

**THE TALE OF THROND OF
GATE:
COMMONLY CALLED
FAEREYINGA SAGA**

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The Tale of Throned of Gate: Commonly Called Faereyinga Saga by F. York Powell

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(NORTHERN LIBRARY. VOL. II.)

NORTHERN LIBRARY

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THE
TALE OF THROND OF GATE

COMMONLY CALLED

FÆREYINGA SAGA
=

ENGLISHED BY

F. YORK POWELL

REGIUS PROFESSOR OF MODERN HISTORY IN THE UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD; FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE;
STUDENT OF CHRIST CHURCH

"Such are the golden Hopes of iron Days"



LONDON
DAVID NUTT, 270-71 STRAND
1896

TO
HENRY GEORGE LIDDELL
AND
HENRY STONE

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INTRODUCTION

THIS story is found in the great fourteenth-century Icelandic MS. known as Flateybook, cut up into separate pieces, which are seen when brought together to make a single tale, which we may call Throand's Saga.¹ This single story must have been put into shape by an Icelander of the School of Snorre early in the thirteenth century. By an Icelander, because of the lack of local colour and the mistakes made as to the geography of the Færeys. By one of the School of Snorre, because of the identity of its classic style with that of the best Kings' Lives composed by Snorre, and of the finest Icelandic Family Sagas of the day. In the thirteenth century, because it mentions Einar Sigmund's son and his brother Soegge as lately stewards or high reeves of the Færeys (chap. 58), and Böglunga Saga speaks of this Einar, c. 1200, as alive (see Orkney Saga, R.S., i. 233). Such a date as 1230, therefore, well accords with all the internal evidence the style and character of the story yield.

We have got as far as the single story, but, on examination, it turns out to be, like the Icelandic Sagas of the same period, really a compilation, and though there is no small art shown in the composition, it has not been the compiler's care to smooth the joints out, or to disguise the qualities of the different factors in his compound. Obviously the Saga as we have it falls into ten fairly equal sections (which have been noted and numbered for the reader's convenience) as below:—

¹ The bits in Flateybook are thus distributed:—Chapters 1-26, Sigmund at the Heorunga-Voe battle; chapters 28; 29-33; 34-41; 42-48; 49-58. The apocryphal stuff was already in the Saga, which the Flateybook scribes used, cutting it up to suit their purpose of grouping all the matter they could get together about the contemporary Norwegian king's life.

- § I. Tale of Thrond's trick at Haleyre, ch. 2-3.¹
- § II. The slaying of the Brethren, ch. 4-9.
- § III. The boys and the outlaw, ch. 10-16, and part of ch. 26.
- § IV. The Wicking days of Sigmund, ch. 17-21.
- § V. Sigmund revenges his father, ch. 22-27 (less part of ch. 26).
- § VI. Sigmund brings the Faith to the Færeys, ch. 28-33, 34.²
- § VII. The murder of Sigmund, ch. 35-41.
- § VIII. How Thrond would never pay scot to St. Olave, ch. 42-47.
- § IX. The wickedness of the Thorlacssons, ch. 48-51.
- § X. Thrond outwitted and the Thorlacssons slain, ch. 51-57, 58.³

As was pointed out in a little paper on *Saga-growth*, written in 1893 and printed in *Folk-lore*, v. 97, these sections are of various origin.

Sects. IV. and IX. are fictitious matter, absolutely of the same kind as those miserable episodes that disfigure Nial's Saga and many more, and show the sad decay of taste for true epic prose in the post-classic centuries, which had begun to care for other things than native traditions.⁴

Sect. III. is an old tale (part of which survives in our Jack and the Bean-Stalk and in the Eddic poem of Thor and his mate visiting the giant—The Lay of Hymr, C.P.B., i. 220, 511) tacked into the story of Sigmund with considerable skill; the anecdote of the bear-killing is also a bit of old story fitted in to illustrate the young hero's promise (almost an obligatory part of Icelandic Sagas biography), though it was hardly needed after that Spartan sentence, "Grátum eige, frænde, en munum leingr." This section is pretty and neatly inserted, but it never formed part of the original story, and there is a lack of that pith and grip which the true classic style invariably shows somewhere or other.

Let us turn to more veracious matter.

¹ Chapter 1 is mainly citations from *Landnámabók*.

² Chapter 34 is a brief historic notice of Sigmund and the young Earls.

³ Chapter 58 is chiefly an epilogue.

⁴ That this pseudo-wicking stuff was of late insertion is evident. One of the marks of its intrusion is seen in chapter 18, where a notice of Sigmund having been made one of Earl Hacon's house-carles (probably a truth, though it is as likely to have happened after Heorunga-Voe battle as before), now in chapter 21, ought to follow. It also seems possible that chapter 23 is out of place as regards the gift of the ring, which one would have fancied to be Hacon's last present to his friend. But as the glosses, which I have sometimes put back to the margin, show, the middle of the Saga is in a rather dislocated state, mainly owing to worthless additions.