ólafur Davíðsson II 93.

11. J.Á. I 555-6; source as for no.5. Another popular story, of which Jón Árnason's informants gave several more variants (J.Á. I 556, III 504-5, 511-12). The horse is more usually said to have been grey, not brown, this being the regular colour for supernatural horses and cattle in Iceland.

12. J.Á. I 557-8; source as for no.1. A rare instance of someone being rescued safely from mountain trolls; contrast ch.III no.3. It is in keeping with this happier outcome that a glass cage should be mentioned, for this is a motif borrowed from Icelandic fairy tales (*ævintýrar*) which do, of course, have happy endings. Other variants of this story are in J.Á. I 557, 558-9.

13. J.Á. I 559; source as for no.5. In this tale and the two following, Eiríkur uses his arts to outwit the oppressors of the common people: the

representatives of Danish law, the pirates, and the extortionate Danish merchants. In such tales, he displays something of the cool cheek of Robin Hood; this is particularly marked in a variant of the present one (J.Á. III 504-5), where he not only lends the outlaw his skin-and-bone horse to escape on, but later impudently makes a judge compensate him for the loss of a 'stolen' horse.

The 'man from the West Fjords' at the end of the present tale is to be taken as a powerful black magician; that district, the extreme north-west of Iceland, was reputed to be swarming with them.

14. J.Á. I 561-2; source as for no.1. The 'Turks' were Algerian pirates who attacked various places in south-east and south-west Iceland in 1627, and took a large number of captives away into slavery; they also murdered people, including the hymn-writer séra Jón Þorsteinsson. The great magicians were believed to be able to guard against similar dangers by building magic cairns, with suitable incantations, so that the pirate ships would be wrecked, and/or to ensure that no hostile ships would ever land in a particular area again. (J.Á. I 562, 598-9, III 554, 609-10).

Eiríkur's 'seeing' of the pirate ship at the beginning of this tale is an instance of Second Sight, Selvogur being out of sight of Hafnarfjörður; cf. ch.IV no.1.

15. J.Á. I 562; source as for no.1. A legend expressing resentment at oppression and injustice in the form of a wish-fulfilling fantasy; cf. ch.II no.3.

16. J.Á. I 653, from séra S.B.Sivertsen of Útskálir, from traditions current in the district. Vilhjálmur Sigurðsson of Kirkjuból died in 1706, and his wife and son the following year, all three deaths being attributed to Gunna's ghost. Four variants of the tale are in J.Á. III 508-9, and

another is in Ólafur Davíðsson, II 95-6. Laying ghosts was one of the chief benefits a white magician could confer on his community, for they were greatly feared; cf. ch.IV no.1. In another story Eiríkur is said to have banished a ghost into the depths of the volcano Hekla (J.Á. I 564).

17. J.Á. I 564-5; source as for no.5. The same anecdote is told of various other magicians, with an almost identical verse (J.Á. I 516, III 612-13, 621).

18. J.Á. I 565; source as for no.1. For a variant, see Ólafur Davíðsson, II 100. The candles and the few drops of rain, the latter symbolizing God's mercy, make this a particularly attractive rendering of the theme of the portents at a magician's death; cf. ch.III no.6, and ch.VII no.5.

19. J.Á. I 565; source as for no.5. Here, in contrast, the portents are markedly sinister, the storm symbolizing the Devil's power. The conflict of the white bird and the black is an international motif; a raven and a dove fought over the heart of Michael Scot, and over the 'liver and lights' of the English wizard, Jack o' Kent; see Swire, O., *The Highlanders and their Legends* (London 1963) 48, and Leather, E.M., *The Folklore of Herefordshire* (London 1912), 166.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

1. J.Á. I 499; from Skúli Gíslason. Gottskálk Nikulásson was Bishop of Hólar from 1497 to 1520, and was reputed to be the most evil of wizards; see Introduction, above. It has been suggested that the name of his alleged manual of magic, *Rauðskinna*, 'Red Skin', was derived from Bishop Ólafur Rögnvaldsson's unpopular register of church possessions and charges, which, according to Dr Jón Þorkelsson, was bound in red calfskin.

2. J.Á. I 572-5; from Skúli Gíslason and Páll Ólafsson. The core of this powerful tale, the suspicion that students at Hólar and Skálholt were adept in magic, can be seen also in legends about Eiríkur (ch.V nos.1 and 2), and in a story about three unnamed students at Skálholt which much resembles the present tale: the enterprise fails because the bell is rung too soon, and the leader of the group subsequently goes mad (J.Á. III 620).

A version of Loftur's story is also given by Ólafur Davíðsson (II 129-32); it is less dramatic than J.Á.'s, but more realistic. According to this variant, Loftur's death was suicide; he persuaded a servant to take him out rowing, and threw himself overboard. A significant detail is that in the mid-eighteenth century the boys at Hólar used to point out two deep marks on the schoolroom floor which they asserted were Loftur's footprints, marking the spot where he stood and pledged his soul to the Devil. These marks must have done much to keep alive the memory of Loftur's personality, madness and suicide, and to foster the growth of the legend. His death occurred in 1722 or 1723.

The bridling of the maid refers to a belief that sorcerers and witches could ride through the air on people or on objects, by using a magic bridle made from human bones and skin (J.Á. I 426-8; cf. Simpson, J., *Icelandic Folktales and Legends*, London 1972, 180-1).

For the magic manual Grey Skin, see note to ch.V no.1.

Þorleifur Skaftason (1682-1748) was a notable cleric in the diocese of Hólar, who appears in various other folktales as a worthy and popular figure.

The three crowned bishops are St Jón Ögmundsson (1106-21), the first Bishop of Hólar (cf. ch.I no.1); Guðmundur Arason (1203-37), popularly considered a saint, though never officially recognised as such, and credited with miraculous powers; and Jón Arason, the last Catholic bishop, who was executed by King Christian III's governor. When the ghost of St Jón refers to his 'brother Gvendur', he is speaking of Guðmundur, by an affectionate diminutive, and later in the tale it is implied that it is the 'powerful' prayers of the angry Guðmundur which outweigh those of the kindly priest who shelters Loftur, and ensure the latter's damnation.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VII

1. J.A. I 575-6; from Skúli Gíslason. For Snorri's dates and personality, see Introduction above; he lived at Aðalvík, in the extreme northwest of Iceland, from 1741 to 1757.

2. Ólafur Davíðsson, *þjoðsögur* (Akueyri 1945) II 52-4; the variant in J.Á. III 562-3 is less dramatic. For the use of sacramental means to defeat evil, cf. ch.I no.15.

3. Ólafur Davíðsson II 55-6.

4. J.Á. III 566; from Markús Gíslason. A frequent motif in Icelandic folktales is that of a hidden, fertile valley high up among the glaciers, inhabited by bands of outlaws who live there securely, protected by their semi-magical powers. The earliest mention of such a place is in *Grettis saga*, and according to one variant of the present tale (Ó.D. II 59-60) it was in Grettir's own valley, Þórisdalur, that Snorri found his stolen sheep.

5. B.S.Benedikz; see note to ch.V no.2.

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INDEX OF TALE TYPES

FOLKTALES ARE CLASSIFIED on an international system based on their plots, devised by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson in *The Types of the Folktale*, 1961; numbers from this system are preceeded by the letters AT. Some local legends were classified by R.Th.Christiansen in *The Migratory Legends*, 1958; the numbers in this sytem are preceded by the letters ML. It was further developed by K.M.Briggs in *A Dictionary of British Folktales*, 1970-71, whose numbers are followed by an asterisk.

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