

**HEROES OF THE  
NORSELANDS: THEIR  
STORIES RETOLD**

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Heroes of the Norselands: their stories retold by Katharine F. Boulton

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**KATHARINE F. BOULT**

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**HEROES  
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THEIR STORIES  
RETOLD

BY

**KATHARINE F. BOULT**

WITH NINE ILLUSTRATIONS

BY

**T.H. ROBINSON**



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# HEROES OF THE NORSELANDS

## THE COMING OF THE GODS

### I

**I**N the dawn of the world, when first the Northern Lands were peopled, came there Odin, a mighty god, out of the East, to rule and direct them: for he saw that these men with fair hair and blue eyes would do great deeds, and that, because of them, the North should be held in honour of all nations as long as the earth should last.

Sad was he, knowing that, for him and his, the end of all would come ere the greatness of this people reached its height. Yet was he content, since he, the All-Father, could teach them truth and honour and the love of glory, and to die joyfully, before the Twilight of the Gods crept over the earth, and since he knew that the kingdom of a gentler god would follow his.

Now the world was upheld by the mighty ash-tree, Yggdrasil, and round it on all sides was the sea; and beyond the sea, the frozen land of the giants—Jötunheim.

Among the branches of Yggdrasil did Odin and

## 2 HEROES OF THE NORSELANDS

the gods set their beautiful city, Asgard, wherein they built many glorious halls ; and Odin's hall was called Valhalla. There did he welcome the heroes slain in battle, and bid them feast on ale and mead at eventide and go forth to warlike exercises when the sun was high.

And to join Asgard with the earth, there was built a bridge of many colours, glittering like sun-frost upon the trees on a winter morning, which the gods called Bifröst ; and all could ride over it but Thor, and he, by reason of his strength and weight, would have broken the bridge had he not, in his goat-chariot, gone by another way over the clouds.

At the end of Bifröst was a beautiful city, warded by the maidens called the Nornir. They it is who know the destinies of gods and men, and parcel out unto each the fate that was ordained before the beginning of Time.

And there, also, gushed forth the Fountain of Wisdom, of which the guardian is Mimir. To him one day came Odin, All-Father, seeking how he might better learn to rule the world, and he begged of Mimir a draught from the wondrous spring—

“ Give me, I pray thee, O Mimir, of thy water, that I may know what is best for the gods of Asgard and for the men of lower earth.”

But Mimir shook his head :

“ The water of my spring can only be come at through much toil and sacrifice, O All-Father ! Toil hast thou in plenty, but what of sacrifice ? Give me that which thou valuest most.”

The All-Father was silent, for most of all the world did he value the dear god Baldur the Beautiful, his son.

But Mimir knew his thought and smiled: "Baldur's time is not yet; work hath he still to do, although the Nornir have cut short his thread of life."

"Then most," said Odin, "do I prize mine eyes, since with them can I keep outlook from my throne over the doings of men. Yet shalt thou have one, if I may gather from thee wisdom that will serve me better than an eye."

Again Mimir smiled, and, filling a great beaker with the water of Urd, gave it to the god; and Odin, plucking out his eye, gave it into Mimir's hand, and drained the precious beaker.

"'Tis well," said the guardian of Urd; "ever shall thine eye be here, watered by the silver fountain, as a sign that thou—highest of gods—gave of thy best for men."

Then Odin turned away, but his face shone with the light of knowledge; for now he was sure of what he had never known ere this—how much or how little to do for his people for their highest good. For what the Nornir decreed he could not alter; yet might he work much sorrow by striving against them unwittingly, so was it best to have this fore-knowledge of their will.

## II

WITH Odin, to Asgard, came many gods and goddesses. First, his wife, Frigga, queen of all; to her was all the future plain, and all secrets open; to her did the Nornir tell the weird they wove for men, but unto none did she ever make known that which should come to pass, not even to Odin.