



Tain Buis

The Runestone is a journal of the old Norse religion and is dedicated to revival of that religion as epitomized during the Viking Age, and to the revival of the values of courage, freedom, and personal independence which are associated with it. The Runestone is the official publication of THE VIKING BROTHERHOOD and is published quarterly. Subscriptions are \$3.00 per year in the U.S. and Canada, \$4.00 per year overseas. Write The Runestone, Box 31023, El Paso, Tex 79931. PLEASE write all checks to THE VIKING BROTHERHOOD thankyou.

NOTICE

Due to our printers cost increase, we at The Runestone are going to have to raise the subscription fee at least one dollar for both the U.S. and Europe. I am sorry but it had to be done. PAM

VIKING BROTHERHOOD TAX EXEMPT!

"Based on information supplied, and assuming your operations will be as stated in your application for recognition of exemption, we have determined you are exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code." Thus began a letter from the IRS, that we don't have to pay Federal income tax, and that contributions to us are tax deductible.

This ruling culminated our efforts of a year or more to attain this status. We are rather proud of it.

THE SHETLAND SHIP AS AN EMERGING RITUAL

In late January of each year, the population of Lerwick, in the Shetland Islands, conducts a strange fire ritual which has a double nature - whether the Shetlanders are away of it or not.

Early on this January evening five or six hundred people, dressed in weird and bizarre costume, parade through the dark streets of the town carrying torches and towing behind them a replica of a Viking warship, complete with dragon prow. The ship is hauled to an open place and the disguised townspeople surround it in several ranks. At the given signal the marchers throw their blazing torches high into the air, from whence they plummet onto the deck of the ship, setting it ablaze from end to end with flames which consumes it, the rest of the night is filled with dancing in fine festival fashion.

The most remarkable fact about this ceremony - or, more specifically, about the Viking ship which is its central item - is that it is not the remains of an old pagan Norse rite. Oh, parts of the event are very old. The costumes and the drinking are old folk customs, but the immolation of a Viking ship dates back no farther than the late 1880's. Until 1889, the participants carried burning tar barrels as a remnant of a pre-Christian festival which celebrated - or attempted to cause - the return of the sun to the cold and lifeless winter sky.

The addition of the Viking ship has changed the former customs beyond recognition, and has lasted long enough to be declared a legitimate folk tradition. Some authorities speculate that whoever introduced the ship-burning realized the significance of a ritual similar to an old ship burial, with its release of the spirit from the body, and its connection to the freeing of the sun from the bondage of winter. At any rate, the addition of the Viking ship to the custom tends to underline the Norse ancestry of the Shetlanders and to remind them of their Viking origins. It may indeed be seen as a symptom - or even partially as a cause - of the Shetland - Norse separatist sentiment which has been growing throughout this century.

That this folk event can be interpreted in several ways is apparent. One can look at it as a simple custom observed by a people to keep faith with their traditions and as an excuse to do a lot of drinking. Or one can see it as the survival, however distorted by time, of old pagan rites. Or - and

this may be the most interesting viewpoint of all - the ship burning may indicate a desire, at the deep, unconscious level, of persons of Norse decent longing to revive at least the memories of the glorious past. And maybe much more. Oh, not that the average Shetlander is about to dash out and burn the nearest church, but maybe deep down inside there exists yet a bit of the pagan in men.

NOTICE

The Viking Brotherhood wishes to extend an invitation to all pagans of the Norse tradition, to all who are dedicated to heroic individualism, and to sincere, interested pagans of any persuasion, to attend the first All- Thing to be held since the eclipse of Norse culture. There will be three days of contests, Meats of arms, feasting and drinking, and much serious decision making and discussion regarding the future of the religion of the vikings.

Those wishing further information may write to The Runestone, Box 31023, El Paso, Texas 79931.

HOW CHRISTIANITY CAME TO NORTHERN EUROPE

Few myths about Christianity are as all pervading as the myth that Christianity has spread its Gospel around the world by peaceful conversion and the use of love and reason, and few lies have served the Christian cause more faithfully. Millions of people throughout the earth have been taught from childhood that it was peaceful conquest, not force, that brought Christianity to the pagan peoples of the world.

Christianity, on both its mundane and its mythical levels, is the antithesis of human freedom and the Norse religion. It has always been the traditional opponent of the viking ethic, and it was Christianity that set the old religion of the Norsemen into decline. Thus it behooves us to set history straight and to examine more closely the process by which Northmen Europe became converted to the Christian camp.

Official history, in one of many monumental oversights, totally ignores that there were people who died defending their heathen beliefs - pagan martyrs. In Norway it was Olaf Trygvason and Olaf the Holy who gained fame as propagators of the new religion. As one source puts it "These two waged unceasing battle against the heathen gods, smashing their idols, burning their temples, and either driving out their followers or putting them to a painful death in the name of Christ," In Halgogaland, especially

men clung with tenacity to Odin and Thor. One Eyvind Kinnrif was tortured with red-hot embers until he died - still a pagan. Raud the Powerful, another influential follower of the old ways, was also tortured to death. Tryggvason then had the gall to expropriate Raud's ship for his own use, renaming it "Long Serpent". Thorlief the wise was another man who could not be threatened from his beliefs, and he presented the Christians with something of a special problem; because of his great wisdom and amiable personality, no one could be found to murder him. King Olaf enlisted the aid of Hallfred the Icelander to put him to death or, failing that, to at least blind him. The would-be assassin succeeded in taking one of Thorlief's eyes, but was moved by shame or pity and could not find it in himself to take the other. Thus was Thorlief, like the god ODIN to whom he was true, left with but one eye.

Even in Iceland, where Olaf Trygvason himself did not lead the conversion and where scholar Lee M. Hollander remarks on the "Absence of religious fanaticism" on the part of the Christians, we find the usual hallmarks of Christian missionary activity. The evangelical brand led by the priest Rhangbrand is described in Njal's Saga as going "on to Flotslid and preaching the faith. The strongest opposition came from Vertrliki the Poet and his son Ari; so they killed Vertrliki." Despite Rhangbrand's considerable successes in making at least nominal Christians out of the Icelanders, he still went shaming to Trygvason complaining of ill treatment. The great Christian-king of Norway ordered all the Icelanders in his country rounded up and cast into the dungeons, and had given the order to have them put to death. The only reason this grisley sentence was not carried out was because two Icelanders, Gizur the Whit and Hjalti Skeggjason, offered to sail to their homeland and preach Christianity to the inhabitants of the island (Njal's Saga, Chapter 104). It was these two who rose to the Althing, Icelanders' great legislative and judicial assembly and managed to get Christianity accepted as the state religion. The man who made the final decision (which was, as the saga relates, a political one designed to keep widespread civil war from rendering the final country) was a heathen, one Thorgeir the Priest. Despite his decision which made Iceland a Christian nation he made certain allowances for religious freedom. His words were "The penalty for carrying on these practices openly shall be outlawry, but they shall not be punishable if they are done in private". Immediately after this sentence Njal's Saga continues parenthetically "Within a few years all these heathen practices were absolutely forbidden, in private as well as in public." Thus did a large measure of the traditional Icelandic freedom die.

Christian persecution of pagans was not limited to Iceland or even to Scandinavia; other Germanic heathens elsewhere were subject to violent repression. In Hollander's introduction to The Poetic Edda he remarks that "just as fire and sword wrought more conversions in the Merovingian kingdom, in Germany, and England than did peaceful missionary activity, so too in the north; and little would have been heard of sagas, Eddic lays, and skaldic poetry had it not been for the fortunate existence of the political refuge of remote Iceland. "Despite the horrible deeds of the Christians in Iceland, the repression throughout the rest of the Teutonic world was even more severe. The church aimed at nothing less than cultural extinction of heathens.

If murder and the prejudice exercise of the law were not enough to make men accept the Christian faith, there were always economic measures. The kingdom of Norway had an especially tight stranglehold on the isolated Greenland colony which, because of the severity of its climate and the dangers of its long and hazardous trade routes with the nations of Europe, found itself perpetually fighting for mere survival. Eric the Red and other prominent pagans in this outpost of Norse civilization were threatened with a cessation of trade with Norway unless the Greenlanders adopted Christianity. (The Viking Settlements in North America, by Fredrick J. Poehl, page 21; in other words, this colony of men, women, and children was threatened with immediate suffering and eventual death.

The story of the extremes to which Christians use typically gone in order to spread their religion is not limited to Norse peoples, or even to Europe. Indians of the American Southwest were killed for entering their ceremonial kivas, and their cousins farther south saw their infants' skulls smashed by Spanish soldiers who, having just baptised the babes, fulfilled their bloody duty in the firm belief that the children were being dispatched to Heaven.

But surely, you will ask, is not this intolerance a universal thing? Have not non-Christians practised it as resolutely as the Christians? While intolerance is admittedly no new thing, historical examination shows that the Judeo-Christian religion is one of the few to teach intolerance as an intrinsic and established part of its doctrine. Most heathens have shown themselves remarkably uninterested in forcing their religion on others or condemning them for following other gods, though of course there are exceptions. Herodotus was only one of many prominent pagans who traveled to foreign lands and commented not unfavorably on the gods of the peoples he visited. He was not in the slightest anxious

to convert them or to condemn them to eternal torment just because they were not followers of his particular religion. The Judeo-Christian religion, on the other hand, has from the very beginning taught that no other religions are to be tolerated as "Thou shalt not kill". Actually the proper translation should read "Thou shalt not commit murder." Now, this can be quite a difference, especially when murder is defined as the killing of someone who is a member of your own tribe - all outsiders are fair game; it is only "wrong" if the person you kill is a member of your own group! as another quick example, consider those heathens who were killed or driven from their ancestral lands because Jehovah had declared that land must belong to his Chosen People - no matter, who was there first, or who had settled it, or what means must be used to take it from them (remember, it wasn't really murder!).

The Norsemen were not at first openly hostile to Christian clergymen. It was only when Christian missionaries began abusing customs and utilizing coercion and otherwise making a nuisance of themselves that an anti-Christian backlash occurred. The much publicized raids on churches and monasteries were carried out not with any thought of opposing Christianity, but simply because that was where the loot was to be found. The tolerance of the pagan Scandinavians can be discerned from reading these words from the journal kept by Archbishop Rimbert, who traveled to the North in the 800's: "With great difficulty they (the missionaries) continued their journey on foot, travelling whenever possible by boat across the waters that crossed their route, and arrived finally at a harbor town in the land of the Svea, called Birka. Here they were welcomed by the king, whose name was Bjorn. The delegates told the king the purpose of their journey. When he knew it and had discussed it with his faithful followers, he gave them permission to stay - with the former's approval and to preach the gospel of God. He also gave freely in this instruction."

The contrast between Bjorn at Birka and the prohibitions which followed the conquest of Christianity in Iceland is obvious.

Can you imagine what would have happened if a boatload of Vikings had sailed up the Thames into London and asked permission to establish a grove and convert people to ODIN? They would have been massacred on the spot - after, I am sure, dispatching a number of Christians to their Heaven or Hell.

Such religious intolerance seems rampant among monotheists. Perhaps it is easier for polytheists to conceive of the existence and the validity of other gods, having as they do a pluralistic conception of deity.

Those who brought Christianity to the Norse peoples were skilled in the use of propaganda and distortion. Two principal ruses were used. One was the depicting of Christ and the apostles as a young warrior and his band of faithful followers, something which any Norseman could understand because it was a concept which entered into his daily living. Needless to say, this is a most inaccurate representation of Christianity and is in fact diametrically opposed to the basic values and philosophy of the Christianity religion, which is non-violent and anti-heroic. This was glossed over to make the religion palatable to the Norsemen, who would have never accepted it had they been aware of what Christianity really was, or to what degree it would enslave their descendants of the far future.

Another trick used by the bearers of the new religion was, after destroying the old pagan temple, to erect the local church on the same ground. The idea was that since people were in the habit of coming to one particular place to conduct their religious ceremonies, they would more readily come to that same place to worship the Christian god. Likewise Christian religious feasts were arranged to be held at about the same time of the year as the old pagan nature festivals. By utilizing such simple behavioral tactics, the Christians hoped to "outflank" the heathen religion, pouring Christian substance into forms which, if not pagan, were at least similar in some respects to the forms of the old religion. Instructions in great detail were given to the missionaries telling them exactly how to go about this technique.

Unfortunately, it worked. Due to numerous reasons - the zeal of Christians missionaries, lack of cohesion among the followers of the pagan religion, the lack of written literary arts as flexible as oral use in the lands occupied by the Christians, and the use of bribes, violence, and economic coercion, Christianity became the predominant religion in those states where Odin or Thor had been the dominant deity. As was expected, paganism went into decline once the religion attained state power. The world is immeasurably worse off for that fact.

But let there be no more talk of the kindhearted Christians, holy and

loving, who came to steer the savage barbarian from his misguided way. Let there be no more heard of pagans who as one man, rushed into the embrace of the Church. It never happened that way, and the lie that it did occur in this manner is a lie that has served the Christian cause too long. Let the truth be known and we will have struck a blow against tyranny, and for those brothers of ours who long ago died faithful to the old gods, the gods of freedom.

BOOK REVIEW: by Allie Bennett

For those interested in hardhitting, fast-paced highly entertaining adventure drama: The Green Man by Henry Treece offers excellent fare.

A novel as big and bold as the Northlands where it begins, The Green Man is the story of Prince Amleth Vendelson; it follows him from his early manhood-heralded by the murder of his father by his power-hungry uncle- through his adventures in Fritian under the standard of King Arthur, his marriage to the Pict Queen Elekt and his subsequent leadership of a tribe; and finally to the regaining of his father's kingdom, and his death at the hands of Beowulf; who's favors he once refused.

From the first page until the final word, you will be caught up in one of the most powerful novels of the year. A reveling look at the spirit and motivation of the Viking warrior.

The Green Man is available from Paperback Library, Inc. of New York for \$95.

FATE

Of all the beliefs of the Viking persons that which is least consistent with the rest of their belief system is the concept of fate. It is only logical that a people who hold individualism in such high regard would seem to be in direct conflict with a people as vital, stubborn, and independent as the Vikings. How shall we resolve this contradiction?

Edith Hamilton, in her Mythology, connects the pessimism of the Norse religion with the concept of fate. The gods, it is prophesied, are doomed, and with them their allies, the humans. The day is coming for Ragnarok - the last, great battle in which the giant forces will overwhelm the forces of good, and Asgard will lie in rubble. Despite this preordination (or at least foreseeing) the gods will fight to the end rather than surrender, even though they heroes gods are doomed, humans are more so. The heroes on Earth and in Valhalla know that no feat of

daring or act of endurance will grant them victory, yet this does not give them pause. They die resisting.

In this rather gloomy outlook, as Miss Hamilton writes so eloquently, "The only sustaining support possible for the human spirit, the one pure unsullied good men can hope to attain, is heroism; and heroism depends on lost causes. The hero can prove what he is only by dying. The power of good is shown not by triumphantly conquering evil, but by continuing to resist evil while facing certain defeat." She argues, however, that this seemingly fatalistic outlook is deceiving. There is no inexorable fate because although the hero was indeed doomed if he did not yield, he did have the choice of yielding or of dying. This may not seem like much of a choice by today's standards, but it was a choice which the hero could make. His fate was not predestined. In addition, to die a hero's death is, in one sense, not to be defeated but to triumph. There is a saying to the effect that you cannot enslave a free man, you can only kill him. The idea, I think is much the same.

Ragnarok may not be a predestined thing. It is foreseen in the prophecy of the seers, but to foresee is not predestine. As parapsychologists today aver, sometimes prophecy depicts what will happen unless certain actions are taken. There is no inflexible or unchangeable fate ruling over men.

It is interesting that Edison Marshall has his hero in The Viking state that the reason the northmen so hated and feared the Christian god was because it was said that he could change men's fate for better or for worse. Of course, to beg for one's fate to be changed - to pray for favors - was deemed a cowardly act not worthy of a man. At one point Marshall's Ogier says to his Lap saewoman.

"How would I live? By the pity of the gods?"

"I thought the shadow of the slave ring was still around your neck and you could accept their pity and perhaps, protection."

"...Can I fall on my knees to Odin and clasp my hands and beg him to change my fate as a Christian unto his God? No, when I would speak to him, I will shout to the sky as loud as I can my voice shaking in the wind of my great breath. I don't plead with him, nor do I demand. I only call and await his reply".

Fate, in the Norse conception, may be defined as that which will



happen to a man in the natural course of events., rather than as some inexorable web which constrains a man and which forces him to a certain and despite his own exertions. It is individualist in essence as it calls for total responsibility for one's actions and one's life, and is opposed to shirking or fate-changing. This is the opppsite of the prevalent conception of fate as a sort of entropment which negates free will. The Norse conception exalts free will and rejects control.

Thus we see that the apparent contradiction between the Viking concept of fate and the other Viking beliefs of courage and individuality is just that - an apparent contradiction rather than a real one. For a Viking to "accepthis Fate" does not mean to sit down and, unresisting, be destroyed by his enemies or by the particular situation, nor does it mean passively submitting to difficulties and indignities. On the contrary it means fighting totally and unemittingly, never surrendering, yet resigned to suffer the worst without calling for mercy from the enemies or aid from supernatural entities. It is the ultimate in courage and defiance. It is this condeption of fate that is consistent with the Viking's attitude toward Ragnarok. And it is t is conception of fate, and of man's reaction to fate, which is about one hundred and eighty degrees from the tame, timid, and cowardly attitude of the predestination crowd and the weak ones who use gods as crutches.

DEAR FRIENDS,

As you know from the earlier state ent of this issue, we at The Viking Brotherhood have launched a project which is the boldest and most important event in our short existence, and one not soon to be outshone - the convening of an assembly, or Thing. The importance of this Thing cannot be overestimated. But to make it a success, to justify the considerable effort involved, we need YOUR help, in several ways.

WE NEED A FEW COMMITTED PEOPLE to volunteer their special aid. We have considered several cities as sites for the Thing, but there is yet one factor to be taken into account. That factor is a local group of followers of the Norse religion to help us make advance arrangements and on-the-scene preparations which we simply can't make from a distance. This will take several hours of work on these people's part, but they will have the knowlege that they have contributed much to the Viking cause. One or two dedicated workers would be adequate to properly perform this task, if indeed they were energetic and hard-driving. If you are interested in this chance to help us out, please volunteer your services.

ALSO, BUT OF EQUAL IMPORTANCE, we want to urge each and every one of you to make every attempt to attend the Thing. Without you, we can't pull it off. This is your chance to meet together with other Norse men, to share ideas and to make plans. For three days you can forget the outside world if you wish, and live in a Viking environment. We will be celebrating our rituals together, meeting plans combat with our traditional weapons. Not to mention a Viking revel or two!

By the way, you don't have to be a hard-core Viking to attend our Thing (although only those of our religion will be able to participate in the rituals or decision-making). Pagans of other persuasions are invited to attend as observers, and will be made welcome in the tradition of Norse hospitality. Also, edged weapons buffs, would find our Thing a matter of interest.

Please give your attention to the enclosed questionnaire. The information from it will help us to locate the Thing and make necessary plans. Because of our small numbers, it is vital that we get as many of these back as possible to get an accurate idea of your interest.

Remember, your help and interest is vital, I hope to meet and personally talk with each of you next summer at the first Norse Thing in a thousand years!

Sincerely yours,

Svein Steindsson

YES, I WOULD LIKE TO ATTEND THE THING I WOULD BE ABLE TO ATTEND IF IT WAS HELD IN:

- NEW YORK
- ILLINOIS
- TEXAS
- CALIFORNIA
- _____

YES, I WOULD BE WILLING TO HELP IN ADVANCE PREPARATIONS IF THE THING IS HELD IN ANY CITY.

I AM MORE PAGAN OTHER PAGAN
 OTHER INTERESTED PERSON (PLEASE SPECIFY)

OF PHYSICAL FITNESS

The physical prowess of our Norse ancestors is one of their best-known attributes. Strength was a highly-admired quality among them, and the feats of skill and daring which they celebrated around the fires in winter time were deeds which would caw the average man of today or of their day, either, for that matter. Their physical hardihood and toughness accounts in large measures for their outlook on life and their supreme self-confidence that at times bordered on arrogance. They were heroic in word and deed, and for this the world remembers them still - and will hear from their spiritual descendents in days to come.

The everyday life of the Norsemen kept him in top shape. A natural diet, unpolluted air, and the rigors of the climate helped, but above all there was the daily routine of farming, building, hunting, and of course the games and contests so loved by their competitive spirits. Today, most of us have to be more deliberate about it, as our jobs are more sedentary these days. Still - and this brings us to the main point of this article - physical conditioning is something to be taken up by all of us who claim to follow the old gods, regardless of our age, sex, or occupation. The Viking Way demands certain sacrifices, and the willingness to mold our bodies in the ways we desire can be a test of one's devotion; are we really serious about this matter of the Norse religion, or are we merely giving life service to a romantic ideal, without the sheer guts to actually take our destiny in our hands and make real changes in ourselves and in our environment? Only you can answer that one!

The relationship between the mind and the body makes it abundantly clear why physical fitness is essential to the development of those psychological traits so sought after by the devotees of the Norse religion. A. H. Ismail and L.E. Trachtman reported in a recent issue of Psychology Today (a magazine I seldom quote!) that participants in their study of the psychological effects of exercise became " more even, stable, and self-confident," more extraverted, and more self-reliant as their condition improved. A study by Thomas K. Cureton and William Heusner of Olympic champions revealed that they were " more intelligent, more emotionally stable, more dominant, more venturesome, and much more self-assured than others. They also tended to disregard rules and reject group standards." From the point of view of our religion and our philosophy, these are all very good things. Other studies over a span of years have generally verified these findings concerning the mental

results of developing physical abilities. Now, physical culturists have long believed all this to be true, but it wasn't until recent years that people got around to actually putting the matter to scientific study.

The self-knowledge and self-satisfaction granted to those who push their body and their mind to the utmost is something unique. There is a very special feeling which rewards those who endure a four-hour karate workout, or run for miles under adverse conditions, or who reach some other greater or lesser physical goal. Victory over one's weaknesses, a realization of the will, an exaltation of life - it is all of those.

So what are you doing about it? Of course, you can't repair a body in a few quick sessions which has suffered years of neglect. You can, however, begin right now - immediately if not sooner - to work out in that manner which best suits your present condition and temperament. Any number of good programs are available, or you can devise your own. The important thing is to do something and to do it regularly. Remember to be honest with yourself and not to allow any of the cop-outs which will arise distract you (" too tired today" or " too busy" or " I'll just skip one time").

It's no easy path to take. It is a definite challenge to your motivation, your perseverance, your seriousness regarding your religion a challenge to your very " guts ". The Viking Way is not for the quitter or the weak, for the whiner or the coward.

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES???????

GUTEN JUL!

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This is the first issue that we have put our staff names in. Now maybe the Runestone will not be so mysterious to our subscribers and other interested people. Also, to wish everyone a good Jul! in the traditional Norse way. Performing the rituals and having alot of plain ole fun.