

no attempt to do more than lightly touch on the sagas—each would need a separate paper to itself. Now I pass on to the legends and superstitions which exist even to the present day.

It would be hard to imagine any place more suitable than Iceland as the cradle of wild and exaggerated imaginings. There is something about the broken line of shore, the echoing caves, the glistening glaciers, the rushing waterfalls, the snowclad peaks, that seems to defy one to be devoid of romance and sentiment. Surrounded on all sides by the monuments of power invisible, man peoples the solitude of air and rock and mountain top with beings supernatural.

In the valleys of the interior, away among the deep woods and rich pastures, the elves of *huldra-folk* reign supreme. To the simple shepherd lads, whose hearts she ravishes, the elf-wife appears as a tall and lovely woman with long, golden hair. But her beauty is but skin-deep and her garments cannot hide the emblem of her origin—the cow's tail. So great is the fascination that she wields, that he who comes under her influence forgets everything for love of her; if he follow her to the mountains, he is lost and may forever say farewell to the society of men. As for the elf-man, he may be often seen basking in the sunbeams, but if anyone approach him, he opens his mouth and breathes forth sickness and pestilence.

The legends of the trolls—the Irish fairies—afford to geologists and others a very interesting explanation of various topographical features of the island.

A troll had once taken up his abode near a certain village; but when the people there became pious and went often to church, the poor troll was so desperately annoyed by the incessant ringing of the bells, that he took his departure. Nothing has more contributed to the emigration of the troll folk than the increasing piety of the

people and their taking to bell ringing.

Some time later, this troll met a man from his former village and asked him to be so kind as to take a letter back for him, saying that, if he threw it unopened over the church yard wall, the person for whom it was intended would find it.

The man forgot all about the letter for some time; when he remembered it, he took it from his pocket and examined it. Suddenly water began to trickle from the corner! The letter now opened of itself and water came out faster and faster, so that the poor man had to fly for his life. The treacherous troll had enclosed an entire lake in the envelope, hoping thereby to avenge himself on the church and the church bells, that had so aggravated him! God ordered it otherwise, and to this day, the lake lies in the great meadow where the envelope was opened.

This attitude of antipathy to the church was not, however, shared by all trolls. A troll-man and his wife took a great fancy to a certain clergyman and determined to do him a service by taking an island from the sea and adding it to the church property. So they waded out one night till they reached an island, which suited their notions, and, having rooted it up, they proceeded to take it ashore, the man pulling before, the wife pushing behind. But before they could reach the shore, dawn broke in the east and they were turned to stone. And there you can see them in Breidifjörður to this day, the husband troll a tall, thin, gawky rock, the wife a short and stumpy one; and they are called still old man and old woman.

One large division of Icelandic legend is naturally concerned with the sea. According to the Icelanders, the mermaids are all children of Eve, whom she hid away on one occasion when the Lord came to visit her, because they were not washed and presentable, and who were in consequence condemned to be invisible forever.