

Still more pathetic is the dying speech of *Gudrun*: "O Sigund, remember the pledge thou madest me. Now from the sombre dwelling place among the dead, come forth; lift me in thy shadowy arms and bear me tenderly to the pale kingdoms of Hades."

Most beautiful of all the love tales is that of "*Gunnlaug and the Fair Helga*." *Gunnlaug* of the Worm Torgue came to *Thorstein* to learn law-craft but from the first he much preferred to sit at chess with *Helga* than to puzzle over law with her father! *Thorstein*, however, refused to give her him to wife, saying, just as the tyrannical father in the most modern novel might say, that *Gunnlaug* had not the wherewithal to keep a wife, and that the pair were much too young to know their own minds. Softened at last by their united entreaties, he agreed to keep them on probation for three years; if, at the end of that time, *Gunnlaug* should claim *Helga*, they might be free to wed.

So *Gunnlaug* set off on his journeys, during which he visited the courts of England, Ireland, and Sweden. Alas, illness delayed his return beyond the appointed three years and *Helga* became the bride of *Rafn*.

From the moment of the marriage, *Helga* drooped. She would pace about her new home, like a bird in a cage, and reck nothing of the jewels and garments her husband heaped at her feet.

Time went on and her father wedded her to *Thorkel*, a man of substance. Still she sat plucking out the threads one by one; she had no other joy than to gaze upon the fading cloak and pull the scanty threads away. Then she fell sick. One night, as she sat like some pale ghost with her head on *Thorkel's* knees, she said: "Bring me again the cloak that *Gunnlaug* gave me." And when they had brought it, she sat up, gazed at it for a moment, then plucked the last gold threads away and sank back dead.

I have selected one or two of the

love stories so as to give you some faint idea of the wonderful delicate workmanship of those great sagas of which they form but a side-issue. In a brief paper such as this, it would be an utter impossibility to do anything like justice to these sagas as a whole — to these sagas which can boast tales of adventure and of battle as fine as the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, love stories rivalled only by *Tristram* and *Lancelot* and the best ghost-tales in the world.

Surely it is these little side-issues, these pieces of delicate tracery that show the master hand. Every here and there throughout the sagas, we come upon little things which none but a genius would have mentioned, and which yet put the crowning touches to the characters and turn them for us from stilted images to real creatures of flesh and blood. It may be well to mention a few more of these.

*Thorfinn's* wife takes advantage of her husband's absence to indulge in an extra period of spring cleaning. When the *Berserkers* invade her dwelling, her first thought is not of the personal danger of herself—no—it is of the dirt the men's boots will make in her clean and new-decked hall!

Again: *Grettir*, the outlaw, the reckless, remorseless shedder of men's blood, lavishes his affection on an old pied ram, and this pet comes every evening to kiss the bearded warrior good-night.

Once again: We have drawn for us in *Viga Glum* a picture of all the young Vikings, drawing lots to see who shall sit at table beside the *Lady Astrida*, the most beautiful of maidens.

And one closing example: We have the wife of *Viga Glum*, a fit ancestor for Florence Nightingale, coming out after the battle to tend the wounded, no matter to what side they belonged.

These are but a few examples out of hundreds, but I think they seem to illustrate my point.

As I have said earlier. I am making