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THE POETIC EDDA

Sigrdrífumál

The Ballad of the Victory-Bringer

Old Norse · English – H. A. Bellows (1923)

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After slaying the dragon Fáfnir, Sigurð rides up the mountain Hindarfjall and sees a great light blazing to the sky. Within a wall of shields he finds a figure asleep in full armour; lifting the helm, he sees that it is a woman. She is the valkyrie Sigrdrífa, in the heroic legend identified with Brynhild. Odin had pricked her with the sleep-thorn because in battle she felled the old king Hjálmgunnar, to whom he himself had promised victory, and doomed her to be wed. Sigurð cuts the tight-grown mail-coat from her with the sword Gram; she wakes, greets day and night, gods and goddesses, and hands him the draught of memory. Then she teaches him the lore of runes — victory-runes, ale-runes, birth-runes for the aid of women in labour, sea-runes for the voyage, branch-runes for healing, speech-runes and thought-runes — and gives him eleven wise counsels for life. The close of the poem is affected by the Great Lacuna of the Codex Regius. Sources: Old Norse Codex Regius (ed. Guðni Jónsson) and Henry Adams Bellows 1923, both public domain.

	Old Norse	English - H. A. Bellows (1923)
1	<i>Hvat beit brynju? Hví brá ek svefni? Hverr felldi af mér fölvor nauðir? Hann svaraði: Sigmundar burr, sleit fyr skömmu hrafn hrælundir, hjörð Sigurðar!</i>	What bit through the byrnie? how was broken my sleep? Who made me free of the fetters pale? He answered: Sigmund's son, with Sigurth's sword, That late with flesh hath fed the ravens.
2	<i>Lengi ek svaf, lengi ek sofnuð var, löng eru lýða læ; Óðinn því veldr, er ek eigi máttak bregða blundstöfum.</i>	Long did I sleep, my slumber was long, And long are the griefs of life; Othin decreed that I could not break The heavy spells of sleep.
3	<i>Heill dagr! Heilir dags synir! Heil nótt ok níft! Óreiðum augum lítið okkr þinir ok gefið sitjöndum sigr!</i>	Hail, day! Hail, sons of day! And night and her daughter now! Look on us here with loving eyes, That waiting we victory win.
4	<i>Heilir æsir! Heilar ásynjur! Heil sjá in fjölnýta fold! Mál ok mannvit gefið okkr mærum tveim ok læknishendr, meðan lifum.</i>	Hail to the gods! Ye goddesses, hail, And all the generous earth! Give to us wisdom and goodly speech, And healing hands, life-long.
5	<i>Bjór færi ek þér, brynþings apaldr, magni blandinn ok megintíri; fullr er hann ljóða ok líknstafa, góðra galdra ok gamanrúna.</i>	Beer I bring thee, tree of battle, Mingled of strength and mighty fame; Charms it holds and healing signs, Spells full good, and gladness-runes.

- 6 *Sigrúnar skaltu kunna,
ef þú vilt sigr hafa,
ok rísta á hjalti hjörs,
sumar á véttrimum,
sumar á valböstum,
ok nefna tysvar Tý.*
- Winning-runes learn,
if thou longest to win,
And the runes on thy sword-hilt write;
Some on the furrow,
and some on the flat,
And twice shalt thou call on Tyr.
- 7 *Ölrúnar skaltu kunna,
ef þú vill annars kvæn
véli-t þik í tryggð, ef þú trúir;
á horni skal þær rísta
ok á handar baki
ok merkja á nagli Nauð.*
- Ale-runes learn,
that with lies the wife
Of another betray not thy trust;
On the horn thou shalt write,
and the backs of thy hands,
And Need shalt mark on thy nails.
- 8 *Full skal signa
ok við fári sjá
ok verpa lauki í lög;
þá ek þat veit,
at þér verðr aldri
meinblandinn mjöðr.*
- Thou shalt bless the draught,
and danger escape,
And cast a leek in the cup;
For so I know
thou never shalt see
Thy mead with evil mixed.
- 9 *Bjargrúnar skaltu kunna,
ef þú bjarga vilt
ok leysa kind frá konum;
á lófum þær skal rísta
ok of liðu spenna
ok biðja þá dísir duga.*
- Birth-runes learn,
if help thou wilt lend,
The babe from the mother to bring;
On thy palms shalt write them,
and round thy joints,
And ask the fates to aid.
- 10 *Brimrúnar skaltu rísta,
ef þú vilt borgit hafa
á sundi seglmörum;
á stafni skal rísta
ok á stjórnarblaði
ok leggja eld í ár,
er-a svá brattr breki
né svá bláar unnir,
þó kemstu heill af hafí.*
- Wave-runes learn,
if well thou wouldst shelter
The sail-steeds out on the sea;
On the stem shalt thou write,
and the steering blade,
And burn them into the oars;
Though high be the breakers,
and black the waves,
Thou shalt safe the harbor seek.
- 11 *Limrúnar skaltu kunna,
af þú vilt læknir vera,
ok kunna sár at sjá;
á berki skal þær rísta
ok á baðmi viðar,
þeim er lúta austr limar.*
- Branch-runes learn,
if a healer wouldst be,
And cure for wounds wouldst work;
On the bark shalt thou write,
and on trees that be
With boughs to the eastward bent.

12 *Málrúnar skaltu kunna,
ef þú vilt, at manngi þér
heiftum gjaldi harm:
þær of vindr,
þær of vefr,
þær of setr allar saman
á því þingi,
er þjóðir skulu
í fulla dóma fara.*

Speech-runes learn,
that none may seek
To answer harm with hate;
Well he winds
and weaves them all,
And sets them side by side,
At the judgment-place,
when justice there
The folk shall fairly win.

13 *Hugrúnar skaltu kunna,
ef þú vilt hverjum vera
geðsvinnari guma;
þær of réð,
þær of reist,
þær of hugði Hroft
af þeim legi,
er lekit hafði
ór hausi Heiðdraupnis
ok ór horni Hoddrofnis.*

Thought-runes learn,
if all shall think
Thou art keenest minded of men.
Them Hropt arranged,
and them he wrote,
And them in thought he made,
Out of the draught
that down had dropped
From the head of Heithdraupnir,
And the horn of Hoddrofnir.

14 *Á bjargi stóð
með Brimis eggjar,
hafði sér á höfði hjalm;
þá mælti Mímis höfuð
fróðligt it fyrsta orð
ok sagði sanna staf.*

On the mountain he stood
with Brimir's sword,
On his head the helm he bore;
Then first the head
of Mim spoke forth,
And words of truth it told.

15 *Á skildi kvað ristnar,
þeim er stendr fyr skínandi goði,
á eyra Árvakrs
ok á Alsvinn's hófi,
á því hvéli, er snýsk
undir reið Hrungnis,
á Sleipnis tönnum
ok á sleða fjötrum.*

He bade write on the shield
before the shining goddess,
On Arvak's ear,
and on Alsvith's hoof,
On the wheel of the car
of Hrungnir's killer,
On Sleipnir's teeth,
and the straps of the sledge.

16 *Á bjarnar hrammi
ok á Braga tungu,
á ulfs klóum
ok á arnar nefi,
á blóðgum vængjum
ok á brúar sporði,
á lausnar lófa
ok á líknar spori.*

On the paws of the bear,
and on Bragi's tongue,
On the wolf's claws bared,
and the eagle's beak,
On bloody wings,
and bridge's end,
On freeing hands
and helping foot-prints.

- 17 *Á gleri ok á gulli
ok á gumna heillum,
í víni ok í virtri
ok vilisessi,
á Gugnir's oddi
ok á Grana brjósti,
á nornar nagli
ok á nefi uglu.*
- On glass and on gold,
and on goodly charms,
In wine and in beer,
and on well-loved seats,
On Gungnir's point,
and on Grani's breast,
On the nails of Norns,
and the night-owl's beak.
- 18 *Allar váru af skafnar,
þær er váru á ristnar,
ok hverfðar við inn helga mjöð
ok sendar á víða vega;
þær ro með ásum,
þær ro með alfum,
sumar með vísu vönum
sumar hafa mennskir menn.*
- Shaved off were the runes
that of old were written,
And mixed with the holy mead,
And sent on ways so wide;
So the gods had them,
so the elves got them,
And some for the Wanes so wise,
And some for mortal men.
- 19 *Þat eru bókrúnar,
þat eru bjargrúnar
ok allar ölrúnar
ok mætar meginrúnar,
hveim er þær kná óvilltar
ok óspilltar
sér at heillum hafa;
njóttu, ef þú namst,
unz rjúfask regin.*
- Beech-runes are there,
birth-runes are there,
And all the runes of ale,
And the magic runes of might;
Who knows them rightly
and reads them true,
Has them himself to help;
Ever they aid,
Till the gods are gone.
- 20 *Nú skaltu kjósa,
alls þér er kostur of boðinn,
hvassa vápna hlynur;
sögn eða þögn
hafðu þér sjálf í hug;
öll eru mein of metin.*
- Now shalt thou choose,
for the choice is given,
Thou tree of the biting blade;
Speech or silence,
'tis thine to say,
Our evil is destined all.
- 21 *Munk-a ek flæja,
þótt mik feigan vitir,
emk-a ek með bleyði borinn;
ástráð þín
ek vil öll hafa;
svá lengi sem ek lifi.*
- I shall not flee,
though my fate be near,
I was born not a coward to be;
Thy loving word
for mine will I win,
As long as I shall live.
- 22 *Þat ræð ek þér it fyrsta,
at þú við frændr þína
vammalaust verir;
síðr þú hefnir,
þótt þeir sakar geri;
þat kveða dauðum duga.*
- Then first I rede thee,
that free of guilt
Toward kinsmen ever thou art;
No vengeance have,
though they work thee harm,
Reward after death thou shalt win.

- 23 *Þat ræð ek þér annat,
at þú eið né sverir,
nema þann er saðr sé;
grimmar limar
ganga at tryggðrofi;
armr er vára vargr.*
- 24 *Þat ræð ek þér þriðja,
at þú þingi á
deili-t við heimska hali,
því að ósviðr maðr
lætur oft kveðin
verri orð en viti.*
- 25 *Allt er vant,
ef þú við þegir,
þá þykkir þú með bleyði borinn
eða sönnu sagðr;
hættir er heimis kviðr,
nema sér góðan geti;
annars dags
láttu hans öndu farit,
ok launa svá lýðum lygi.*
- 26 *Þat ræð ek þér it fjórða,
ef býr fordæða
vammafull á vegi,
ganga er betra
en giska sé,
þótt þik nótt of nemi.*
- 27 *Fornjósna augu
þurfu fira synir,
hvars skulu vreiðir vega;
oft bölvísar konur
sitja brautu nær,
þær er deyfa sverð ok sefa.*
- 28 *Þat ræð ek þér it fimmta,
þóttú fagnar séir
brúðir bekkjum á,
sifja silfr
lát-a-ðu þínum svefni ráða;
teygj-at-tu þér at kossi konur.*
- 29 *Þat ræð ek þér it sétta,
þótt með seggjum fari
ölðrmál til öflug,
drukkín deila
skal-at-tu við dolgviðu;
margan stelr vín viti.*
- Then second I rede thee,
to swear no oath
If true thou knowest it not;
Bitter the fate
of the breaker of troth,
And poor is the wolf of his word.
- Then third I rede thee,
that thou at the Thing
Shalt fight not in words with fools;
For the man unwise
a worser word
Than he thinks doth utter oft.
- Ill it is
if silent thou art,
A coward born men call thee,
And truth mayhap they tell;
Seldom safe is fame,
Unless wide renown be won;
On the day thereafter
send him to death,
Let him pay the price of his lies.
- Then fourth I rede thee,
if thou shalt find
A wily witch on thy road,
It is better to go
than her guest to be,
Though night enfold thee fast.
- Eyes that see
need the sons of men
Who fight in battle fierce;
Oft witches evil
sit by the way,
Who blade and courage blunt.
- Then fifth I rede thee,
though maidens fair
Thou seest on benches sitting,
Let the silver of kinship
not rob thee of sleep,
And the kissing of women beware.
- Then sixth I rede thee,
if men shall wrangle,
And ale-talk rise to wrath,
No words with a drunken
warrior have,
For wine steals many men's wits.

30 *Söngur ok öl
hefr seggjum verit
mörgum at móðtrega,
sumum at bana,
sumum at bölstöfum;
fjölð er, þat er fira tregur.*

Brawls and ale
full oft have been
An ill to many a man,
Death for some,
and sorrow for some;
Full many the woes of men.

31 *Þat ræð ek þér it sjaunda,
ef þú sakar deilir
við hugfulla hali,
berjask er betra
en brenna sé
inni auðstöfum.*

Then seventh I rede thee,
if battle thou seekest
With a foe that is full of might;
It is better to fight
than to burn alive
In the hall of the hero rich.

32 *Þat ræð ek þér it átta,
at þú skalt við illu sjá
ok firrask flærðarstafi;
mey þú teygj-at
né manns konu
né eggja ofgamans.*

Then eighth I rede thee,
that evil thou shun,
And beware of lying words;
Take not a maid,
nor the wife of a man,
Nor lure them on to lust.

33 *Þat ræð ek þér it níunda,
at þú náum bjargir,
hvars þú á foldu finnr,
hvárts eru sótt dauðir
eða eru sædauðir
eða eru vápn dauðir verar.*

Then ninth I rede thee:
burial render
If thou findest a fallen corpse,
Of sickness dead,
or dead in the sea,
Or dead of weapons' wounds.

34 *Laug skal gera,
þeim er liðnir eru,
þvää hendr ok höfuð,
kemba ok þerra,
aðr í kistu fari,
ok biðja sælan sofa.*

A bath shalt thou give them
who corpses be,
And hands and head shalt wash;
Wipe them and comb,
ere they go in the coffin,
And pray that they sleep in peace.

35 *Þat ræð ek þér it tíunda,
at þú trúir aldregi
várum vargdropa,
hvárstu ert bróður bani
eða hafir þú felldan föður;
ulfr er í ungum syni,
þó sé hann gulli gladdr.*

Then tenth I rede thee,
that never thou trust
The word of the race of wolves,
If his brother thou broughtest to death,
Or his father thou didst fell;
Often a wolf
in a son there is,
Though gold he gladly takes.

36 *Sakar ok heiftir
hyggja-t svefngar vera
né harm in heldr;
vits ok vápna
vant er jöfri at fá
þeim er skal fremstr með firum.*

Battle and hate
and harm, methinks,
Full seldom fall asleep;
Wits and weapons
the warrior needs
If boldest of men he would be.

37 þat ræð ek þér it ellifta,
at þú við illu séir
hvern veg at vini;
langt líf þykkjumk-a-k
lofðungs vita;
römm eru róg of risin.

Then eleventh I rede thee,
that wrath thou shun,
And treachery false with thy friends;
Not long the leader's
life shall be,
For great are the foes he faces.

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