CHAPTER II

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I

The chief reflections of Morris's reading of Old Norse literature which one discovers in his poetry, are in the poems which he adapted from original Old Norse sources: The Lovers of Gudrun, Sigurd the Volsung, and not in any large body of allusions in works having no other connection with Icelandic literature. But although the number of references to historical, Eddic, and saga materials in Morris's original poetry is not great, it is especially significant, for in a large measure it enables us accurately to determine which fragments of the Old Icelandic literature he had at his finger-tips. These allusions and references are chiefly from the Eddas and the Heimskringla; the contributions of the sagas to this phase of his knowledge of the Scandinavian are negligible.

The next five sections of this Chapter will treat of Morris's use of (1) Scandinavian names; (2) miscellaneous Scandinavian references; (3) allusions to saga materials; (4) historical references (5) Eddic allusions; in those of his poems which are "non-Norse," in that they do not deal with a subject which is definitely and thoroughly Old Icelandic in theme, or source, or both. As far as possible, the allusions collected

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1 The first and second parts here are included because they show, particularly in the early poems, (and some prose pieces), how Morris incorporated first general Scandinavian materials into his works, and later definite Old Icelandic allusions.
for this Chapter are those which are 'out of their element,' so to speak; and in general they demonstrate how Morris reached into the Old Norse stories for metaphors, similes, and miscellaneous allusions, in dealing with subjects quite remote from that field. Any reference, whether it pertains to a theme or story which is specifically from the Old Icelandic, or to material from any document written in that language, is taken to be within the province of this discussion.

II

Morris's penchant for Scandinavian proper names dates back to his first prose writings,- the stories which he wrote for the Oxford and Cambridge Magazine. It is of course impossible to state with any accuracy just where he got these names, but one may assume with safety that his reading in the Thorpe and Dasent story-books, rather than in the saga translations, gave him a general aptitude for 'Scandinavianizing,' which he tried to accomplish almost entirely by the use of proper names, as we have observed in Chapter I. The question of what total Scandinavian effect is produced by this method, has already been mentioned; suffice it here to say that the mere naming of these characters does not assure the reader

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3 Such as Benjamin Thorpe’s, Northern Mythology, London, 1851, and Yuletide Stories, London, 1853; and Sir George W. Dasent’s Popular Tales from the Norse, Edinburgh, 1859.
that he is face to face with a person who may be called Scandinavian in any other sense.

But in the first volume of The Earthly Paradise, in the famous Prologue—The Wanderers, Morris has properly assigned Northern names to characters about whom he has also cast a Northern atmosphere. "Marcus Erling," for instance, and his daughter, "Kirstin Erling" (who should more correctly be "Kirstin Marcussdaughter") are a little more than mere Scandinavian names, while in Thora in the poem, Anthony, written about the same time (1865-68) one finds Morris giving evidence of his later practice: using real saga-names for Icelandic characters. In the same poem, wherein he has placed an expatriate English group in Norway, he refers definitely to Iceland:

[Thora to Margaret]

For a year past, I thought of sending thee
Unto my mother's brother in the North
Or out to Iceland to my father's kin:

The Prologue also contains the first actual reference to the Edda.—"Remember me, who am of Odin's blood,"—as well as another passage which may be considered the first in Morris's poetry which actually shows his erudition with regard to Old

4 Collected Works, XXIV, 329-342. Thora is an important character in the Njáll's Saga.

5 Ibid., p. 333.


7 Ibid., p. 21. The same references are also found in the earlier, but unpublished first draft of The Wanderers.
Norse. When the Wanderers are discussing their ill-fated and inconsequential journeys to many lands, one of them rehearse past affairs, stating what had happened: "E'en while at Miklarth my folk did stay...." "Miklarth" is the saga-name for Constantinople, and if this poem had been written after 1869 instead of before, we could conclude that Morris recalled this word from the many examples of miklarth in the Grettis saga. Unfortunately, we cannot hold that Morris's source for this word was in the original Old Icelandic; but it was used before him by many writers, including Rasent and Thorpe, in English renditions of Old Norse materials.

But Morris's employment of the general Scandinavian and the Icelandic saga-name is relatively unimportant. If it were not for the fact that it is accompanied by specific allusions, which are more edifying as to Morris's early knowledge of Old Norse stories, it would not be worthy of our attention.

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8 Ibid., p.6.

9 When the scene of the Saga shifts to Constantinople (in The Lady of Spes episodes) there occur several instances of miklarth, from Chapter XC to the end of the Saga.

10 It is also found in Morris's earlier and unpublished Prologue--The Wanderers, published by May Morris in Collected Works, XXIV:

'Then,' said one, 'this is the Greek tongue
That erst at Miklegarth I heard....' [page 120]
III

The four miscellaneous allusions which will be recorded below are also quite general in character. Their existence in the works of Morris is no proof whatsoever that he was an ardent student of Scandinavian and Old Icelandic literature and customs. But what is true of his use of proper names, on the other hand, is equally true here: this material in his poems gives rise to an hypothesis which his Eddic and historical references prove: that the learned and diffuse character of these later references, although they are comparatively few in number, indicates the growing interest in Old Norse literature which Morris's work shows from the time of his earliest poetry to the publication of Sigurd the Volsung.

The first of these minor allusions to be cited is the latest in date, and it appears here before the others because it defines in Morris's consistent manner, the temper of Northern literature:

['Love' speaks concerning the tone of his song:]

Nor shall my tale in measured cadence play
About the golden lyre of Gods long gone,
Nor dim and doubtful 'twixt the ocean's moan
Wail out about the Northern fiddle-bow,
Stammering with pride or quivering shrill with woe.'

The description of the tenor of the "Northern fiddle-bow," in Love is Enough, the general tone of which poem is, as even

11 From Love is Enough [written 1871-72], Collected Works, IX, 13.
this passage shows, far removed from Old Norse, is entirely in keeping with "O muse that swayest the sad Northern Song," from another poem, - which is devoted entirely to epitomizing the character of this Northern muse.

The second is a specific allusion to a racial talent of the Norwegians, although it might as easily refer to the Swedes, Danes, or Icelanders:

'While we abode with people of that place, And built them huts, as well we could, for we Who dwell in Norway have great mastery In woodwright's craft'; 13

Only because of what may be considered possibly a chance circumstance, - that Morris chose "Certain gentlemen and mariners of Norway" for the chief figures in his Wanderers, - is this characteristic referred especially to the Norwegians. He must have known as well that the ancient carvings of the Vikings, found both on the Scandinavian peninsula and in Iceland, were skilfully executed.

The third allusion is also of a very general character, and except for the fact that its being a Norse custom is evinced

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12 The Muse of the North, Collected Works, IX, 116. See above, Part I, Chapter III.


14 Ibid., "Argument," p. 3.

15 See Paul B. du Chaillu, The Viking Age (New York, 1889), two Chapters [XII and XIII]: on "Northern Relics," I, 193-234, and 235-246.
in "Fretulium," a country subject to much cold," upon having a garden amidst ice and snow. This garden was created for her, to the astonishment of the residents of "Fretulium," by one Signior Ansaldo, who contrived to have a magician perform the feat in the middle of January. Although the circumstances of the story here and of that in Morris are considerably different, the essential element: the creation of summer during winter, is present in both. Basically, this magic is the same as that found in Sir Cleges, and is not unlike the Simiya of The Thousand Nights and a Night, both of which concern the immediate production of fruit, or flowery lands out of season. Whether Morris adapted his reference from one or other of these old tales, or whether he had read some Scandinavian folk-tale which contained all the elements of the story he mentioned, cannot at present be decided. The line, "Folk say a wizard to a northern king...did show..." may as well refer to "Fretulium" as to Denmark; but Morris's use of the phrase, "northern king," forces us to set this reference down here even though it is impossible to conclude definitely concerning the allusion as a whole.

IV

Two of the three saga incidents in Morris's poetry are


19 All Volsung references, for convenience, are being considered as Eddie, rather than as saga material. There is no way of separating them; some may naturally have been inspired by the Volsunga Saga. All are discussed in Section VI, below, with other Eddie allusions.
concerned with the burning of Njal in the Njal's Saga. The first occurs in one of his earliest poems, Rapunzel, published in 1858. Speaking of a castle, the Prince says:

'No bolt or stone had ever crush'd the green Shafts, amber and rose walls; no soot that tells

Of the Norse torches burning up the roofs,
On the flower-carven marble could I see';

The importance of this single early reference, however, should not be overlooked: it indicates that Morris had read of some such "Norse torches," presumably in Dasein's Njal, more than ten years before he commenced the study of Old Icelandic, and furthermore, that the torches had made a memorable impression upon him. The very strangeness and incongruity of the allusion, the "flower-carven marble," for instance, will suggest that the reference was being used for itself, and not to strengthen, with an external literary touch, the description of the castle. The subject of Rapunzel is Germanic (from Grimm's Fairy Tales) but certainly not Norse in any respect.

The second use of the Njal burning occurs in a verse at the end of The Proud King, in The Earthly Paradise. The tale-tellers and listeners are discussing various types of stories, and one of them mentions:

The fir-built Norway hall
Filled with the bonders waiting for the fall
Of the great roof whereeto the torch is set; 21

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21 *Collected Works*, III, 266.
Not only is "fire-built Norway hall" more in keeping with the Norse than "flower-carven marble," but the passage, in general, fits the corresponding lines in Njála closely enough to allow a definite conclusion to be drawn from it. In the Saga, as fast as Flosi's burners light a fire, the women in the house put it out with whey or slops, till at last, annoyed with the difficulty of firing the hall, Kil Thorstein says to Flosi: "'A plan comes into my mind; I have seen a loft over the hall among the crosstreec, and we will put fire in there....'" This type of Old Norse allusion comes exactly between those vague and inconsequential names and incidents, mentioned above, and the more accurate and detailed adaptations from Old Norse literature, such as The Lovers of Gudrun.

The third saga-incident should be appended here, although it is of a mythical character, and is also more specific than the Njála allusions, it does not occur in either Edda, but is found in at least two sagas. The poem, "In Arthur's House," as mentioned above, is the only piece of literature Morris wrote in which he combines two of his favorite subjects: the Arthurian story, which won much of his interest in the first ten years of his writing career, and the Norse motifs which interested him later. Written probably about 1865, it forms a nice mid-ground between the periods represented by the Arthur-

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23 Part I, Chapter I.
ian poems and the Icelandic adaptations. Into the Arthur story Morris introduces the Norse sword, Tyrfing. An old earl appears, carrying the blade, and concerning it he says to Guenevere:

'Hold this, O Queen,  
Thine hand is where Gods' hands have been,  
For this is Tyrfing: who knows when  
His blade was forged? Belike ere men  
Had dwelling on the middle-earth.'

Tyrfing was one of the most famous of all mythic swords used by Norse heroes. It was provided for Svafrlami (son of Sigrlami, son of Odin) by two dwarfs, and its particular attributes caused it to kill a man each time it was unsheathed. The sword later became the property of Angantyr, who was one of the twelve berserk sons of Arngrim and Eyfura (Svafrlami's daughter). Many notable and terrible deeds were accomplished with it. Since the poem ("In Arthur's House") was left unfinished, one can only make conjectures as to what place Morris intended to give Tyrfing in the Arthur story; the possibility of its replacing Excalibur is of course palpable. The two

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24 Collected Works, XXIV, 323.


Sagas which chiefly concern Angantyr and Tyrfing are still untranslated; but Morris could easily have obtained his information concerning them from Scott's "On the Fairies of Popular Superstition."

Morris was probably not acquainted with much of the interesting and involved detail surrounding the Tyrfing legend. He did know, however, as one passage in his poem undoubtedly proves, that Tyrfing killed whenever it was taken from its scabbard:

'At least a man's life is it worth
To draw it out once....

.....

...the blade...

...would seldom slide

Back to its sheath unsatisfied.'

But his doubt regarding its origin: "who knows when this blade was forged," does not testify to his having learned that Dvalinn and Duninn made it for Svafrlami by command.

The date and circumstances of the composition of "In Arthur's House" are at all events controversial. Morris may never have seen any translated poem which dealt with Tyrfing;

27 These are: Harvarar Saga ok Heiðreks, especially Chapters II and XII, and Orvar-Odds Saga, XIV. Both are published in Fornaldar Sögur, Nordlanda, edited by Valdimar Asmundarson (Reykjavik, 1891), Vols. I and II respectively.

28 See Farley, op. cit., pp. 43, 44, 100, note, etc., for references to Tyrfing's appearance in English poetry.

29 Collected Works, XXIV, 324.

30 Hervarar Saga, Chapter II, Fornaldar Sögur, I, 310.
in fact, these lines could have been added in a re-worked manuscript of the poem long after he had learned to read Old Norse. This hypothesis would explain the distinctly analogical use of the word, "middle-earth" [miøgärð] in the last line quoted above, but it could never answer the question as to why Morris did not use (or did not know) more Tyrning material if he had read a whole Saga in which it was of prime importance. It is most likely that he learned of it from some English abridgement of the story in Percy, Hickes, or Scott.

V

The historical incidents, of which Morris shows a knowledge in the quotations below, demonstrate a general and diversified knowledge of Scandinavian history. They indicate specifically that the Heimskringla was well known to the poet, in 1865-8, when he wrote The Wanderers. They vary in detail from one which is a very slight and casual mention of Leif the Lucky, to another, which indicates Morris’s acquaintance with what is more confusing and more difficult to obtain from Old Norse documents than history: that strange, yet ever-present desire of the saga-man to stretch his historical or mythical hero’s genealogy back to Odin.

Nicholas, one of the "Gentlemen of Norway" who are planning the voyage to find the Earthly Paradise, in considering

³ Miss Morris mentions only one Ms. See Collected Works, Introduction to Vol. XXIV, passim.
past explorations, tells his companions:

"The land was good now
That Leif the son of Eric came unto." 32

He continues to speak of Vineland, following this, in a manner which shows that Morris was fully informed concerning Leif's discovery. It must be remembered in this connection, that the Heimskringla is full of incidental references to Leif, and at least one use of the proper name, Vineland, in connection with North America, 33 even though the Vineland voyage in the Flateyjarbók were not available to Morris.

In the same strain, Rolf weighs in his mind the famous voyages of the past, and says:

"For all of one kind seemed to be
The Vineland voyage o'er the unknown sea
And Swegdir's search for Godhome." 34

Swegdir was the son of Fjólnir, the son of Yngvi-Frey (Freyr) of the Æsir. Swegdir ruled the Swedes after his father's death, and went on a five-year journey in search of Godhome, where Odin had gone after his death. He traveled all over the earth, but never found Godhome, and was finally trapped in a cave by a dwarf. This allusion is a particularly accurate and ironic one;


33 For references to Leif, see The Story of Olaf Tryggvesson, in Morris and Magnusson's Saga Library (London, 1891-1905), III, 341, 345; and The Story of Olaf the Holy, ibid., IV, 134, etc. For Vineland, see Olaf Tryggvesson, ibid., III, 355, etc.


35 Ynglinga Saga, Saga Library, III, 24-26. Godhome was apparently the same as Valhalla; it was also known as 'Sweden the Great.'
Rolf, a conservative person at best, is not so sure that his own journey will prosper. "Swegdir's search for Godhome" is the phrase which Morris uses to say, in the terminology of the Heimskringla, "wild-goose-chase."

Two references to Scandinavian geography, both from The Wanderers, serve to strengthen the Norse atmosphere, which is otherwise not very impressive in that poem. The Wanderers, upon departure, agree to meet "at King Tryggvi's hill," which Morris also calls "King Tryggvi's mound." This hill, mound, or cairn of King Tryggvi [Tryggva-hreyr], is, according to Harald Gray-Cloak's Saga, on Tryggvi's Isle, in Sweden. Tryggvi was tricked by King Gudrod, and ambushed; "and he lieth at the place which is now called Tryggvi's Cairn." The second geographical reference also deals with Tryggvi. Rolf, the chief speaker in The Wanderers, says:

"Wick was once my home, Where Tryggvi Olaf's son and Olaf's sire Lit to the ancient Gods the sacred fire, Unto whose line am I myself akin, Through him who Astrid in old time did win, King Olaf's widow." 39

Wick [vik] is a saga-term for the territory on the Bay of Fold (now Christiania Fjord), and the Heimskringla records that many

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36 The Wanderers, in Collected Works, III, 10.

37 Saga-Library, III, 211. Tryggvi was the son of Olaf Geirsteadelf, the son of Harald Fairhair, and was the father of King Olaf Tryggvisson.

38 Ibid., p. 211.

of Trygvi's activities were carried on there. Mentioning Astrid is of course Morris's way of allowing Rolf to connect himself with the great past leaders of his people. Astrid was the daughter of King Olaf of Sweden, and married King Olaf the Holy, against her father's wishes. She was separated from Olaf, however, and went to live at the court of King Magnus. "Him" to whom the speaker is related, and who married Astrid, is probably a mythical character, also brought in by Morris as a means of giving his own imaginary Norseman a royal genealogy.

Each of the famous Olafs, Olaf the Holy, and Olaf the Son of Trygvi, is mentioned in Morris's poetry, the one in an extremely early poem, "The Wind," published in The Defence of Guenevere, 1858, the other in The Wanderers. The Norse knight, the speaker of "The Wind," recalling an almost forgotten glory, sees, in his dreams, a line of Marching warriors. The last words of the poem indicate that he once was one of their company:

'I knew them by the arms that I was used to paint
Upon their long thin shields; but the colors were all grown faint,
And faint upon their banner was Olaf, king and saint.'

Whether this army is meant to be Olaf's own, or a later troop which used his picture as a token, is difficult to decide. The

40 See Harald Grey-Cloak's Saga. There seems to be no reference to Trygvi's "sacred fire" in the sagas dealing with Trygvi.

41 These events are related in the Magnus Saga, Saga Library, V, 13; and in the Saga of Olaf the Holy, Saga Library, IV, 152-153.

42 Collected Works, I, 110.
latter theory is probably the better, because Olaf's own banner bore a white snake, and it would be perfectly logical for Morris to picture a later band carrying Olaf's picture into battle, for Olaf was the Patron Saint of Norway, and the poet may well have assumed that carrying his likeness into war would enhance the possibilities for that miraculous victory which Olaf was often able to give to his followers.

The other Olaf (Tryggvesson) is portrayed, in the earlier version of The Wanderers, as being in the company of Odin, when he appears in a dream to the Norse leader:

'Waking, I saw two ancient men
There in the corner; of gold fine
One wore a crown; about his head
Shone rings of light, all armed was he
And all his raiment was of red;
He held a great axe handily.
The other man was clad in blue
One-eyed he was and held a spear:
Olaf and Odin straight I knew
And cried the cry that you did hear.'

If one were to choose a passage in Morris's poetry which best illustrates his Old Norse reading, the lines quoted above could be as easily taken as any. The crown, the rings of light, the red raiment, and the axe of Olaf Tryggvesson, are all parts of

43 The Story of Olaf the Holy, Saga Library, IV, 57.

44 Both the Heimskringla and Thorpe's Northern Mythology record the miracles of Saint (and King) Olaf.

45 The difference between the earlier, or unpublished Wanderers, and the latter, is discussed in Part I, Chapter I, above.

46 Collected Works, XXIV, 91-92.
descriptions of that king in *The Story of Olaf Tryggvason*. Morris doubtless obtained his impression of Olaf directly from various passages of the *Olaf Tryggvason Saga* in the *Heimskringla*. This excerpt, in particular, is close to Morris's lines: "King Olaf...a forgiold shield he had and a gold-wrought helm, and was easy to know from other men: a short red kirtle had he over his byrny." Olaf was so proficient with the battle-axe, and did so many stout deeds with it, that Snorri often speaks of the axe in connection with his other equipment. Odin also appears here in a guise which is accurate enough to enable any *Edda* reader to recognize him. He always donned the blue (or grey) cloak when he went among men, on earth. He had only one eye, since he had to give the other as a pledge to *Mimir* for a drink from the sacred well. The spear which he carried, called Gungnir, was more properly a part of his heavenly, or Asgard, garb, but it is not entirely in violation of Norse Mythology to allow him to bear it as he goes abroad on earth. The appearance of Olaf and Odin together is also proper, according to legend in the *Olaf's Saga Tryggvason*, in which Odin comes to visit and beguile Olaf.


48 For one instance see *ibid.*, p. 266.

49 *Völuspa*, Stanzas 28-29.

50 Sigdrifumál, Stanza 17. It is interesting to note, in passing, that Gungnir, Odin's spear, is called a sword in Morris and Magnusson's "Alphabetical List of Persons, Places, and Things in the Story," in the *Volsunga Saga*, *Collected Works*, VII, 487.

51 See *Saga Library*, III, 314, "Of King Olaf and The Guiles of Odin."
everything considered, the detailed information which is packed into this allusion is exceedingly edifying regarding Morris's general knowledge of the Odin and Olaf traditions.

The last historical reference cited from the poetry is the most subtle of all. Nicholas speaks, in the unpublished _Wanderers_

> 'From Harald Fair-Hair am I sprung  52
> And thence from Odin in right line,'

The theory that Harald Fair-hair descended from Odin follows the common custom of Old Norse literature and tradition, spoken of above, and calls to mind the genealogy of Harald as it is reconstructed (in reverse order), in two steps: first, Harald's ancestry back to Sigurd the Volsung, and second, Sigurd's ancestry back to Odin. The bare outlines of these genealogies are given here.

1. 

Odin

Sigi

Rerir

Volsungr

Sigmund

Sigurd

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52 Collected Works, XXIV, 127.

53 It should also be remembered that at the time Morris wrote these lines, he had no such specific knowledge of the Volsungs as he had in 1870. The earlier _Wanderers_ was written 1865-68. Harald's descent is mentioned, though not in detail, in the Story of Halfdan The Black, Saga Library, III, 77-87.
The child Aslaug, in some versions of the Volsung legend the
daughter of Sigurd and Brynhild by a marriage which occurred
before that of Sigurd and Gudrun, and in others a love-child
of Sigurd and Brynhild's illicit union, is married to the
famous Ragnar Lodbrok, and from them comes Harald's line.

II. Sigurd-Brynhild
  m.
Aslaug—Ragnar Lodbrok
  m.
Sigurd Worm-in-eye
  m.
Helgi-Keen-Aslaug
  m.
Sigurd-Hart
  m.
Ragnhild-Halfdan the Black
  m.
Harald Fair-hair.

There is nothing to be gained from the assumption that Morris
comprehended the details of this alleged genealogy as early as
1865-68, though it is certain that he was well acquainted with
it after 1870. It is given here merely to suggest that Morris
knew what he was doing when he referred to the Harald-Odin re-
relationsh ip.

In Part I, Chapter II, of this consideration of Morris's
relations with the Old Icelandic, the statement was made that
before Morris came to Magnusson for study, he was fairly well
versed in the history, customs, and mythology of the Old Norse-
men; the quotations from his early poetry thus far discussed
will give some specific proof of the truth of this statement, as far as history and customs are concerned. The quotations dealing with Eddic subjects, in the next Section, will show as well that he was not ill-prepared in the mythology; and since these passages are found chiefly in the 1865-70 group of poems, it will be seen that the translations of the Eddas which Morris read before the time that he and Magnússon went over the Volsung Laya together had made no small impression upon his mind, and hence upon his poetry.

VI

The allusions to the Edda materials in Morris's poetry concern both the Gods and the Heroes, but they give evidence of a much more thorough understanding of the first cycle than of the second. The Volsung [Hero] passages are neither subtle nor involved. Besides the quotation, already discussed, which connects Harald with Odin, two others of importance are present in The Wanderers. Encountering certain cannibals, the speaker says:

'For with our grief such fearful foes we grew, That Odin's gods had hardly scared men more 54 As fearless through the naked press we bore.'

The Gods of Odin's Asgard, except for Thor, whose aspect is generally fearsome, and Loki, whose mischief-making is a byword, are nearly always represented as kindly, especially in their

54 Collected Works, III, 48.
treatment of men. Though they are the eternal enemies of the Rime-giants, often fight rather viciously among themselves, and even play tricks upon unsuspecting men when they visit Midgard, their normal appearances and deeds would not frighten men. But they were by no means always of calm and gentle aspect, and were indeed capable of great fierceness in looks and in actions. Morris appreciated the fact that, given the same circumstances, Odin's gods would have been even more fierce than the Norwegian mariners about whom Rolf is speaking. That Odin and his lesser gods were not capable of the sublimity of the Christian God of Love, Morris seemed fully to understand. The wrath of the Norse Gods, as for instance in the Lokasenna, and the Thrymskviða, was terrific when once aroused.

Morris also knew that shortly after Christianity was introduced into the Scandinavian countries, the practice of the people was to rely on both the God of their missionaries, and upon the old Odinic worship which their ancestors had so long carried on. The Wanderers had accepted the Christian faith; moreover, they had a priest in their party, but they had not forgotten the heathen tales of long ago. One says:

'Though we worshipped God,  
And heard mass duly, still of Swithiod  
The Greater, Odin and his house of gold,  
The noble stories cease not to be told.'

55 For this characteristic of the Norse Gods, see Gylfaginning, Chapter 51, and Völuspá, Stanzas 43-66.

56 A modern treatment of the same paradoxical, dual worship exists in Sigrid Undset's Kristin Lavransdattur.

57 Collected Works, III, 6.
"Swithiod the greater," or Sweden the Great [Svíþjóð hin mikla], also called Godhome, was the home of the Gods, in certain sagas, but the term found no general use in legitimate Eddic material. Magnússon ventures the opinion that it was synonymous with Valhalla. Morris probably got it from the Ynglinga Saga, which, as we have seen above, he must have known, and in which the names Svíþjóð and göðheimar occur frequently. If this is true, the phrases "of Swithiod the greater," and Odin's "house of gold" are redundant, for Gladsheim was the fifth home of the Gods ("In my Father's House there are many mansions") and contains within it Valhalla. Says Odin, disguised as Grimmel:

'The fifth is Gladsheim, and gold-bright there
Stand Valhall stretching wide';

Following the lines from The Wanderers concerning Swithiod, quoted above, the speaker continues to note the contrast between the old and new in times and religion:

'A little and unworthy land it seemed,
And all the more of Asgard's days I dreamed,
And worthier seemed the ancient faith of praise.'

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58 See Ynglinga Saga in Saga Library, III, 25-26, where Sweddir searches for Godhome so that he may find Odin.


60 Grimmismal, Stanza 8, Bellow's translation. Cf. also Gylfaginning, Chapter XIV, wherein Gladsheim [glaðsheimr] is the first house: "It was their [the Gods'] first work to make that court in which their twelve seats stand, and another, the high-seat which Allfather himself has. That house is the best-made of any on earth, and the greatest; without and within, it is all like one piece of gold; men call it Gladsheim."

[The Prose Edda, Translated by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur (New York, 1929), p. 25.]

61 I.e., the Yand in which he, the speaker, lived.

In closing this particular discussion, one should point out that Morris's respect for "the ancient faith of praise," and the worthwhile aspiration toward Valhalla which all true heroes had, is not the least of the many things which Old Norse literature taught him.

To only three other Norse Gods,—Heimdall, Baldr, and Thor,—does Morris allude in his non-Norse poems. The allusion to Heimdall in the incomplete "In Arthur's House," testifies to Morris's early recognition of the importance of ragna rök.

'E'en as the sun arising wan
In the black sky when Heimdall's horn
Screams out and the last day is born,
This blade to eyes of men shall be
On that dread day I shall not see--,

The old carle who is speaking to Arthur's entourage refers to ragna rök, the last battle of the Gods with their ancient enemies, the giants, by telling of the harbinger which shall herald it: Heimdall's horn. Heimdall, the "white God," dwells in Himinbjörg, close to Bifrost, the Bridge of Æsir. He is the watchman of the Gods, and when the giants come raging over Bifrost, he will blow "Yeller-Horn" [Gjallarhorn] to warn the Gods. Then the Gods will arise and take counsel; Yggdrasill will tremble, and the Æsir will attack their invaders; there

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63 Morris's understanding and appreciation of the Eddic code of ethics is discussed above, Part I, Chapter III.

64 Collected Works, XXIV, 323.

65 Gylfaginning, Chapter XXVII.
will be much slaughter and mutual-killing in duels, the world
will be burned, and the Gods and champions of mankind will be
66 dead. Then the "dread day," which Morris's old earle says
"I shall not see," will have come.

Baldur's chief characteristics,—his beauty and bright-
ness,—were apparent to Morris of course. In order to de-
scribe another man whose aspect he wished to appear shining
also, Morris uses a Baldur allusion as a simile. The elder
woman in Anthony pictures a youth for the maiden:

'Southland may,
Almost would he have moved thy solemn heart;
Baldur come back to life67 again he seemed
A sun to light the dim hall's glimmering dusk--'68

This information concerning Baldur is given many times in both
Eddas; Morris may have recalled a passage from Snorri:

'The second son of Odin is Baldr, and good things
are to be said of him...He is so fair of feature,
and so bright, that light shines from him.'69

Possibly the most obscure of all the references to the
Norse Gods is one which makes mention of Thor. In Ogier the
Dane, the twelfth tale of The Earthly Paradise, Ogier scolds
the multitude with the following injunction:

66 See Snorri's Edda, Chapters LI, LII, LIII.

67 "Baldur come back to life," cf. "Ah! when thy Balder comes
back...." in Morris's Iceland First Seen, Collected Works, IX,
126, and also "And Baldr comes back" [Baldr man kome],
Voluspa, Stanza 62.

68 Collected Works, XXIV, 335.

69 Gylfaginning, Chapter XXII, Brodeur's translation, p. 36.
'S[ain]t. Mary! do such men as ye
Fight with the wasters from across the sea?
Then certes, are ye lost, however good
Your hearts may be; not such were those who stood
Beside the Hammer-bearer years agone.'

It is appropriate that Ogier the Dane, should employ such a
figure in his speech. The "Hammer-Bearer" is Thor [Mjörn, 
Vingbur: "Thor the Hurler"] and "those who stood" are probably 
the other Gods. The allusion no doubt contrasts the inadequacy 
of the Ogier warriors in battle with the strength of the Æsir. 
They (the Æsir) "stood beside the Hammer-Bearer" while Loki 
wrangled and accused the Asynjur of infidelity, and their accum-
ulated rage, after Loki's invective against, Sif, Thor's wife, 
drove Loki out of Asgard, whence he hid in Franang's Waterfall, 
and was fished out in the form of a salmon by the Gods. This con-
cluded a long series of other ill deeds by Loki, and henceforth 
he lies bound with the guts of his son, Vali, waiting, as 
Snorri says, "till the weird of the Gods."

After the completion of the translations of Gunnlauga's 
Saga and Grettir the Strong, Magnusson turned Morris's atten-
tion toward the Volsung Lays of the Edda, which, as we have 
noted before, were among the most important, in inspirational

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70 Collected Works, IV, 235-236.

71 Loki's expulsion for his abuse of the Gods is found in the 
Elder Edda, Lokasenna, stanzas 60-65. Cf. also Thrymshwittha 
for Thor's wrath, and the passive nature of his companions, 
Stanzas 30-33.

72 In Snorri's version, however, Loki is punished by the Gods 
for his part in Baldr's death, Gylfaginning, Chapter I.

73 In Part I, Chapter II. See also above, Part I, Chapter III.
value, of all the Old Norse reading and translating which Morris did with Magnusson. Although Magnusson states elsewhere that Morris was familiar with the Eddas from the Thorpe and Davent renditions, he leads one to suppose, in his Preface to the Saga Library, that Morris's first real understanding of the Volsung stories came through the translations which they made together in 1870. Two of the three allusions from the Old Norse Hero cycle in the early Morris poetry do not provide any basis for disproving Magnusson's general statement. But it can be shown in these poems which were written before the Volsung Lays were read in the original, that Morris had not forgotten all of what he had learned about the Volsungs in the years preceding his study with Magnusson.

The first two Volsung allusions refer to the Hoard of the Niblungs. The "link" following The Writing on the Image, in The Earthly Paradise, Part II, contains the following passage:

They praised the tale, and for a while they talked
Of other tales of treasure-seekers balked,
And shame and loss for men insatiate stored,
Nitooris' tomb, the Niblungs' fatal hoard.75

The other Niblung reference mentions the Hoard figuratively, as a synonym for gold:

[On the Sword, Tyrfing]

74 Saga Library, VI, Preface, pp. xv-xvi. See also Part I, Chapter II above, for quotations from Magnusson's writings on Morris.

75 Collected Works, IV, 85.
"The ruddy kin of Niblung's [sic] curse
O'er the tresses of a sea-wife's hair
Was wrapped about the handle fair;" 76

The phrase "ruddy kin" is easily explicable, but "the sea-
wife's hair" is not so readily interpreted. Ægir the Norse
sea-god, had a wife, Ran, who was the sea-wife in most Eddic
stories concerning the deities of the waters. Her "hair" may
pertain to the net in which she caught those ship-wrecked with-
in her domain, or it may refer to gold itself. The vague al-
lusion to "a sea-wife's hair" probably was intended by Morris
to represent simply one of the strange attributes of Tyrfig,
or perhaps to signify the fetter which bound Tyrfig to its
scabbard so that its unwary possessor might not pull it out and
thereby kill himself, since Tyrfig always took a life when it
was bared. The passage is certainly mystical and mysterious enough
to lend to the sword that glamour of the supernatural which is so
definitely a feature of charmed weapons of the Norsemen.

The final quotation, from Love is Enough, speaks of a differ-
ent part of the Volsung story from those already mentioned: the
marriage of Gunnar and Brynhild. "Love" speaks:

---'Yea, in the heaven from whence my dreams go forth
Are stored the signs that make the world of worth:
There is the wavering wall of mighty Troy
About my Helen's hope and Paris' joy:

[There also is]

My Sigurd's sword, my Brynhild's fiery bed,
The tale of years of Gudrun's drearilhead." 78

76 "In Arthur's House," in Collected Works, XXIV, 320.

77 "Ran's light" was a kenning for gold, since Ægir used gold
instead of torches to illuminate his palace. See Snorri's Edda,
Málakaparmál, Chapter XXXIII.

"Sigurd's sword" was Gráð, which Regin made from the shards of Sigmund's broken brand. "Brynhild's fiery bed" symbolizes a well-known episode in the Volsung legend: Sigurd, in the person of Gunnar, rode through the flames that surrounded Brynhild, on his horse, Grani, and slept with her three nights in the guise of Gunnar, placing his sword, Gráð, between them. It was Gudrun's later knowledge of this, the subsequent murder of Sigurd by her brothers, and the ensuing life of tragedy, that made up those events which are, "The tale of years of Gudrun's dreariness."  

VII

The majority of the allusions cited in this Chapter are from Morris's early [1865-70] poems; of these, the greater number are found in the two versions of The Wanderers, the first written between 1865 and the publication of the second, in 1868. If there is anything startling about the fact that before he could read Old Norse, Morris used more Norse references in miscellaneous poems than he did after the years of actual Old Icelandic study with Magnusson, let that other fact, that the poems written after 1869 contain not only references and allusions, but whole stories from the Old Icelandic, explain away whatever paradox to which this situation gives rise. The memory of English

79 This portion of the story is told in Gripispa, stanzas 36-51.
versions of the Heimskringla as translated by Laing, and the Eddas, as rendered by Thorpe and Dasset, sufficed for the relatively minor Norse materials used in Morris's lesser poems, and which tend in an accurate way to show what Morris knew before Magnusson's time; but nothing other than the adaptation of powerful stories directly from the Old Norse versions would satisfy the artistic urge which brought forth The Lovers of Gudrun and Sigurd the Volsung; major poems of a later period.
PART III

CONTRIBUTIONS OF OLD NORSE LITERATURE TO

THE SUBSTANCE OF WILLIAM MORRIS'S

POETRY