

123. HERE BEGINS THE STORY OF ASBJORN SELSBANE.

(.....) In summer (A.D. 1022) it appeared again that there would be a bad year for corn; and to this came the report from the south that King Olaf prohibited all export of corn, malt, or meal from the southern to the northern parts of the country. Then Asbjorn perceived that it would be difficult to procure what was necessary for a house-keeping, and resolved to put into the water a vessel for carrying goods which he had, and which was large enough to go to sea with. The ship was good, all that belonged to her was of the best, and in the sails were stripes of cloth of various colours. Asbjorn made himself ready for a voyage, and put to sea with twenty men. They sailed from the north in summer; and nothing is told of their voyage until one day, about the time the days begin to shorten, they came to Karmtsund, and landed at Augvaldsnes. Up in the island Karmt there is a large farm, not far from the sea, and a large house upon it called Augvaldsnes, which was a king's house, with an excellent farm, which Thorer Sel, who was the king's bailiff, had under his management. Thorer was a man of low birth, but had swung himself up in the world as an active man; and he was polite in speech, showy in clothes, and fond of distinction, and not apt to give way to others, in which he was supported by the favour of the king. He was besides quick in speech, straightforward, and free in conversation. Asbjorn, with his company, brought up there for the night; and in the morning, when it was light, Thorer went down to the vessel with some men, and inquired who commanded the splendid ship. Asbjorn named his own and his father's name. Thorer asks where the voyage was intended for, and what was the errand.

Asbjorn replies, that he wanted to buy corn and malt; saying, as was true, that it was a very dear time north in the country. "But we are told that here the seasons are good; and wilt thou, farmer, sell us corn? I see that here are great corn stacks, and it would be very convenient if we had not to travel farther."

Thorer replies, "I will give thee the information that thou needst not go farther to buy corn, or travel about here in Rogaland; for I can tell thee that thou must turn about, and not travel farther, for the king forbids carrying corn out of this to the north of the country. Sail back again, Halogalander, for that will be thy safest course."

Asbjorn replies, "If it be so, bonde, as thou sayest, that we can get no corn here to buy, I will, notwithstanding, go forward upon my errand, and visit my family in Sole, and see my relation Erling's habitation."

Thorer: "How near is thy relationship to Erling?"

Asbjorn: "My mother is his sister."

Thorer: "It may be that I have spoken heedlessly, if so be that thou art sister's son of Erling."

Thereupon Asbjorn and his crew struck their tents, and turned the ship to sea. Thorer called after them. "A good voyage, and come here again on your way back." Asbjorn promised to do so, sailed away, and came in the evening to Jadar. Asbjorn went on shore with ten men; the other ten men watched the ship. When Asbjorn came to the house he was very well received, and Erling was very glad to see him, placed him beside himself, and asked him all the news in the north of the country. Asbjorn concealed nothing of his business from him; and Erling said

it happened unfortunately that the king had just forbid the sale of corn. "And I know no man here." says he, "who has courage to break the king's order, and I find it difficult to keep well with the king, so many are trying to break our friendship."

Asbjorn replies, "It is late before we learn the truth. In my childhood I was taught that my mother was freeborn throughout her whole descent, and that Erling of Sole was her boldest relation; and now I hear thee say that thou hast not the freedom, for the king's slaves here in Jadar, to do with thy own corn what thou pleasest."

Erling looked at him, smiled through his teeth, and said, "Ye Halogalanders know less of the king's power than we do here; but a bold man thou mayst be at home in thy conversation. Let us now drink, my friend, and we shall see tomorrow what can be done in thy business."

They did so, and were very merry all the evening. The following day Erling and Asbjorn talked over the matter again, and Erling said. "I have found out a way for you to purchase corn, Asbjorn. It is the same thing to you whoever is the seller." He answered that he did not care of whom he bought the corn, if he got a good right to his purchase. Erling said. "It appears to me probable that my slaves have quite as much corn as you require to buy; and they are not subject to law, or land regulation, like other men." Asbjorn agreed to the proposal. The slaves were now spoken to about the purchase, and they brought forward corn and malt, which they sold to Asbjorn, so that he loaded his vessel with what he wanted. When he was ready for sea Erling followed him on the road, made him presents of friendship, and they took a kind farewell of each other.

Asbjorn got a good breeze, landed in the evening at Karmtsund, near to Augvaldsnes, and remained there for the night. Thorer Sel had heard of Asbjorn's voyage, and also that his vessel was deeply laden. Thorer summoned people to him in the night, so that before daylight he had sixty men; and with these he went against Asbjorn as soon as it was light, and went out to the ship just as Asbjorn and his men were putting on their clothes. Asbjorn saluted Thorer, and Thorer asked what kind of goods Asbjorn had in the vessel.

He replied, "Corn and malt."

Thorer said, "Then Erling is doing as he usually does, and despising the king's orders, and is unwearied in opposing him in all things, insomuch that it is wonderful the king suffers it."

Thorer went on scolding in this way, and when he was silent Asbjorn said that Erling's slaves had owned the corn.

Thorer replied hastily, that he did not regard Erling's tricks. "And now, Asbjorn, there is no help for it; ye must either go on shore, or we will throw you overboard; for we will not be troubled with you while we are discharging the cargo."

Asbjorn saw that he had not men enough to resist Thorer; therefore he and his people landed, and Thorer took the whole cargo out of the vessel. When the vessel was discharged Thorer went through the ship, and observed. "Ye Halogalanders have good sails: take the old sail of our vessel and give it them; it is good enough for those who are sailing in a light vessel." Thus the sails were exchanged. When this was done Asbjorn and his comrades sailed away north along the coast, and did not stop until they reached home early in whiter. This expedition was talked of far and wide, and Asbjorn had no trouble that winter in making feasts at home. Thorer Hund invited Asbjorn and his mother, and also all whom they pleased to take along with him, to a Yule feast; but Asbjorn sat at home, and would not travel, and it was to be seen that Thorer thought Asbjorn despised his invitation, since he would not come. Thorer scoffed much at Asbjorn's voyage. "Now," said he, "it is evident that Asbjorn makes a great difference in his respect towards his relations; for in summer he took the greatest trouble to visit his relation Erling in Jadar, and now will not take the trouble to come to me in the next house. I don't know if he thinks there may be a Thorer Sel in his way upon every holm." Such

words, and the like sarcasms, Asbjorn heard of; and very ill satisfied he was with his voyage, which had thus made him a laughing-stock to the country, and he remained at home all winter, and went to no feasts.

124. MURDER OF THORER SEL.

Asbjorn had a long-ship standing in the noust (shipshed), and it was a snekke (cutter) of twenty benches; and after Candlemas (February 2, 1023), he had the vessel put in the water, brought out all his furniture, and rigged her out. He then summoned to him his friends and people, so that he had nearly ninety men all well armed. When he was ready for sea, and got a wind, he sailed south along the coast, but as the wind did not suit, they advanced but slowly. When they came farther south they steered outside the rocks, without the usual ships' channel, keeping to sea as much as it was possible to do so. Nothing is related of his voyage before the fifth day of Easter (April 18, 1023), when, about evening, they came on the outside of Karmt Island. This island is so shaped that it is very long, but not broad at its widest part; and without it lies the usual ships' channel. It is thickly inhabited; but where the island is exposed to the ocean great tracts of it are uncultivated. Asbjorn and his men landed at a place in the island that was uninhabited. After they had set up their ship-tents Asbjorn said, "Now ye must remain here and wait for me. I will go on land in the isle, and spy what news there may be which we know nothing of." Asbjorn had on mean clothes, a broadbrimmed hat, a fork in his hand, but had girt on his sword under his clothes. He went up to the land, and in through the island; and when he came upon a hillock, from which he could see the house on Augvaldsnes, and on as far as Karmtsund, he saw people in all quarters flocking together by land and by sea, and all going up to the house of Augvaldsnes. This seemed to him extraordinary; and therefore he went up quietly to a house close by, in which servants were cooking meat. From their conversation he discovered immediately that the king Olaf had come there to a feast, and that he had just sat down to table. Asbjorn turned then to the feasting-room, and when he came into the ante-room one was going in and another coming out; but nobody took notice of him. The hall-door was open, and he saw that Thorer Sel stood before the table of the high-seat. It was getting late in the evening, and Asbjorn heard people ask Thorer what had taken place between him and Asbjorn; and Thorer had a long story about it, in which he evidently departed from the truth. Among other things he heard a man say, "How did Asbjorn behave when you discharged his vessel?" Thorer replied, "When we were taking out the cargo he bore it tolerably, but not well; and when we took the sail from him he wept." When Asbjorn heard this he suddenly drew his sword, rushed into the hall, and cut at Thorer. The stroke took him in the neck, so that the head fell upon the table before the king, and the body at his feet, and the table-cloth was soiled with blood from top to bottom. The king ordered him to be seized and taken out. This was done. They laid hands on Asbjorn, and took him from the hall. The table-furniture and table-cloths were removed, and also Thorer's corpse, and all the blood wiped up. The king was enraged to the highest; but remained quiet in speech, as he always was when in anger.

125. OF SKJALG, THE SON OF ERLING SKJALGSON.

Skjalg Erlingson stood up, went before the king, and said, "Now may it go, as it often does, that every case will admit of alleviation. I will pay thee the mulct for the bloodshed on account of this man, so that he may retain life and limbs. All the rest determine and do, king, according to thy pleasure."

The king replies, "Is it not a matter of death, Skjalg, that a man break the Easter peace; and in the next place that he kills a man in the king's lodging; and in the third that he makes my feet his execution-block, although that may appear a small matter to thee and thy father?"

Skjalg replies, "It is ill done, king, in as far as it displeases thee; but the deed is, otherwise, done excellently well. But if the deed appear to thee so important, and be so contrary to thy will, yet may I expect something for my services from thee; and certainly there are many who will say that thou didst well."

The king replies, "Although thou hast made me greatly indebted to thee, Skjalg, for thy services, yet I will not for thy sake break the law, or cast away my own dignity."

Then Skjalg turned round, and went out of the hall. Twelve men who had come with Skjalg all followed him, and many others went out with him. Skjalg said to Thorarin Nefiulfson, "If thou wilt have me for a friend, take care that this man be not killed before Sunday." Thereupon Skjalg and his men set off, took a rowing boat which he had, and rowed south as fast as they could, and came to Jadar with the first glimpse of morning. They went up instantly to the house, and to the loft in which Erling slept. Skjalg rushed so hard against the door that it burst asunder at the nails. Erling and the others who were within started up. He was in one spring upon his legs, grasped his shield and sword, and rushed to the door, demanding who was there. Skjalg named himself, and begs him to open the door. Erling replies, "It was most likely to be thee who hast behaved so foolishly; or is there any one who is pursuing thee?" Thereupon the door was unlocked. Then said Skjalg, "Although it appears to thee that I am so hasty, I suppose our relation Asbjorn will not think my proceedings too quick; for he sits in chains there in the north at Augvaldsnes, and it would be but manly to hasten back and stand by him." The father and son then had a conversation together, and Skjalg related the whole circumstances of Thorer Sel's murder.

126. OF THORARIN NEFIULFSON.

King Olaf took his seat again when everything in the hall was put in order, and was enraged beyond measure. He asked how it was with the murderer. He was answered, that he was sitting out upon the doorstep under guard.

The king says, "Why is he not put to death?"

Thorarin Nefiulfson replies, "Sire, would you not call it murder to kill a man in the night-time?"

The king answers, "Put him in irons then, and kill him in the morning."

Then Asbjorn was laid in chains, and locked up in a house for the night. The day after the king heard the morning mass, and then went to the Thing, where he sat till high mass. As he was going to mass he said to Thorarin, "Is not the sun high enough now in the heavens that your friend Asbjorn may be hanged?"

Thorarin bowed before the king, and said, "Sire, it was said by Bishop Sigurd on Friday last, that the King who has all things in his power had to endure great temptation of spirit; and blessed is he who rather imitates him, than those who condemned the man to death, or those who caused his slaughter. It is not long till tomorrow, and that is a working day."

The king looked at him, and said, "Thou must take care then that he is not put to death to-day; but take him under thy charge, and know for certain that thy own life shall answer for it if he escape in any way."

Then the king went away. Thorarin went also to where Asbjorn lay in irons, took off his chains, and brought him to a small room, where he had meat and drink set before him, and told him what the king had determined in case Asbjorn ran away. Asbjorn replies, that Thorarin need not be afraid of him. Thorarin sat a long while with him during the day, and slept there all night. On Saturday the king arose and went to the early mass, and from thence he went to the Thing, where a great many bondes were assembled, who had many complaints to be determined. The king sat there long in the day, and it was late before the people went to high mass. Thereafter the king went to table. When he had got meat he sat drinking for a while, so that the tables were not removed. Thorarin went out to the priest who had the church under his care, and gave him two marks of silver to ring in the Sabbath as soon as the king's table was taken away. When the king had drunk as much as he wished the tables were removed. Then said the king, that it was now time for the slaves to go to the murderer and put him to death. In the same moment the bell rang in the Sabbath.

Then Thorarin went before the king, and said, "The Sabbath-peace this man must have, although he has done evil."

The king said, "Do thou take care, Thorarin, that he do not escape."

The king then went to the church, and attended the vesper service, and Thorarin sat the whole day with Asbjorn. On Sunday the bishop visited Asbjorn, confessed him, and gave him orders to hear high mass. Thorarin then went to the king, and asked him to appoint men to guard the murderer. "I will now," he said, "be free of this charge." The king thanked him for his care, and ordered men to watch over Asbjorn, who was again laid in chains. When the people went to high mass Asbjorn was led to the church, and he stood outside of the church with his guard; but the king and all the people stood in the church at mass.

127. ERLING'S RECONCILIATION WITH KING OLAF.

Now we must again take up our story where we left it,—that Erling and his son Skjalg held a council on this affair, and according to the resolution of Erling, and of Skjalg and his other sons, it was determined to assemble a force and send out message-tokens. A great multitude of people accordingly came together. They got ready with all speed, rigged their ships, and when they reckoned upon their force they found they had nearly 1500 men. With this war-force they set off, and came on Sunday to Augvaldsnes on Karmt Island. They went straight up to the house with all the men, and arrived just as the Scripture lesson was read. They went directly to the church, took Asbjorn, and broke off his chains. At the tumult and clash of arms all who were outside of the church ran into it; but they who were in the church looked all towards them, except the king, who stood still, without looking around him. Erling and his sons drew up their men on each side of the path which led from the church to the hall, and Erling with his sons stood next to the hall. When high mass was finished the king went immediately out of the church, and first went through the open space between the ranks drawn up, and then his retinue, man by man; and as he came to the door Erling placed himself before the door, bowed to the king, and saluted him. The king saluted him in return, and prayed God to help him. Erling took up the word first, and said, "My relation, Asbjorn, it is reported to me, has been guilty of misdemeanor, king; and it is a great one, if he has done anything that incurs your displeasure. Now I am come to entreat for him peace, and such penalties as you yourself may determine; but that thereby he redeem life and limb, and his remaining here in his native land."

The king replies, "It appears to me, Erling, that thou thinkest the case of Asbjorn is now in thy own power, and I do not therefore know why thou speakest now as if thou wouldst offer terms for him. I think thou hast drawn together these forces because thou are determined to settle what is between us."

Erling replies, "Thou only, king, shalt determine, and determine so that we shall be reconciled."

The king: "Thinkest thou, Erling, to make me afraid? And art thou come here in such force with that expectation? No, that shall not be; and if that be thy thought, I must in no way turn and fly."

Erling replies, "Thou hast no occasion to remind me how often I have come to meet thee with fewer men than thou hadst. But now I shall not conceal what lies in my mind, namely, that it is my will that we now enter into a reconciliation; for otherwise I expect we shall never meet again." Erling was then as red as blood in the face.

Now Bishop Sigurd came forward to the king and said, "Sire, I entreat you on God Almighty's account to be reconciled with Erling according to his offer,—that the man shall retain life and limb, but that thou shalt determine according to thy pleasure all the other conditions."

The king replies, "You will determine."

Then said the bishop, "Erling, do thou give security for Asbjorn, such as the king thinks sufficient, and then leave the conditions to the mercy of the king, and leave all in his power."

Erling gave a surety to the king on his part, which he accepted.

Thereupon Asbjorn received his life and safety, and delivered himself into the king's power, and kissed his hand.

Erling then withdrew with his forces, without exchanging salutation with the king; and the king went into the hall, followed by Asbjorn. The king thereafter made known the terms of reconciliation to be these:—"In the first place, Asbjorn, thou must submit to the law of the land, which commands that the man who kills a servant of the king must undertake his service, if the king will. Now I will that thou shalt undertake the office of bailiff which Thorer Sel had, and manage my estate here in Augvaldsnes." Asbjorn replies, that it should be according to the king's will; "but I must first go home to my farm, and put things in order there." The king was satisfied with this, and proceeded to another guest-quarter. Asbjorn made himself ready with his comrades, who all kept themselves concealed in a quiet creek during the time Asbjorn was away from them. They had had their spies out to learn how it went with him, and would not depart without having some certain news of him.

128. OF THORER HUND AND ASBJORN SELSBANE.

Asbjorn then set out on his voyage, and about spring (A.D. 1023) got home to his farm. After this exploit he was always called Asbjorn Selsbane. Asbjorn had not been long at home before he and his relation Thorer met and conversed together, and Thorer asked Asbjorn particularly all about his journey, and about all the circumstances which had happened on the course of it. Asbjorn told everything as it had taken place.

Then said Thorer, "Thou thinkest that thou hast well rubbed out the disgrace of having been plundered in last harvest."

"I think so," replies Asbjorn; "and what is thy opinion, cousin?"

"That I will soon tell thee," said Thorer. "Thy first expedition to the south of the country was indeed very disgraceful, and that disgrace has been redeemed; but this expedition is both a disgrace to thee and to thy family, if it end in thy becoming the king's slave, and being put on a footing with that worst of men, Thorer Sel. Show that thou art manly enough to sit here on thy own property, and we thy relations shall so support thee that thou wilt never more come into such trouble."

Asbjorn found this advice much to his mind; and before they parted it was firmly, determined that Asbjorn should remain on his farm, and not go back to the king or enter into his service. And he did so, and sat quietly at home on his farm.