

solemn conclave the Æsir recommended, even besought, Thor to personate Freya and go to Utgard. He long resisted the humiliating alternative, but the public interests prevailed, and, arrayed in the head-dress and other magnificent robes of the queen, and veiled as a bride of Heaven, he set off for Giantland, accompanied by the Machiavelian Loki, who had not yet lost himself by his great offence. The giants were rather astonished by a glimpse they got of the bride's fierce eyes, and still more at her fine appetite, when she ate an ox, eight salmon, and no end of sweetmeats, the disappearance of which was a mortification to the bridesmaids. At length the mighty hammer was brought in on a truss borne by four giants. Thor seized it, and laid about him, crashing skulls to the right and the left. He was now himself again, and restored to his authority. It is observable that even in this instance the moral of the Eddas, that sheer strength is everything, and policy unworthy of the gods, is not entirely abandoned. It is when deprived of his proper element of physical force, and consequently enervated, and in a manner demoralised, that the great Thor has recourse to policy.

Even from these small glimpses one may see how thoroughly the Eddas are filled and animated by the spirit of the northern people. Throughout there is ever-striving energy, determination of purpose, the physical power seconding the unbending will, a courage that is manifest not only in contempt of death, but in patient endurance of suffering, a distaste of all politic devices and diplomatic intrigues, and a reliance on honest strength to carry out the mighty designs of a never-resting ambition. There are no applications of gentleness and mercy, but there is a strong sense of justice and an aversion to wanton cruelty. There is no pretence of abjuring the good gifts of nature, and shrivelling into impotent asceticism; on the contrary, there is mighty feasting and revelling when the bow is unbent and the sword sheathed, but there is honest domestic faith and fidelity withal. Such are the qualities set to struggle with the ice, the storms, and the arid soil of the northern land; and all these difficulties are conquered so effectually that their conquerors abide in affluence and splendour.

Yet the propensity to hunt forth analogies, and make a display of learning and ingenuity, has not overlooked this stormy region; and we are taught to connect its thoroughly northern legends with the voluptuous aspirations of the Oriental nations and the polished