

Prose Edda

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FOREWORD

1. In the beginning Almighty God created heaven and earth, and all things that belong to them, and last he made two human beings, from whom the races are descended (Adam and Eve), and their children multiplied and spread over all the world. But in the course of time men became unequal; some were good and right-believing, but many more turned them after the lusts of the world and heeded not God's laws; and for this reason God drowned the world in the flood, and all that was quick in the world, except those who were in the ark with Noah. After the flood of Noah there lived eight men, who inhabited the world, and from them the races are descended; and now, as before, they increased and filled the world, and there were very many men who loved to covet wealth and power, but turned away from obedience to God, and so much did they do this that they would not name God. And who could then tell their sons of the wonderful works of God? So it came to pass that they lost God's name; and in the wide world the man was not to be found who could tell of his Maker. But, nevertheless, God gave them earthly-gifts, wealth and happiness, that should be with them in the world; he also shared wisdom among them, so that they understood all earthly things, and all kinds that might be seen in the air and on the earth. This they thought upon, and wondered at, how it could come to pass that the earth and the beasts and the birds had the same nature in some things but still were unlike in manners.

One evidence of this nature was that the earth might be dug into upon high mountain-peaks and water would spring up there, and it was not necessary to dig deeper for water there than in deep dales; thus, also, in beasts and birds it is no farther to the blood in the head than in the feet. Another proof of this nature is, that every year there grow on the earth grass and flowers, and the same year it falls and withers; thus, also, on beasts and birds do hair and feathers grow and fall off each year. The third nature of the earth is, that when it is opened and dug into, then grass grows on the mould which is uppermost on the earth. Rocks and stones they explained to correspond to the teeth and bones of living things. From these things they judged that the earth must be quick and must have life in some way, and they knew that it was of a wonderfully great age and of a mighty nature. It nourished all that was quick and took to itself all that died. On this account they gave it a name, and numbered their ancestors back to it. This they also learned from their old kinsmen, that when many hundred winters were numbered, the course of the heavenly bodies was uneven; some had a longer course than others. From such things they suspected that some one must be the ruler of the heavenly bodies who could stay their course at his own will, and he must be strong and mighty; and of him they thought that, if he ruled the prime elements, he must also have been before the heavenly bodies, and they saw that, if he ruled the course of the heavenly bodies, he must rule the sunshine, and the dew of the heavens, and the products of the earth that follow them; and thus, also, the winds of the air and therewith the storms of the sea. They knew not where his realm was, but they believed that he ruled over all things on the earth and in the air, over the heavens and the heavenly bodies, the seas and the weather. But in order that these things might be better told and remembered, they gave him the same name with themselves, and this belief has been changed in many ways, as the peoples have been separated and the tongues have been divided.

2. In his old age Noah shared the world with his sons: for Ham he intended the western region, for Japheth the northern region, but for Shem the southern region, with those parts which will hereafter be marked out in the division of the earth into three parts. In the time that the sons of these men were in the world, then increased forthwith the desire for riches and power, from the fact that they knew many crafts that had not been discovered before, and each one was exalted with his own handiwork; and so far did they carry their pride, that the Africans, descended from Ham, harried in that part of the world which the offspring of Shem, their kinsman, inhabited. And when they had conquered them, the world seemed to them too small, and they smithied a tower with tile and stone, which they meant should reach to heaven, on the plain called Sennar. And when this building was so far advanced that it extended above the air, and they were no less eager to continue the work, and when God saw how their pride waxed high, then he sees that he will have to strike it down in some way. And the same God, who is almighty, and who might have struck down all their work in the twinkling of an eye, and made themselves turn into dust, still preferred to frustrate their purpose by making them realize their own littleness, in that none of them should understand what the other talked; and thus no one knew what the other commanded, and one broke what the other wished to build up, until they came to strife among themselves, and therewith was frustrated, in the beginning, their purpose of building a tower. And he who was foremost, hight Zoroaster, he laughed before he wept when he came into the world; but the master-smiths were seventy-two, and so many tongues have spread over the world since the giants were dispersed over the land, and the nations became numerous. In this same place was built the most famous city, which took its name from the tower, and was called Babylon. And when the confusion of tongues had taken place, then increased the names of men and of other things, and this same Zoroaster had many names; and although he understood that his pride was laid low by the said building, still he worked his way unto worldly power, and had himself chosen king over many peoples of the Assyrians. From him arose the error of idolatry; and when he was worshiped he was called Baal; we call him Bel; he also had many other names. But as the names increased in number, so was truth lost; and from this first error every following man worshiped his head-master, beasts or birds, the air and the heavenly bodies, and various lifeless things, until the error at length spread over the whole world; and so carefully did they lose the truth that no one knew his maker, excepting those men alone who spoke the Hebrew tongue,—that which flourished before the building of the tower,—and still they did not lose the bodily endowments that were given them, and therefore they judged of all things with earthly understanding, for spiritual wisdom was not given unto them. They deemed that all things were smithied of some one material.

3. The world was divided into three parts, one from the south, westward to the Mediterranean Sea, which part was called Africa; but the southern portion of this part is hot and scorched by the sun. The second part, from the west and to the north and to the sea, is that called Europe, or Enea. The northern portion of this is cold, so that grass grows not, nor can anyone dwell there. From the north around the east region, and all to the south, that is called Asia. In that part of the world is all beauty and pomp, and wealth of the earth's products, gold and precious stones. There is also the mid-world, and as the earth there is fairer and of a better quality than elsewhere, so are also the people there most richly endowed with all gifts, with wisdom and strength, with beauty and with all knowledge.

4. Near the middle of the world was built the house and inn, the most famous that has been made, which was called Troy, in the land which we call Turkey. This city was built much larger than others, with more skill in many ways, at great expense, and with such means as were at hand. There were twelve kingdoms and one over-king, and many lands and nations belonged to each kingdom; there

were in the city twelve chief languages.⁵ Their chiefs have surpassed all men who have been in the world in all heroic things. No scholar who has ever told of these things has ever disputed this fact, and for this reason, that all rulers of the north region trace their ancestors back thither, and place in the number of the gods all who were rulers of the city. Especially do they place Priamos himself in the stead of Odin; nor must that be called wonderful, for Priamos was sprung from Saturn, him whom the north region for a long time believed to be God himself.

5. This Saturn grew up in that island in Greece which hight Crete. He was greater and stronger and fairer than other men. As in other natural endowments, so he excelled all men in wisdom. He invented many crafts which had not before been discovered. He was also so great in the art of magic that he was certain about things that had not yet come to pass. He found, too, that red thing in the earth from which he smelted gold, and from such things he soon became very mighty. He also foretold harvests and many other secret things, and for such, and many other deeds, he was chosen chief of the island. And when he had ruled it a short time, then there speedily enough became a great abundance of all things. No money circulated excepting gold coins, so plentiful was this metal; and though there was famine in other lands, the crops never failed in Crete, so that people might seek there all the things which they needed to have. And from this and many other secret gifts of power that he had, men believed him to be God, and from him arose another error among the Cretans and Macedonians like the one before mentioned among the Assyrians and Chaldeans from Zoroaster. And when Saturn finds how great strength the people think they have in him, he calls himself God, and says that he rules heaven and earth and all things.

6. Once he went to Greece in a ship, for there was a king's daughter on whom he had set his heart. He won her love in this way, that one day when she was out with her maid-servants, he took upon himself the likeness of a bull, and lay before her in the wood, and so fair was he that the hue of gold was on every hair; and when the king's daughter saw him she patted his lips. He sprang up and threw off the bull's likeness and took her into his arms and bore her to the ship and took her to Crete. But his wife, Juno, found this out, so he turned her (the king's daughter) into the likeness of a heifer and sent her east to the arms of the great river (that is, of the Nile, to the Nile country), and let the thrall, who hight Argulos, take care of her. She was there twelve months before he changed her shape again. Many things did he do like this, or even more wonderful. He had three sons: one hight Jupiter, another Neptune, the third Pluto. They were all men of the greatest accomplishments, and Jupiter was by far the greatest; he was a warrior and won many kingdoms; he was also crafty like his father, and took upon himself the likeness of many animals, and thus he accomplished many things which are impossible for mankind; and on account of this, and other things, he was held in awe by all nations. Therefore Jupiter is put in the place of Thor, since all evil wights fear him.

7. Saturn had built in Crete seventy-two burghs, and when he thought himself firmly established in his kingdom, he shared it with his sons, whom he set up with himself as gods; and to Jupiter he gave the realm of heaven; to Neptune, the realm of the earth, and to Pluto, hell; and this last seemed to him the worst to manage, and therefore he gave to him his dog, the one whom he called Cerberos, to guard hell. This Cerberos, the Greeks say, Herakles dragged out of hell and upon earth. And although Saturn had given the realm of heaven to Jupiter, the latter nevertheless desired to possess the realm of the earth, and so he harried his father's kingdom, and it is said that he had him taken and emasculated, and for such great achievements he declared himself to be god, and the Macedonians say that he had the members taken and cast into the sea, and therefore they believed for ages that therefrom had come a woman; her they called Venus, and numbered among the gods,

and she has in all ages since been called goddess of love, for they believed she was able to turn the hearts of all men and women to love. When Saturn was emasculated by Jupiter, his son, he fled from the east out of Crete and west into Italy. There dwelt at that time such people as did not work, and lived on acorns and grass, and lay in caves or holes in the earth. And when Saturn came there he changed his name and called himself Njord, for the reason that he thought that Jupiter, his son, might afterward seek him out. He was the first there to teach men to plow and plant vineyards. There the soil was good and fresh, and it soon produced heavy crops. He was made chief and thus he got possession of all the realms there and built many burghs.

8. Jupiter, his son, had many sons, from whom races have descended; his son was Dardanos, his son Heriklon, his son Tros, his son Ilos, his son Laomedon, the father of the chief king Priamos. Priamos had many sons; one of them was Hektor, who was the most famous of all men in the world for strength, and stature and accomplishments, and for all manly deeds of a knightly kind; and it is found written that when the Greeks and all the strength of the north and east regions fought with the Trojans, they would never have become victors had not the Greeks invoked the gods; and it is also stated that no human strength would conquer them unless they were betrayed by their own men, which afterward was done. And from their fame men that came after gave themselves titles, and especially was this done by the Romans, who were the most famous in many things after their days; and it is said that, when Rome was built, the Romans adapted their customs and laws as nearly as possible to those of the Trojans, their forefathers. And so much power accompanied these men for many ages after, that when Pompey, a Roman chieftain, harried in the east region, Odin fled out of Asia and hither to the north country, and then he gave to himself and his men their names, and said that Priamos had hight Odin and his queen Frigg, and from this the realm afterward took its name and was called Frigia where the burgh stood. And whether Odin said this of himself out of pride, or that it was wrought by the changing of tongues; nevertheless many wise men have regarded it a true saying, and for a long time after every man who was a great chieftain followed his example.

9. A king in Troy hight Munon or Mennon, his wife was a daughter of the head-king Priamos and hight Troan; they had a son who hight Tror, him we call Thor. He was fostered in Thrace by the duke, who is called Loricos. But when he was ten winters old he took his father's weapons. So fair of face was he, when he stood by other men, as when ivory is set in oak; his hair was fairer than gold. When he was twelve winters old he had full strength; then he lifted from the ground ten bear skins all at once, and then he slew Loricos, the duke, his foster-father and his wife, Lora or Glora, and took possession of Thrace; this we call Thrudheim. Then he visited many lands and knew the countries of the world, and conquered single-handed all the berserks and all the giants, and one very big dragon and many beasts. In the north region he found that prophetess who hight Sibyl, whom we call Sif, and married her. None can tell the genealogy of Sif; she was the fairest of all women, her hair was like gold. Their son was Loride (Hloride), who was like his father; his son was Henrede; his son Vingethor (Vingthor); his son Vingener (Vingner); his son Moda (Mode); his son Magi (Magne); his son Kesfet; his son Bedvig; his son Atra, whom we call Annan; his son Itrman; his son Heremod (Hermod); his son Skjaldun, whom we call Skjold; his son Bjaf, whom we call Bjar; his son Jat; his son Gudolf, his son Fjarlaf, whom we call Fridleif; he had the son who is called Vodin, whom we call Odin; he was a famous man for wisdom and all accomplishments. His wife hight Frigida, whom we call Frigg.

10. Odin had the power of divination, and so had his wife, and from this knowledge he found out that his name would be held high in the north part of the world, and honored beyond that of all kings. For this reason he was eager to begin his journey from Turkey, and he had with him very

many people, young and old, men and women, and he had with him many costly things. But wherever they fared over the lands great fame was spoken of them, and they were said to be more like gods than men. And they stopped not on their journey before they came north into that land which is now called Saxland; there Odin remained a long time, and subjugated the country far and wide. There Odin established his three sons as a defense of the land. One is named Veggdegg; he was a strong king and ruled over East Saxland. His son was Vitrgils, and his sons were Ritta, the father of Heingest (Hengist), and Sigar, the father of Svebdegg, whom we call Svipdag. Another son of Odin hight Beldegg, whom we call Balder; he possessed the land which now hight Vestfal; his son was Brander, and his son Frjodigar, whom we call Froda (Frode). His son was Freovit, his son Yvigg, his son Gevis, whom we call Gave. The third son of Odin is named Sigge, his son Verer. These forefathers ruled the land which is now called Frankland, and from them is come the race that is called the Volsungs. From all of these many and great races are descended.

11. Then Odin continued his journey northward and came into the country which was called Reidgotaland, and in that land he conquered all that he desired. He established there his son, who hight Skjold; his son hight Fridleif; from him is descended the race which hight Skjoldungs; these are the Dane kings, and that land hight now Jutland, which then was called Reidgotaland.

12. Thereupon he fared north to what is now called Svithjod (Sweden), there was the king who is called Gylfe. But when he heard of the coming of those Asiamen, who were called asas, he went to meet them, and offered Odin such things in his kingdom as he himself might desire. And such good luck followed their path, that wherever they stopped in the lands, there were bountiful crops and good peace; and all believed that they were the cause thereof. The mighty men of the kingdom saw that they were unlike other men whom they had seen, both in respect to beauty and understanding. The land there seemed good to Odin, and he chose there for himself a place for a burg, which is now called Sigtuna.⁶ He there established chiefs, like unto what had formerly existed in Troy; he appointed twelve men in the burg to be judges of the law of the land, and made all rights to correspond with what had before been in Troy, and to what the Turks had been accustomed.

13. Thereupon he fared north until he reached the sea, which they thought surrounded all lands, and there he established his son in the kingdom, which is now called Norway; he is hight Saming, and the kings of Norway count their ancestors back to him, and so do the jarls and other mighty men, as it is stated in the HALEYGJATAL.⁷ But Odin had with him that son who is called Yngve, who was king in Sweden, and from him is descended the families called Ynglings (Yngvelings). The asas took to themselves wives there within the land. But some took wives for their sons, and these families became so numerous that they spread over Saxland, and thence over the whole north region, and the tongue of these Asiamen became the native tongue of all these lands. And men think they can understand from the way in which the names of their forefathers is written, that these names have belonged to this tongue, and that the asas have brought this tongue hither to the north, to Norway, to Sweden and to Saxland. But in England are old names of places and towns which can be seen to have been given in another tongue than this.