

***THOMAS
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An aerial photograph of a coastal town in Norway, featuring a long, winding bridge that connects several islands and peninsulas. The water is a deep blue, and the land is covered in green vegetation. The town is built on a peninsula, and the bridge extends into the sea, connecting to other islands. The sky is clear and blue.

***EARLY
KINGS
OF NORWAY***

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Early Kings of Norway

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CHAPTER I. HARALD HAARFAGR.

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Till about the Year of Grace 860 there were no kings in Norway, nothing but numerous jarls,—essentially kinglets, each presiding over a kind of republican or parliamentary little territory; generally striving each to be on some terms of human neighborhood with those about him, but,—in spite of "*Fylke Things*" (Folk Things, little parish parliaments), and small combinations of these, which had gradually formed themselves,—often reduced to the unhappy state of quarrel with them. Harald Haarfagr was the first to put an end to this state of things, and become memorable and profitable to his country by uniting it under one head and making a kingdom of it; which it has continued to be ever since. His father, Halfdan the Black, had already begun this rough but salutary process,—inspired by the cupidities and instincts, by the faculties and opportunities, which the good genius of this world, beneficent often enough under savage forms, and diligent at all times to diminish anarchy as the world's worst savagery, usually appoints in such cases,—conquest, hard fighting, followed by wise guidance of the conquered;—but it was Harald the Fairhaired, his son, who conspicuously carried it on and completed it. Harald's birth-year, death-year, and chronology in general, are known only by inference and computation; but, by the latest reckoning, he died about the year 933 of our era, a man of eighty-three.

The business of conquest lasted Harald about twelve years (A.D. 860-872?), in which he subdued also the vikings of the out-islands, Orkneys, Shetlands, Hebrides, and Man.

Sixty more years were given him to consolidate and regulate what he had conquered, which he did with great judgment, industry and success. His reign altogether is counted to have been of over seventy years.

The beginning of his great adventure was of a romantic character.—youthful love for the beautiful Gyda, a then glorious and famous young lady of those regions, whom the young Harald aspired to marry. Gyda answered his embassy and prayer in a distant, lofty manner: "Her it would not beseem to wed any Jarl or poor creature of that kind; let him do as Gorm of Denmark, Eric of Sweden, Egbert of England, and others had done,—subdue into peace and regulation the confused, contentious bits of jarls round him, and become a king; then, perhaps, she might think of his proposal: till then, not." Harald was struck with this proud answer, which rendered Gyda tenfold more desirable to him. He vowed to let his hair grow, never to cut or even to comb it till this feat were done, and the peerless Gyda his own. He proceeded accordingly to conquer, in fierce battle, a Jarl or two every year, and, at the end of twelve years, had his unkempt (and almost unimaginable) head of hair clipt off,—Jarl Rognwald (*Reginald*) of More, the most valued and valuable of all his subject-jarls, being promoted to this sublime barber function;—after which King Harald, with head thoroughly cleaned, and hair grown, or growing again to the luxuriant beauty that had no equal in his day, brought home his Gyda, and made her the brightest queen in all the north. He had after her, in succession, or perhaps even simultaneously in some cases, at least six other wives; and by Gyda herself one daughter and four sons.

Harald was not to be considered a strict-living man, and he had a great deal of trouble, as we shall see, with the tumultuous ambition of his sons; but he managed his government, aided by Jarl Rognwald and others, in a large, quietly potent, and successful manner; and it lasted in this royal form till his death, after sixty years of it.

These were the times of Norse colonization; proud Norsemen flying into other lands, to freer scenes,—to Iceland, to the Faroe Islands, which were hitherto quite vacant (tenanted only by some mournful hermit, Irish Christian *fakir*, or so); still more copiously to the Orkney and Shetland Isles, the Hebrides and other countries where Norse squatters and settlers already were. Settlement of Iceland, we say; settlement of the Faroe Islands, and, by far the notablest of all, settlement of Normandy by Rolf the Ganger (A.D. 876?). [2](#)

Rolf, son of Rognwald, [3](#) was lord of three little islets far north, near the Fjord of Folden, called the Three Vigten Islands; but his chief means of living was that of sea robbery; which, or at least Rolf's conduct in which, Harald did not approve of. In the Court of Harald, sea-robbery was strictly forbidden as between Harald's own countries, but as against foreign countries it continued to be the one profession for a gentleman; thus, I read, Harald's own chief son, King Eric that afterwards was, had been at sea in such employments ever since his twelfth year. Rolf's crime, however, was that in coming home from one of these expeditions, his crew having fallen short of victual, Rolf landed with them on the shore of Norway, and in his strait, drove in some cattle there (a crime by law) and proceeded

to kill and eat; which, in a little while, he heard that King Harald was on foot to inquire into and punish; whereupon Rolf the Ganger speedily got into his ships again, got to the coast of France with his sea-robbers, got infestment by the poor King of France in the fruitful, shaggy desert which is since called Normandy, land of the Northmen; and there, gradually felling the forests, banking the rivers, tilling the fields, became, during the next two centuries, Wilhelmus Conquaestor, the man famous to England, and momentous at this day, not to England alone, but to all speakers of the English tongue, now spread from side to side of the world in a wonderful degree. Tancred of Hauteville and his Italian Normans, though important too, in Italy, are not worth naming in comparison. This is a feracious earth, and the grain of mustard-seed will grow to miraculous extent in some cases.

Harald's chief helper, counsellor, and lieutenant was the above-mentioned Jarl Rognwald of More, who had the honor to cut Harald's dreadful head of hair. This Rognwald was father of Turf-Einar, who first invented peat in the Orkneys, finding the wood all gone there; and is remembered to this day. Einar, being come to these islands by King Harald's permission, to see what he could do in them,—islands inhabited by what miscellany of Picts, Scots, Norse squatters we do not know,—found the indispensable fuel all wasted. Turf-Einar too may be regarded as a benefactor to his kind. He was, it appears, a bastard; and got no coddling from his father, who disliked him, partly perhaps, because "he was ugly and blind of an eye,"—got no flattering even on his conquest of the Orkneys and invention of peat. Here

is the parting speech his father made to him on fitting him out with a "long-ship" (ship of war, "dragon-ship," ancient seventy-four), and sending him forth to make a living for himself in the world: "It were best if thou never camest back, for I have small hope that thy people will have honor by thee; thy mother's kin throughout is slavish."

Harald Haarfagr had a good many sons and daughters; the daughters he married mostly to jarls of due merit who were loyal to him; with the sons, as remarked above, he had a great deal of trouble. They were ambitious, stirring fellows, and grudged at their finding so little promotion from a father so kind to his jarls; sea-robbery by no means an adequate career for the sons of a great king, two of them, Halfdan Haaleg (Long-leg), and Gudrod Ljome (Gleam), jealous of the favors won by the great Jarl Rognwald, surrounded him in his house one night, and burnt him and sixty men to death there. That was the end of Rognwald, the invaluable jarl, always true to Haarfagr; and distinguished in world history by producing Rolf the Ganger, author of the Norman Conquest of England, and Turf-Einar, who invented peat in the Orkneys. Whether Rolf had left Norway at this time there is no chronology to tell me. As to Rolf's surname, "Ganger," there are various hypotheses; the likeliest, perhaps, that Rolf was so weighty a man no horse (small Norwegian horses, big ponies rather) could carry him, and that he usually walked, having a mighty stride withal, and great velocity on foot.

One of these murderers of Jarl Rognwald quietly set himself in Rognwald's place, the other making for Orkney to serve Turf-Einar in like fashion. Turf-Einar, taken by surprise,

fled to the mainland; but returned, days or perhaps weeks after, ready for battle, fought with Halfdan, put his party to flight, and at next morning's light searched the island and slew all the men he found. As to Halfdan Long-leg himself, in fierce memory of his own murdered father, Turf-Einar "cut an eagle on his back," that is to say, hewed the ribs from each side of the spine and turned them out like the wings of a spread-eagle: a mode of Norse vengeance fashionable at that time in extremely aggravated cases!

Harald Haarfagr, in the mean time, had descended upon the Rognwald scene, not in mild mood towards the new jarl there; indignantly dismissed said jarl, and appointed a brother of Rognwald (brother, notes Dahlmann), though Rognwald had left other sons. Which done, Haarfagr sailed with all speed to the Orkneys, there to avenge that cutting of an eagle on the human back on Turf-Einar's part. Turf-Einar did not resist; submissively met the angry Haarfagr, said he left it all, what had been done, what provocation there had been, to Haarfagr's own equity and greatness of mind. Magnanimous Haarfagr inflicted a fine of sixty marks in gold, which was paid in ready money by Turf-Einar, and so the matter ended.

CHAPTER II. ERIC BLOOD-AXE AND BROTHERS.

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In such violent courses Haarfagr's sons, I know not how many of them, had come to an untimely end; only Eric, the accomplished sea-rover, and three others remained to him. Among these four sons, rather impatient for property and authority of their own, King Harald, in his old days, tried to part his kingdom in some eligible and equitable way, and retire from the constant press of business, now becoming burdensome to him. To each of them he gave a kind of kingdom; Eric, his eldest son, to be head king, and the others to be feudatory under him, and pay a certain yearly contribution; an arrangement which did not answer well at all. Head-King Eric insisted on his tribute; quarrels arose as to the payment, considerable fighting and disturbance, bringing fierce destruction from King Eric upon many valiant but too stubborn Norse spirits, and among the rest upon all his three brothers, which got him from the Norse populations the surname of *Blod-axe*, "Eric Blood-axe," his title in history. One of his brothers he had killed in battle before his old father's life ended; this brother was Bjorn, a peaceable, improving, trading economic Under-king, whom the others mockingly called "Bjorn the Chapman." The great-grandson of this Bjorn became extremely distinguished by and by as *Saint Olaf*. Head-King Eric seems to have had a violent wife, too. She was thought to have poisoned one of her other brothers-in-law. Eric Blood-axe had by no means a gentle life of it in this world, trained to

sea-robbery on the coasts of England, Scotland, Ireland and France, since his twelfth year.

Old King Fairhair, at the age of seventy, had another son, to whom was given the name of Hakon. His mother was a slave in Fairhair's house; slave by ill-luck of war, though nobly enough born. A strange adventure connects this Hakon with England and King Athelstan, who was then entering upon his great career there. Short while after this Hakon came into the world, there entered Fairhair's palace, one evening as Fairhair sat Feasting, an English ambassador or messenger, bearing in his hand, as gift from King Athelstan, a magnificent sword, with gold hilt and other fine trimmings, to the great Harald, King of Norway. Harald took the sword, drew it, or was half drawing it, admiringly from the scabbard, when the English excellency broke into a scornful laugh, "Ha, ha; thou art now the feudatory of my English king; thou hast accepted the sword from him, and art now his man!" (acceptance of a sword in that manner being the symbol of investiture in those days.) Harald looked a trifle flurried, it is probable; but held in his wrath, and did no damage to the tricky Englishman. He kept the matter in his mind, however, and next summer little Hakon, having got his weaning done,—one of the prettiest, healthiest little creatures,—Harald sent him off, under charge of "Hauk" (Hawk so called), one of his Principal, warriors, with order, "Take him to England," and instructions what to do with him there. And accordingly, one evening, Hauk, with thirty men escorting, strode into Athelstan's high dwelling (where situated, how built, whether with logs like Harald's, I cannot specifically say), into Athelstan's high

presence, and silently set the wild little cherub upon Athelstan's knee. "What is this?" asked Athelstan, looking at the little cherub. "This is King Harald's son, whom a serving-maid bore to him, and whom he now gives thee as foster-child!" Indignant Athelstan drew his sword, as if to do the gift a mischief; but Hauk said, "Thou hast taken him on thy knee [common symbol of adoption]; thou canst kill him if thou wilt; but thou dost not thereby kill all the sons of Harald." Athelstan straightway took milder thoughts; brought up, and carefully educated Hakon; from whom, and this singular adventure, came, before very long, the first tidings of Christianity into Norway.

Harald Haarfagr, latterly withdrawn from all kinds of business, died at the age of eighty-three—about A.D. 933, as is computed; nearly contemporary in death with the first Danish King, Gorm the Old, who had done a corresponding feat in reducing Denmark under one head. Remarkable old men, these two first kings; and possessed of gifts for bringing Chaos a little nearer to the form of Cosmos; possessed, in fact, of loyalties to Cosmos, that is to say, of authentic virtues in the savage state, such as have been needed in all societies at their incipience in this world; a kind of "virtues" hugely in discredit at present, but not unlikely to be needed again, to the astonishment of careless persons, before all is done!

CHAPTER III. HAKON THE GOOD.

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Eric Blood-axe, whose practical reign is counted to have begun about A.D. 930, had by this time, or within a year or so of this time, pretty much extinguished all his brother kings, and crushed down recalcitrant spirits, in his violent way; but had naturally become entirely unpopular in Norway, and filled it with silent discontent and even rage against him. Hakon Fairhair's last son, the little foster-child of Athelstan in England, who had been baptized and carefully educated, was come to his fourteenth or fifteenth year at his father's death; a very shining youth, as Athelstan saw with just pleasure. So soon as the few preliminary preparations had been settled, Hakon, furnished with a ship or two by Athelstan, suddenly appeared in Norway got acknowledged by the Peasant Thing in Trondhjem "the news of which flew over Norway, like fire through dried grass," says an old chronicler. So that Eric, with his Queen Gunhild, and seven small children, had to run; no other shift for Eric. They went to the Orkneys first of all, then to England, and he "got Northumberland as earldom," I vaguely hear, from Athelstan. But Eric soon died, and his queen, with her children, went back to the Orkneys in search of refuge or help; to little purpose there or elsewhere. From Orkney she went to Denmark, where Harald Blue-tooth took her poor eldest boy as foster-child; but I fear did not very faithfully keep that promise. The Danes had been robbing extensively during the late tumults in Norway; this the Christian Hakon, now established there, paid in kind, and the two countries

were at war; so that Gunhild's little boy was a welcome card in the hand of Blue-tooth.

Hakon proved a brilliant and successful king; regulated many things, public law among others (*Gule-Thing* Law, *Frost-Thing* Law: these are little codes of his accepted by their respective Things, and had a salutary effect in their time); with prompt dexterity he drove back the Blue-tooth foster-son invasions every time they came; and on the whole gained for himself the name of Hakon the Good. These Danish invasions were a frequent source of trouble to him, but his greatest and continual trouble was that of extirpating heathen idolatry from Norway, and introducing the Christian Evangel in its stead. His transcendent anxiety to achieve this salutary enterprise was all along his grand difficulty and stumbling-block; the heathen opposition to it being also rooted and great. Bishops and priests from England Hakon had, preaching and baptizing what they could, but making only slow progress; much too slow for Hakon's zeal. On the other hand, every Yule-tide, when the chief heathen were assembled in his own palace on their grand sacrificial festival, there was great pressure put upon Hakon, as to sprinkling with horse-blood, drinking Yule-beer, eating horse-flesh, and the other distressing rites; the whole of which Hakon abhorred, and with all his steadfastness strove to reject utterly. Sigurd, Jarl of Lade (Trondhjem), a liberal heathen, not openly a Christian, was ever a wise counsellor and conciliator in such affairs; and proved of great help to Hakon. Once, for example, there having risen at a Yule-feast, loud, almost stormful demand that Hakon, like a true man and brother, should drink Yule-beer with