

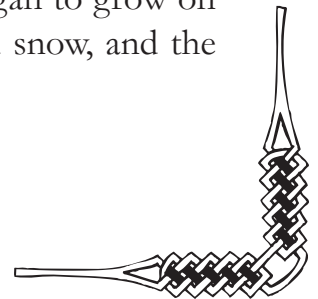


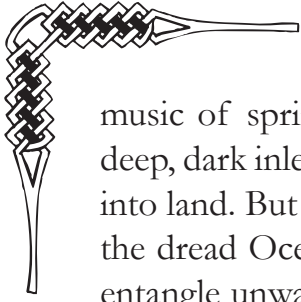
The Story of Siegfried

adventure 5: In *Ægir's Kingdom* *by James Baldwin*

The vessel in which Siegfried sailed was soon far out at sea; for the balmy south wind, and the songs of the birds, and the music from Bragi's harp, all urged it cheerily on. And Siegfried sat at the helm, and guided it in its course. By and by they lost all sight of land, and the sailors wist not where they were; but they knew that Bragi, the Wise, would bring them safely into some haven whenever it should so please him, and they felt no fear. And the fishes leaped up out of the water as the white ship sped by on woven wings; and the monsters of the deep paused, and listened to the sweet music which floated down from above. After a time the vessel began to meet great ice-mountains in the sea,—mountains which the Reifriesen, and old Hoder, the King of the winter months, had sent drifting down from the frozen land of the north. But these melted at the sound of Bragi's music and at the sight of Siegfried's radiant armor. And the cold breath of the Frost-giants, which had driven them in their course, turned, and became the ally of the south wind.

At length they came in sight of a dark shore, which stretched on either hand, north and south, as far as the eye could reach; and as they drew nearer they saw a line of huge mountains, rising, as it were, out of the water, and stretching their gray heads far above the clouds. And the overhanging cliffs seemed to look down, half in anger, half in pity, upon the little white winged vessel which had dared thus to sail through these unknown waters. But the surface of the sea was smooth as glass; and the gentle breeze drove the ship slowly forwards through the calm water, and along the rock-bound coast, and within the dark shadows of the mountain-peaks. Long ago the Frost-giants had piled great heaps of snow upon these peaks, and built huge fortresses of ice between, and sought, indeed, to clasp in their cold embrace the whole of the Norwegian land. But the breezes of the South-land that came with Bragi's ship now played among the rocky steeps, and swept over the frozen slopes above, and melted the snow and ice; and thousands of rivulets of half-frozen water ran down the mountain-sides, and tumbled into rocky gorges, or plunged into the sea. And the grass began to grow on the sunny slopes, and the flowers peeped up through the half-melted snow, and the





music of spring was heard on every side. Now and then the little vessel passed by deep, dark inlets enclosed between high mountain-walls, and reaching many leagues far into land. But the sailors steered clear of these shadowy fjords; for they said that Ran, the dread Ocean-queen, lived there, and spread her nets in the deep green waters to entangle unwary seafaring men. And the sound of Bragi's harp awakened all sleeping things; and it was carried from rock to rock, and from mountain-height to valley, and was borne on the breeze far up the fjords, and all over the land.

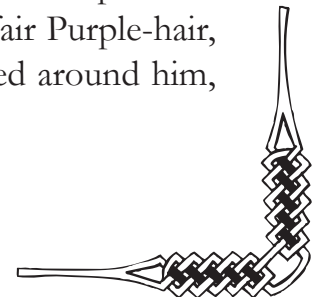
One day, as they were sailing through these quiet waters, beneath the overhanging cliffs, Bragi tuned his harp, and sang a song of sea. And then he told Siegfried a story of Ægir and his gold-lit hall.

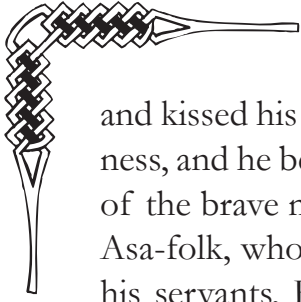
Old Ægir was the Ocean-king. At most times he was rude and rough, and his manners were uncouth and boisterous. But when Balder, the Shining One, smiled kindly upon him from above, or when Bragi played his harp by the seashore, or sailed his ship on the waters, the heart of the bluff old king was touched with a kindly feeling, and he tried hard to curb his ungentle passions, and to cease his blustering ways. He was one of the old race of giants; and men believe that he would have been a very good and quiet giant, had it not been for the evil ways of his wife, the crafty Queen Ran. For, however kind at heart the king might be, his good intentions were almost always thwarted by the queen. Ran could never be trusted; and no one, unless it were Loki, the Mischief-maker, could ever say any thing in her praise. She was always lurking among hidden rocks, or in the deep sea, or along the shores of silent fjords, and reaching out with her long lean fingers, seeking to clutch in her greedy grasp whatever prey might unwarily come near her. And many richly-laden vessels, and many brave seamen and daring warriors, had she dragged down to her blue-hung chamber in old Ægir's hall.

And this is the story that Bragi told of

The Feast in Ægir's Hall.

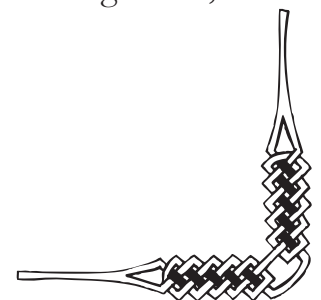
It happened long ago, when the good folk at Gladsheim were wont to visit the mid-world oftener than now. On a day in early autumn Queen Ran, with her older daughters,—Raging Sea, Breaker, Billow, Surge, and Surf,—went out to search for plunder. But old Ægir stayed at home, and with him his younger daughters,—fair Purple-hair, gentle Diver, dancing Ripple, and smiling Sky-clear. And as they played around him,

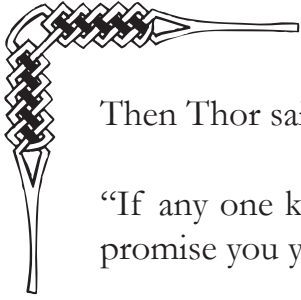




and kissed his old storm-beaten cheeks, the heart of the king was softened into gentleness, and he began to think kindly of the green earth which bordered his kingdom, and of the brave men who lived there; but most of all did he think of the great and good Asa-folk, who dwell in Asgard, and overlook the affairs of the world. Then he called his servants, Funfeng and Elder, and bade them prepare a feast in his gold-lit hall. And he sent fleet messengers to invite the Asa-folk to come and partake of the good cheer. And his four young daughters played upon the beach, and smiled and danced in the beaming sunlight. And the hearts of many seafaring men were gladdened that day, as they spread their sails to the wind; for they saw before them a pleasant voyage, and the happy issue of many an undertaking. Long before the day had begun to wane, the Asa-folk arrived in a body at Ægir's hall; for they were glad to answer the bidding of the Ocean-king. Odin came, riding Sleipner, his eight-footed steed; Thor rode in his iron chariot drawn by goats; Frey came with Gullinburste, his golden-bristled boar. There, too, was the war-like Tyr, and blind Hoder, and the silent Vidar, and the sage Forsete, and the hearkening Heimdal, and Niord, the Ruler of the Winds, and Bragi, with his harp; and lastly came many elves, the thralls of the Asa-folk, and Loki, the cunning Mischief-maker. In his rude but hearty way old Ægir welcomed them; and they went down into his amber hall, and rested themselves upon the sea-green couches that had been spread for them. And a thousand fair mermaids stood around them, and breathed sweet melodies through sea-shells of rainbow hue, while the gentle white-veiled daughters of the Ocean-king danced to the bewitching music.

Hours passed by, and the sun began to slope towards the west, and the waiting guests grew hungry and ill at ease; and then they began to wonder why the feast was so long in getting ready. At last the host himself became impatient; and he sent out in haste for his servants, Funfeng and Elder. Trembling with fear, they came and stood before him. "Master," said they, "we know that you are angry because the feast is not yet made ready; but we beg that your anger may not fall upon us. The truth is, that some thief has stolen your brewing-kettle, and we have no ale for your guests." Then old Ægir's brow grew dark, and his breath came quick and fast; and, had not Niord held the winds tightly clutched in his hand, there would have been a great uproar in the hall. Even as it was, the mermaids fled away in great fright, and the white-veiled Waves stopped dancing, and a strange silence fell upon all the company. "Some enemy has done this!" cried Ægir, as soon as he could speak. "Some enemy has taken away my brewing-kettle; and, unless we can find it, I fear our feast will be but a dry one."





Then Thor said,—

“If any one knows where this kettle is, let him speak, and I will bring it back; and I promise you you shall not wait long for the feast.”

But not one in all this company knew aught about the missing kettle. At last Tyr stood up and said,— “If we cannot find the same vessel that our host has lost, mayhap we may find another as good. I know a dogwise giant who lives east of the Rivers Elivagar, and who has a strong kettle, fully a mile deep, and large enough to brew ale for all the world.”

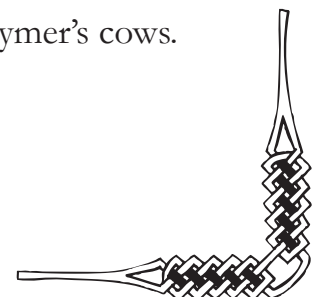
“That is the very kettle we want!” cried Thor. “Think you that we can get it?”

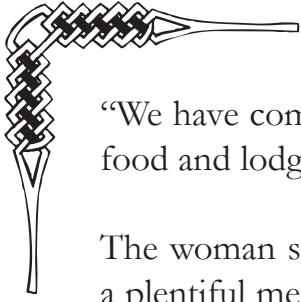
“If we are cunning enough, we may,” answered Tyr. “But old Hymer will never give it up willingly.” “Is it Hymer of whom you speak?” asked Thor. “Then I know him well; and, willingly or not willingly he must let us have his kettle. For what is a feast without the gladsome ale?”

Then Thor and Tyr set out on their journey towards the land of Elivagar; and they travelled many a league northwards, across snowy mountains and barren plains, until they came to the shores of the frozen sea. And there the sun rises and sets but once a year, and even in summer the sea is full of ice. On the lonely beach, stood Hymer's dwelling,—a dark and gloomy abode. Tyr knocked at the door; and it was opened by Hymer's wife, a strangely handsome woman, who bade them come in. Inside the hall they saw Hymer's old mother, sitting in the chimney-corner, and crooning over the smouldering fire. She was a horribly ugly old giantess, with nine hundred heads; but every head was blind and deaf and toothless. Ah, me! what a wretched old age that must have been!

“Is your husband at home?” asked Thor, speaking to the pretty woman who had opened the door.

“He is not,” was the answer. “He is catching fish in the warm waters of the sheltered bay; or, mayhap, he is tending his cows in the open sea, just around the headland.” For the great icebergs that float down from the frozen sea are called old Hymer's cows.





“We have come a very long journey,” said Tyr. “Will you not give two tired strangers food and lodging until they shall have rested themselves?”

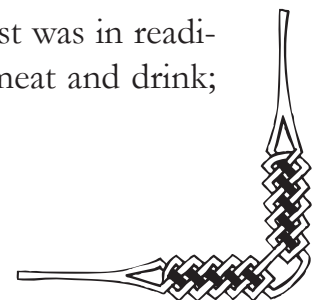
The woman seemed in nowise loath to do this; and she set before the two Asa-folk a plentiful meal of the best that she had in the house. When they had eaten, she told them that it would be far safer for them to hide themselves under the great kettles in the hall; for, she said, her husband would soon be home, and he might not be kind to them. So Thor and Tyr hid themselves, and listened for Hymer's coming. After a time, the great hall-door opened, and they heard the heavy steps of the giant.

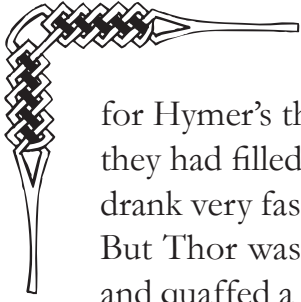
“Welcome home!” cried the woman, as Hymer shook the frost from his hair and beard, and stamped the snow from his feet. “I am so glad that you have come! for there are two strangers in the hall, and they have asked for you. One of them I know is Thor, the foe of the giants, and the friend of man. The other is the one-armed god of war, the brave Tyr. What can be their errand at Hymer's hall?” “Where are they?” roared Hymer, stamping so furiously, that even his deaf old mother seemed to hear, and lifted up her heads.

“They are under the kettles, at the gable-end of the hall,” answered the woman.

Hymer cast a wrathful glance towards the place. The post at the end of the hall was shivered in pieces by his very look; the beam that upheld the floor of the loft was broken, and all the kettles tumbled down with a fearful crash. Thor and Tyr crept out from among the rubbish, and stood before old Hymer. The giant was not well pleased at the sight of such guests come thus unbidden to his hall. But he knew that his rude strength would count as nothing if matched with their skill and weapons: hence he deemed it wise to treat the two Asas as his friends, and to meet them with cunning and strategy.

“Welcome to my hall!” he cried. “Fear no hurt from Hymer, for he was never known to harm a guest.” And Thor and Tyr were given the warmest seats at the fireside. And the giant ordered his thralls to kill the fatted oxen, and to make ready a great feast in honor of his guests. And, while the meal was being got ready, he sat by Thor's side, and asked him many questions about what was going on in the great South-land. And Thor answered him pleasantly, meeting guile with guile. When the feast was in readiness, all sat down at the table, which groaned beneath its weight of meat and drink;





for Hymer's thralls had killed three fat oxen, and baked them whole for this meal, and they had filled three huge bowls with ale from his great brewing-kettle. Hymer ate and drank very fast, and wished to make his guests fear him, because he could eat so much. But Thor was not to be taken aback in this way; for he at once ate two of the oxen, and quaffed a huge bowl of ale which the giant had set aside for himself. The giant saw that he was outdone, and he arose from the table, saying,— “Not all my cows would serve to feed two guests so hungry as these. We shall be obliged to live on fish now.” He strode out of the hall without another word, and began getting his boat ready for a sail. But Thor followed him. “It is a fine day for fishing,” said Thor gayly. “How I should like to go out with you!”

“Such little fellows as you would better stay at home,” growled Hymer.

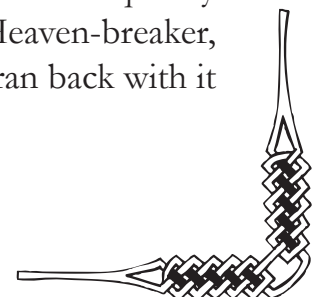
“But let me go with you,” persisted Thor. “I can certainly row the boat while you fish.”

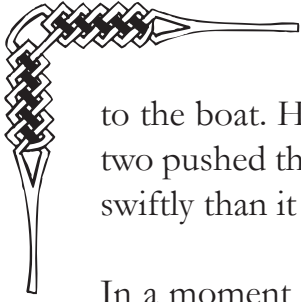
“I have no need of help from such a stunted pygmy,” muttered the giant. “You could not be of the least use to me: you would only be in my way. Still, if you are bent on doing so, you may go, and you shall take all the risks. If I go as far as I do sometimes, and stay as long as I often do, you may make up your mind never to see the dry land again; for you will certainly catch your death of cold, and be food for the fishes—if, indeed, they would deign to eat such a scrawny scrap!”

These taunting words made Thor so angry, that he grasped his hammer, and was sorely tempted to crush the giant's skull. But he checked himself, and coolly said,— “I pray you not to trouble yourself on my account I have set my head on going with you, and go I will. Tell me where I can find something that I can use for bait, and I will be ready in a trice.”

“I have no bait for you,” roughly answered Hymer “You must look for it yourself.”

Half a dozen oxen, the very finest and fattest of Hymer's herd, were grazing on the short grass which grew on the sunnier slopes of the hillside; for not all of the giant's cattle had yet taken to the water. When Thor saw these great beasts, he ran quickly towards them, and seizing the largest one, which Hymer called the Heaven-breaker, he twisted off his head as easily as he would that of a small fowl, and ran back with it





to the boat. Hymer looked at him in anger and amazement, but said nothing; and the two pushed the boat off from the shore. The little vessel sped through the water more swiftly than it had ever done before, for Thor plied the oars.

In a moment the long, low beach was out of sight; and Hymer, who had never travelled so fast, began to feel frightened. "Stop!" he cried. "Here is the place to fish: I have often caught great store of flat-fish here. Let us out with our lines!"

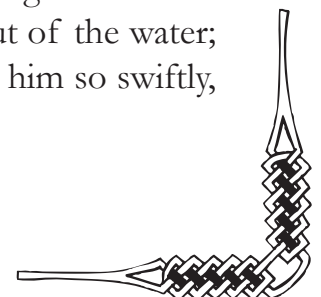
"No, no!" answered Thor; and he kept on plying the oars. "We are not yet far enough from shore. The best fish are still many leagues out."

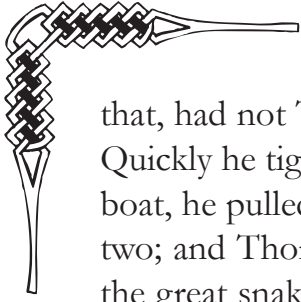
And the boat skimmed onwards through the waters, and the white spray dashed over the prow; and Hymer, now very much frightened, sat still, and looked at his strange fellow-fisherman, but said not a word. On and on they went; and the shore behind them first grew dim, and then sank out of sight; and the high mountain-tops began to fade away in the sky, and then were seen no more. And when at last the fishermen were so far out at sea that nothing was in sight but the rolling waters on every side, Thor stopped his rowing.

"We have come too far!" cried the giant, trembling in every limb. "The great Midgard snake lies hereabouts. Let us turn back!"

"Not yet," answered Thor quietly. "We will fish here a little while."

Without loss of time he took from his pocket a strong hook, wonderfully made, to which he fastened a long line as strong as ten ships' cables twisted together; then he carefully baited the hook with the gory head of the Heaven-breaker ox, and threw it into the water. As the giant had feared, they were now right over the head of the great Midgard snake. The huge beast looked upward with his sleepy eyes, and saw the tempting bait falling slowly through the water; but he did not see the boat, it was so far above him. Thinking of no harm, he opened his leathern jaws, and greedily gulped the morsel down; but the strong iron hook stuck fast in his throat. Maddened by the pain, he began to lash his tail against the floor of the sea; and he twisted and writhed until the ocean was covered with foam, and the waves ran mountain-high. But Thor pulled hard upon the line above, and strove to lift the reptile's head out of the water; then the snake darted with lightning speed away, pulling the boat after him so swiftly,





that, had not Thor held on to the oar-locks, he would have been thrown into the sea. Quickly he tightened his magic girdle of strength around him, and, standing up in the boat, he pulled with all his might. The snake would not be lifted. But the boat split in two; and Thor slid into the water, and stood upon the bottom of the sea. He seized the great snake in his hands, and raised his head clean above the water. What a scene of frightful turmoil was there then! The earth shook; the mountains belched forth fire; the lightnings flashed; the caves howled; and the sky grew black and red. Nobody knows what the end would have been, had not Hymer reached over, and cut the strong cord. The slippery snake glided out of Thor's hands, and hid himself in the deep sea; and every thing became quiet again.

Silently Thor and Hymer sat in the broken boat, and rowed swiftly back towards land. Thor felt really ashamed of himself, because he had gained nothing by his venture. And the giant was not at all happy.

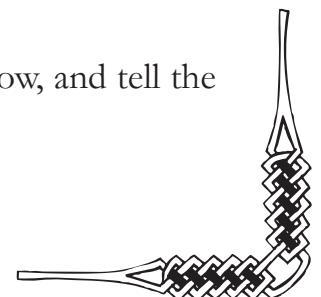
When they reached the frozen shore and Hymer's cheerless castle again, they found Tyr there, anxiously waiting for them. He felt that they were tarrying too long in this dreary place; and he wished to be back among his fellows in old Ægir's hall. Hymer felt very cross and ugly because his boat had been broken; and, when they came into the hall, he said to Thor,—

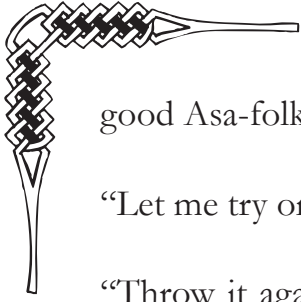
“You may think that you are very stout,—you who dared attack the Midgard snake, and lifted him out of the sea. Yet there are many little things that you cannot do. For instance, here is the earthen goblet from which I drink my ale. Great men, like myself, can crush such goblets between their thumbs and fingers; but such puny fellows as you will find that they cannot break it by any means.” “Let me try!” cried Thor.

He took the great goblet in his hands, and threw it with all his strength against a stone post in the middle of the hall. The post was shattered into a thousand pieces, but the goblet was unharmed.

“Ha, ha!” laughed the giant. “Try again!” Thor did so. This time he threw it against a huge granite rock that stood like a mountain near the seashore. The rock crumbled in pieces and fell, but the goblet was whole as ever.

“What a very stout fellow you are!” cried Hymer in glee. “Go home now, and tell the





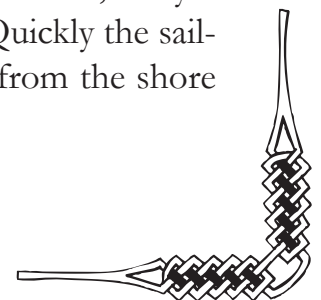
good Asa-folk that you cannot even break a goblet!”

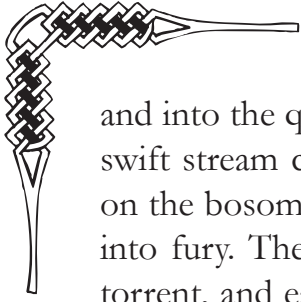
“Let me try once more,” said Thor, amazed, but not disheartened.

“Throw it against Hymer’s forehead,” whispered some one over his shoulder. “It is harder than any rock.” Thor looked, and saw that it was the giant’s handsome wife who had given him this kind advice. He took the goblet, and hurled it quickly, straight at old Hymer’s head. The giant had no time to dodge. The vessel struck him squarely between the eyes, and was shattered into ten thousand little pieces. But the giant’s forehead was unhurt. “That drink was rather hot!” cried Hymer, trying to joke at his ill luck. “But it doesn’t take a very great man to break a goblet. There is one thing, however, that you cannot do. Yonder is my great brewing-kettle, a mile deep. No man has ever lifted it. Now, if you will carry it out of the hall, where it sits, you may have it for your own.” “Agreed!” cried Thor. “It is a fair bargain; and, if I fail, I will go home and never trouble you again.” Then he took hold of the edge of the great kettle, and lifted it with all his might. The floor of Hymer’s hall broke under him, and the walls and roof came tumbling down; but he turned the kettle over his head, and walked away with it, the great rings of the vessel clattering at his heels. Tyr went before him, and cleared the way; and Hymer gazed after him in utter amazement. The two Asa-folk had fairly won the brewing-kettle.

In due time they reached old Ægir’s hall, where the guests were still waiting for them. Some said that they had been gone three days, but most agreed that it was only three hours. Be that as it may, Ægir’s thralls, Funfeng and Elder, brewed great store of ale in the kettle which Thor had brought; and, when the guests were seated at the table, the foaming liquor passed itself around to each, and there was much merriment and glad good cheer. And old Ægir was so happy in the pleasant company of the Asa-folk, that men say that he forgot to blow and bluster for a full six months thereafter.[EN#14]

Such was the story which the wise harper told to Siegfried as they sailed gayly along the Norwegian shore. And with many other pleasant tales did they beguile the hours away. And no one ever thought of danger, for the sky was blue and cloudless. And, besides this, Bragi himself was on board; and he could charm and control the rudest elements. One day, however, the sea became unaccountably ruffled. There was no wind; but yet the waves rose suddenly, and threatened to overwhelm the little ship. Quickly the sailors sprang to their oars, and tried by rowing to drive the vessel away from the shore

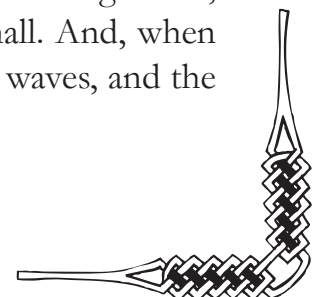


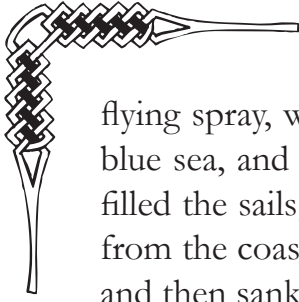


and into the quieter waters of the open sea. But all their strength was of no avail: the swift stream carried the little bark onward in its course, as an autumn leaf is borne on the bosom of a mighty river. Then the whole surface of the water seemed lashed into fury. The waves formed hundreds of currents, each stronger than a mountain torrent, and each seeming to follow a course of its own. They clashed wildly against each other; they heaved, and boiled, and hissed, and threw great clouds of spray high into the air; they formed deep whirlpools, which twisted and twirled, and broke into a thousand eddies, and then plunged deep down into rocky caverns beneath, or laid bare the bottom of the sea. The helpless ship was carried round and round, swiftly and more swiftly still; and vain were the efforts of the crew to steer her out of the seething caldron of waters. Then the cheeks of the sailors grew white with fear; and they dropped their oars, and clung to the masts and ropes, and cried out,—

“Alas, we are lost! This is old Ægir’s brewing-kettle!” But Siegfried stood by the helm, and said,— “If that be true, then we may sup with him in his gold-lit hall.”

And all this time Bragi slept in the hold, and no one dared awaken him. Faster and faster the ship was carried round the seething pool. The flying spray was frozen in the air; and it filled the masts with snow, and pattered like heavy hail upon the deck. The light of the sun seemed shut out, and darkness closed around. A dismal chasm yawned deep before them, and in the gray gloom the ship’s crew saw many wondrous things. Great sea-monsters swam among the rocks, and seemed not to heed the uproar above them. Lovely mermaids sat in their green-and-purple caves, and combed their tresses of golden hair; and thoughtful mermen groped among the seaweeds, searching hopefully for lost or hidden treasures. Then Siegfried caught a glimpse of the mighty Ægir, sitting in his banquet-room; and, as he quaffed his foaming ale, he called aloud to his daughters to leave their play, and come to their father in his gold-lit hall. And the white-veiled Waves answered to their names, and came at his call. First, Raging Sea entered the wide hall, and sat by the Ocean-king’s side; then Billow, then Surge, then Surf, and Breakers; then came the Purple-haired, and the Diver; but Ægir’s two youngest daughters, Laughing Ripple and Smiling Sky-clear, came not at their father’s beck, but lingered to play among the rocks and in the open sea. So deeply engaged was Siegfried in watching this scene, that he did not notice Bragi, who now came upon the deck with his harp in his hand. And sweet music arose from among the dashing waves, and was heard far down in the deep sea-caverns, and even in Ægir’s hall. And, when Siegfried looked up again, the eddying whirlpools, and the threatening waves, and the





flying spray, were no more; but the ship was gliding over the quiet waters of a deep blue sea, and the sun was shining brightly in the clear sky above. Then an east wind filled the sails; and, as Bragi's music rose sweeter and higher, they glided swiftly away from the coast, and soon the snow-capped mountain-peaks grew dim in the distance, and then sank from sight.

Many days they sailed over an unknown sea, and towards an unknown land; and none but Bragi knew what the end of their voyage would be. And yet no one doubted or was afraid, for the secrets of the earth and the sea were known to the sweet singer. After a time, the water became as smooth as glass: not a ripple moved upon its surface, and not the slightest breath of air stirred among the idly-hanging sails. Then the sailors went to their oars; but they seemed overcome with languor and sleepiness, and only when Bragi played upon his harp did they move their oars with their wonted strength and quickness. And at last they came in sight of a long, low coast, and a shelving beach up which the tide was slowly creeping in drowsy silence. And not half a league from the shore was a grand old castle, with a tall tower and many turrets, and broad halls and high battlements; and in the light of the setting sun every thing was as green as emerald or as the fresh grass of early spring. And a pale flickering light gleamed on the castle-walls, and the moat seemed filled with a glowing fire.

The ship glided silently up to the sandy beach, and the sailors moored it to the shore. But Siegfried heard no sound upon the land, nor could he see any moving, living thing. Silence brooded everywhere, and the castle and its inmates seemed to be wrapped in slumber. The sentinels could be seen upon the ramparts, standing like statues of stone, and showing no signs of life; while above the barbican gate the watchman was at his post, motionless and asleep.

