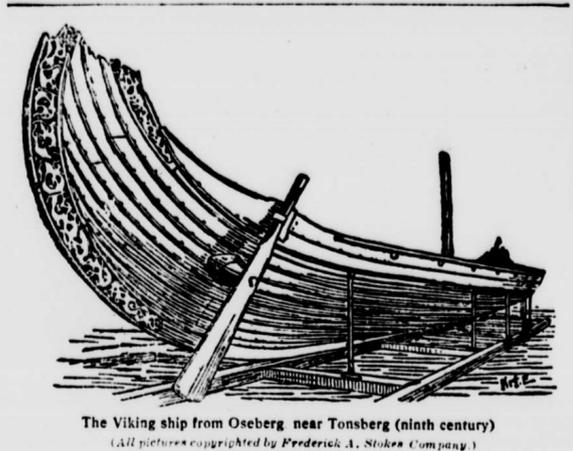


VIKING DISCOVERY OF AMERICA CALLED A MYTH,

Dr. Nansen Rejects Tales Told in Sagas of Leif Ericsson's Voyages and Wineland the Good

JUST as the sun goes down in the western sea there flashes upon the comprehending eye of children and of child men a vision of a wonder geography of the distant west, the object of all desire. For one fleeting blissful glance it is given to the child to see the bright lands which are not of this earth nor yet entirely beyond hope. Here is darkness and the night, there is the land of brilliant suns, a bath of color. Here is want, yonder grow the fruits of the soil in lavish abundance. Out over the sea edge life drifts sweet in idleness, to-day man has sailed upon the ungrateful soil and to-morrow he must wake to toil again. Seen with hope in a flash of the setting sun lie the Fortunate Isles at the further edge of the ocean stream, the Gardens of the Hesperides, Avalon with its apple orchards, Hy-Brasil, the Isle of St. Brendan, the Tir-nan-Og.

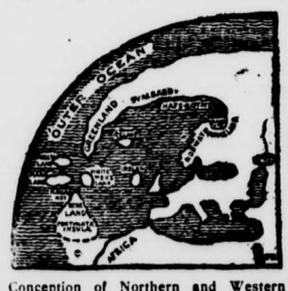
Such fables of the past are instinct with life. Geography does not all at once wipe out the stories which have been handed down at the sunset hour. Belief found in Minnesota, the so-called Kensington stone. On this is narrated a journey of eight Swedes and twenty-two Norwegians from Wineland as far as the country west of the Great Lakes. But by its Runes and its linguistic form this inscription betrays itself clearly as a modern forgery which has no interest for us.



The Viking ship from Oseberg near Tonsberg (ninth century) (All pictures copyrighted by Frederick A. Stokes Company.)

is slow to yield to reason and to knowledge. In the modern times when the maps are filled with facts definitely ascertained and set in mathematical order the ancient stories linger and call for other sort of explanation. They pass into the category of folk myth. Some students gather them eagerly and create a science of folk lore. Other students cling to them as in some sort a dim historical record; they hold them as an obscure record of a past and strive to save from each the kernel of fact about which the accretion of fancy has obscured the event. There is perhaps the less grateful task, for one does not eat a cherry for the pit.

Of this latter order is the work which Dr. Fritof Nansen has performed in the analysis of the northern tales of the discovery of Wineland the Good. From the myth of the sagas he tries to save a central fact, namely that brave Norsemen in icy seas did discover the continent of America nearly five centuries before Columbus sailed over the edge of the



Conception of Northern and Western Lands in Norse Literature.

western sea, before Cabot and the Cortereals really found the great continent which bars forever the road to Cathay. All that is to be known about Wineland the Good, all that the gleeman sang about that fertile wonderland, about Helluland which lay hard by about Markland, with its forests, about Furdhustrandir of the narval strands, about Hvitrannaland, where strange white men lived—every mention which has been preserved in the records of the past has been gathered by Dr. Nansen in his work "In Northern Mists" (Frederick A. Stokes Company). He has subjected this material to careful study, he has cut away the trimming of rude poetry, he has excised the contributions of recognizable myth, he has struggled hard to preserve to the credit of his Norsemen ancestors a central fact, that the Vikings in their long ships did succeed in reaching America. Of this one fact of discovery he thinks there can be no doubt.

Runic Stone a Forgery.

This is a theme over which Americanists once fought with acrimony and the many pages of many volumes did not suffice to contain it all. In general the Scandinavian authorities held Columbus and Cabot for the comers to a land long known. Geographers in this country were equally keen in pointing out that none of the descriptions in the sagas could be made to fit the known conditions of the climate of the Atlantic seaboard. Yet the Viking discovery found sufficient adherents here to warrant the erection of a statue to Leif Ericsson. Confirmation was sought in the skeleton in armor and Newport's old mill, in the Runic inscriptions of the Dighton rock.

Early in the spring of 1690 he set sail from Norway bound toward his home in Greenland. But he lost his way and drifted about until he came to lands of which he had no suspicion. Here were self-sown fields of wheat and trees named "mossur," so large that they were used as house beams. This was Wineland the Good. Still voyaging, Leif found and rescued men on a wreck and took them home with him to Brattalid in the autumn, and there introduced Christianity, and for this reason he was called Leif the Lucky. In 1009 Eric the Red and Leif the Lucky

AMERICAN VIEWS OF VERSATILE GERMAN ARTIST

Continued from Eleventh Page.

and only consider it as a luxury, as a nice pastime. Furthermore, every real artist is a born aristocrat, who always raises a proud wall between the Philistines and himself. To an artist the democratic doctrine of universal equality is preposterous.

"Finally, Americans are not willing to go to any sacrifice for art's sake. The idea of a young Yankee bearing willingly the life of privation which is the life of many a young French or German poet would appear simply preposterous.

"The young man of the United States who possesses poetic gifts takes up journalism and dabbles in verification as a side line. If he does not succeed in one literary line of work he tries another. He would never dream of going against the dictates of the majority. If he has something new, original to say he will be careful not to frighten his public, but to prepare his public for it gradually.

"The poet, the musician, the painter must be gentlemen first with perfectly normal thoughts and normal manners. It is interesting to see so-called bohemians clubs meeting at expensive hotels. There cannot be any real bohemians in America, for there are no real cafes in the European sense of the word.

"It is very seldom that the lower classes of the population produce artists, especially literary men. Still it is interesting to note that one of the few young playwrights who have succeeded in freeing themselves of the usual prudery and conventionality and in presenting modern problems on the stage, Eugene Walter, was actually near starving before he made a reputation.

"Whoever knows the English stage knows the American stage except that things are a little worse in America.

"Actors, however good they may be, become stultified by the system which

assisted in fitting out an expedition in three ships to the new land, but they remained at home. The leaders were Thorfinn Karlsevne and Snorre Thorbrandson on one ship, Bjorne Grimolfsson and Thorhall Gamlason on the second, and Thorvard and Thorhall on the third. After leaving Greenland and the Isles of Bears the voyage made its first landfall in Helluland, with large flat stones and white foxes; next in Markland, with great forests and many beasts, then in Furdhustrandir. It has been sought to identify these three places in Labrador, in Newfoundland and in Cape Breton.

Thence the expedition held toward the south to a land cut up with bays, and two messengers who could run swifter than deer were sent into the country to explore. They returned with grapes and self-sown wheat. Somewhat further along they wintered in a bay and supplies ran short. The pious prayed for food and had none. Thorhall, the hunter, who was a heathen, held a conjuration with Thor, and a little later a whale came ashore and gave them food, but all were taken sick, this because of the traffic with the heathen god. Soon



Kayak Fishers and a Woman's Boat (umiak). Woodcut drawn by Native Greenlander.

they made a miraculous take of fish and were preserved.

Fought the Skraelings.

In the spring of 1004 Thorhall left them and turned homeward, was driven to the coast of Ireland and was made a slave until his death. But Karlsevne and Bjorne sailed southward a long time until they came to a river which flowed down from the interior into a lake and thence into the sea. Here were fields of wheat self-sown and vines on all the heights, fish in all the streams and abundance of wild animals for food.

All went well during the summer, but there was a scare from wild men, the first seen. Nine hide boats came into their bay with much waving of poles in the way of the sun. The Norsemen showed a white shield in token of peace and the strangers came ashore. They were small men and ugly, and they had ugly hair on their heads; their eyes were big and they were broad across the cheeks.



The Rock Hviterk and Fight with a Greenland Pymg.

back in force, the poles in their boats were now waved widdershins, the attack was threatening and the Norsemen took red shields and advanced to the combat. The Skraelings had catapults and three stones and a great blue ball which made an ugly noise when it came down. Karlsevne's men took to flight, but the pursuit was stayed by a woman, Freydis of name, who picked up the sword of



Eskimos playing ball with Stuffed Seal. Wood cut of Fairy Tale engraved by Native Greenlander.

Thorbrand Snorrason, who lay dead, and drove the Skraelings from their boats. The Norsemen lost two, the Skraelings four in this combat.

is historic in connection with a discovery of America by his forefathers 900 years ago. It is much in itself, it speaks volumes for the scientific conscience, that a man of the northland should wipe from the record all those beliefs of which the Scandinavians have been the most earnest upholders and the most zealous advocates.

That which gave Wineland its name is that which destroys its existence as a habitation. In every account it is made to appear that in this western land of the sea the grape grew in abundance, that the wine was good, that wheat grew without the labor of the tiller of the soil.

Dealing first with the former belief that Wineland was some part of the Atlantic seaboard of America, Nansen shows how with better information as to the products of the seaboard States successive identifications have sought to shove Wineland more and more to the south, from Labrador by way of Newfoundland to Nova Scotia, to Mount Desert, to Cape Cod, to Narragansett Bay, all in the hope of bringing it to a point where the grape and wheat might grow.

Only twenty years ago Wineland was linked with that other American mystery, Norumbega; its place was identified with the Charles River in Massachusetts near Waltham, and a tower was reared in commemoration. Nansen shows that at the most southern stretch of the coast which it is at all possible to associate with Thorfinn Karlsevne's voyage the only grape is the small and little appetizing fox grape, and that even if there were any who understood the making of wine, the sour wine derived from this wild grape would fall far short of such perfection as should impress it upon the voyagers whom the sagas commemorate.

Not is this a destructive criticism all that Dr. Nansen brings to bear upon the most determining characteristic of Wineland the Good. He rummages the traditions of the remotest past in the beginnings of Mediterranean culture, and with rich result.

He shows how the primitive people set the eye of faith upon a land in the western sea where the weather was serene—in Wineland no snow fell and the cattle pastured in the fields the whole winter long where the grape abounded and the wheat grew in untilled fields and toil for bread was the lot of none.

The evidence is conclusive that Wineland is no more than the Fortunate Isles of Roman myth. Medieval confirmation of this explanation is found in one of the maps in which Wineland is set down as a northern prolongation of the Fortunate Isles in the warm sea off the coast of Africa.

The Skraelings in these studies cease to be American Indians or Eskimos. They are no more than the trolls of the northern mythology. The whale, which the heathen Thorhall the Hunter secured for the famishing party by working magic with the "redbearded" one, is the great fish of St. Brandan's voyage on which his companions fed miraculously. It is quite likely that this is from an Oriental source; perhaps the case of Jonah turned end for end toward better comprehensibility.

Origin of the Sagas.

A wholly Norwegian contribution is the description of the landing at Stramsey on the way to Wineland, where the eggs of birds were so thick that one could not set the foot between them—applicable enough in the proper season to the northern skerries, but impossible in autumn, in which season they are introduced in Karlsevne's voyage.

The runners, faster than the swift deer,

as to make for verminlike—Eric the Red, Leif the Lucky, Karlsevne, Snorre, Bjorne, Freydis. It is hard to conceive that a fable could have such a list of families and friends.

The Myth of Wineland.

But Dr. Nansen with great skill sets all of these elements into the place proper to each. He proves that not one of them

names of men be examined Thorvald and Thorfinn, Snorre Thorbrandson and Thorhall Gamlason and a dozen more in like composition. It is not difficult to see in this saga a reminiscence of the conflict between older paganism and newly brought Christianity, with Thor fighting the Lattes of Odin and Valhall.

It is not enough to show a similarity subsisting between the myths of the saga of Eric the Red and those of the Mediterranean and the high north. They might be the result of independent development, for man in the childhood of his culture is capable of but few ideas, even as are children. Dr. Nansen is at pains to point out how the copage of this myth material might have been brought to pass.

For the Mediterranean myth cycle he shows that in the Wineland saga there appears no more than in Isidore Hispalensis, and this author had the widest currency in the north in the darkest period of the early Middle Ages. The northern myths were treasured in Iceland and Ireland, two communities in frequent and intimate relations and each the seat of an educated culture when western Europe was in darkness.

The result of this careful dissection which Dr. Nansen has given to this story of western lands is the convincing proof that in every particular it is a complex of myths derived from many sources, that its central theme is the ancient fable

But He Does Hold That Unknown Norsemen May Have Reached New World Long Before Columbus

who go out in advance to find Wineland and return with grapes and wheat, are but loosely patched into the narrative. The episode is without purpose. They are gone the three days which is the characteristic chronology of these legends; they return, much as did the spies, with grapes from Eschol. The promised land is proved to be near, yet the Norsemen took no steps toward the goal. It was not for a year that they reached Wineland. There is reason to associate these swift runners with familiar myths of Thor.

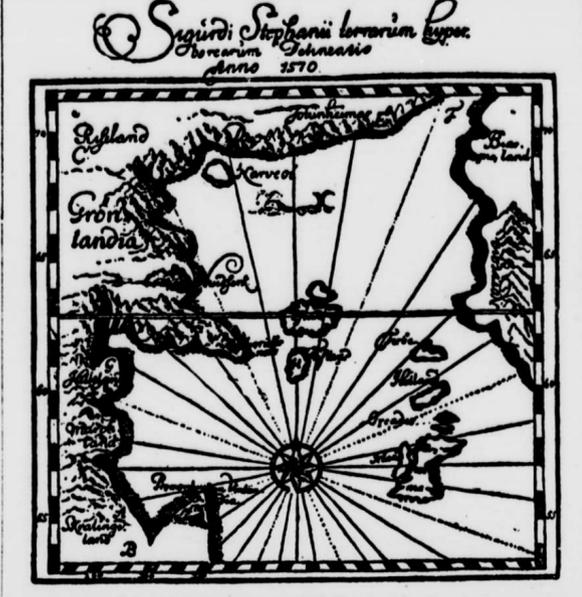
Nor are the runners the only connection with the Thunderer. It has been noted that the names of the adventurers are given with great precision to add verisimilitude to the narrative. The woman Freydis, who turned defeat into victory and drove the Skraelings, has a name which nowhere else appears in all Icelandic literature, but compounds of Frey are frequent in mythical names of the northland. Yet if the list of the

of the Fortunate Islands, that across this wool is woven a warp of myth from many sources with careless disregard of the pattern of the whole. It is all Nephelococcygia, it is Cloud-cuckoo-land, it can be adjusted to the network of geographical coordinates no more than the voyages of Ulysses or the search of the Golden Fleece.

What credit then remains in the destruction of the saga which may reflect honor on the early Norse voyager, whether he be Leif the Lucky or Thorfinn Karlsevne? If not Wineland what did one or other of these fleets discover? Did any Viking reach America at all?

Vikings Did Come Here.

Dr. Nansen discards everything but his belief in the discovery of some part of this continent by the long ship of some Viking rover. In the tangle of fable he segregates a few incidents which to him seem to rest on fact. One of these is the



Icelandic Representation of Northern and Western Lands as Connected with One Another by Sigurd Stefansson, 1570.

open market with the wild men of Wineland. Here the saga runs:

"Then they set up shields and held a market, and the people wanted most to buy red cloth; they also wanted to buy swords and spears, but this was forbidden by Karlsevne and Snorre. The Skraelings gave them untanned skins in exchange for the cloth."

This incident and the combat which followed seem, in Nansen's judgment, to refer to something that actually took place. It seems to be quite clear that the Norsemen in Greenland could never have any memory of defeat at the hands of the peaceful Eskimo. The most feasible explanation is that it is a reference to

some meeting in America with a warlike people, therefore at some point along the coast south of the Eskimo communities in Labrador.

Another grouping of incidents which seems to reveal a knowledge of America at first hand lies in the brief but noteworthy classification of the three landfalls in order, treeless and rocky Helluland, well wooded Markland, fertile Wineland. It is in just such order of description that geography knows Labrador, Newfoundland and uncertain regions of the coast further south and west.

The most convincing evidence comes unexpectedly in the Icelandic annals after the saga period. In 1347 a storm driven ship from Greenland bound for Markland put into Iceland for succor. This is evidence that such voyages were made before the extinction of the Norse settlements in Greenland. The object was plain; wood was worth a voyage no matter what its length and no matter what its perils. This ship diverted from the Markland voyage is the last record of the Greenland settlements.

Arrived in Iceland in 1347 the ship remained over winter; in 1348 it voyaged to Norway in order to find its way back to Greenland, for those ancient seamen knew no way on the sea from Iceland to their home. There was a seven year delay in Norway, for the royal trading ship did not set out until 1355, the last voyage of the sort that was made, and after that voyage nothing is known of the destiny of the settlements save such memorials as may be read in the ruins of farmsteads and churches still to be discerned along the coasts.

One more argument remains, the argument based upon the similarity of the Indian game of lacrosse with the ancient Norse "kattlektr."

This is Wineland the Good, with its loud, howling Skraelings, carted away to the lumber room of antiquities with many another story that once held the faith of the world. Nothing remains save the possibility that Norsemen did visit the American continent. If they really did reach this continent they left for geography no benefit of their knowledge. Upon this land they costumed no benefit of their spiritual or of their temporal store unless the introduction of a wholesome game be thus regarded.

GREAT SNAKE KILLED, NO MORE ANTIDOTE

"I was sitting on the gallery of the little hotel in one of the very driest of the dry towns in the dry belt of North Carolina," said a New York trotter about the country, "when a lank and thirsty looking native came straggling wearily along the road, sat down on a pine stump that served as a horse block for the hotel, mopped his face, and after a scrutinizing glance or two at the surroundings addressed me and said:

"Do you know, suh, that these prohibition folks are putting the axe to the very roots of the tree of personal liberty, down 'yuh in No'th Carolina, suh?"

"I said I hoped it wasn't quite as bad as that."

"Sho'ly, suh! Sho'ly!" insisted the native. "And they've struck the blow in the Cheating Creek precinct, suh, the garden spot of No'th Carolina, and my home, suh!"

"The blow had mighty near fell when it come to pass that you don't give yore neighbor or the wayfaring man a refreshment out of yore bottle without the jail staring you in the face, suh, kase you was breaking the law, and they kept their eye on you so close; and yet, when Capt.

Bill Junkin come 'joggin' into my house from the creek one day, his eyes all blazing and he in a raging fever, and hooted to me that a big moccasin snake had bit him, they didn't have the heart to lay the law onto me for unbinding my bottle and pouring half a pint or so into Capt. Bill to antidote that snake pizen. I'll say that for 'em."

"That moccasin moccasin snake had been lurking round Capt. Bill's for more than a long time and I guess maybe it wasn't more than two days after Capt. Bill had come running in to get cured of that snake bite when I'm hanged if the moccasin didn't pounce on him another time! In he came, hooting again, and human nature wasn't going to see him curl up into fits and die just because the law was against passing out the bottle that had antidote in it, and I passed it out to Capt. Bill and sent him home rejoicing."

"Twice more after that Capt. Bill got bit by that lurking and vindictive moccasin snake and came dashing in for to get cured. Then yesterday he came in again, and I noticed he looked discouraged, and I said that snake is shore keeping Capt. Joe mighty busy. Prohibition folks was

standing around there thick, and watch him out, but they didn't seem to care, so I said to Capt. Bill:

"Well, Captain, I said, 'I see yore bit again. Come and get yore antidote.'"

"Colonel," says he, "I ain't bit, and there ain't no use," says pore Capt. Bill, and he was moaning.

"'Ain't bit?' said I, feeling sorry for Capt. Bill.

"'No,' says he, wailing sad to hear. 'I ain't bit. They've done gone and killed the moccasin snake, suh!'"

"The native paused, mopped his head again, and shaking it mournfully, said: 'Laying the axe to the very roots of personal liberty, suh, these prohibition folks are, suh, down 'yuh in No'th Carolina, and they've struck the blow in the Cheating Creek precinct, the garden spot of No'th Carolina and my home, suh!'"

"Do you reckon, suh, they've took to swinging the axe into them roots around 'yuh, suh, so deep that it won't be any use for a man to hope for being antidoted if he goes out and gets bit by a moccasin snake, suh?"

"I was obliged to tell the native that I was afraid suh was the situation around there, and he got down off of the stump and went on his way."