

THE STORY OF EYVIND OF THE HILLS

-(Taken from Islandske Eulturbilleder by Sigfus Blondal, 2nd Volume, Published by Dansk-Islandsk Samfund Kobenhavn, 1924.)

As far as is known, this is the most authentic story of Eyvind, although the sources are admittedly built to some extent on legend and hearsay, but the dates and main events of the story are said to be true. Eyvind Jonsson was likely born in 1714 at Hlio in Skipholt, Arnessysla, Iceland and brought up at Lack in the same district_ His parents were reported to be well off (his brother and brother's son lived at the old home until their deaths).

Young Eyvind was clever and diligent and a skilful worker, but he was afflicted with what would be called in our day, Kleptomania, but in those days is was considered stealing and a very serious crime. It is said that at an early age he stole a cheese from a wandering beggar woman (a sort of tramp who ambled around the country living on people's good will and generosity) and would not admit his misdemeanor. The story goes that she laid a curse on him that he would be a thief all his life. But to mitigate this harsh doom, she is supposed to have added that he would, all his life, escape punishment (that is, punishment by Law)

Eyvind worked for his father and had a son with his sweetheart, Thom Jorgensdotter, and lived with her on another farm: Traoarholt. The neighbor's began to complain to the authorities of his "stealing", and one fine day in 1745, Eyvind disappeared from the place with his horse and some provisions. It is quite possible that the community was blaming Eyvind for some instances of stealing that he was not guilty of as outlaws living in the adjacent mountains might have been responsible for any number of these incidents.

In any case, the Sysslumaour (Sheriff), Brynjolfur Sigurosson, gave out a warrant for Eyvind's arrest with the following description:

"He was more than average height, blond curly hair, small face, the lower lip thicker than the upper lip, small boned. Particular, almost foppish in his dress. Nice manners, polite in speech. Smokes tobacco if he has a chance. Clever and skilful worker especially in wood and iron. Can read but not write. Knows many poems and songs, many of them corrupted from their original form."

The folk tales of Eyvind's wanderings during the next few years are varied, but he is supposed to have been up Geitlands jokull (glacier) in Thorisdal (dale) where he found an abandoned home of former outlaws (after meeting unfriendly outlaws and escaping from them). Coming back to civilization in the Westfjords, he started working for a young widow, Halla Jonsdttir, at a small farm, Hrafnaroareyri, being part of a church farm of Stao in Gnmdavik. She had one son, Olafur (Oliver).

The farm was run down, but Eyvind, with his skill and diligence, built it up well and was well liked by the minister, who (not knowing about Eyvind's past) married him and Halla. This was in 1749 or perhaps a little sooner. Soon the neighbors began to complain about thievery and pointed their fingers at Eyvind and Halla, whom had not been particularly well liked by her neighbors. When it was known that the authorities had been notified, Halla and Eyvind decided to slip away. This was likely around 1752 or 1753. They had, at the time, three children. Two daughters, Olof and Gudrun and a son, Gisli and Halla's first sons Olafur. The story goes on to say that before departure, Eyvind went into the Baostofa (living room) where the children were and lovingly took leave of them and prayed for them while Halla stood in the doorway and mocked him for his sentimentality.

It is not known where they went first, but likely it was to the hot springs of liveradalir (Hotspringsdale) in the uninhabited inland plateau. At least they were around 1753. Folks from Skag4ord knew about their whereabouts and planned to capture them, but they slipped through their fingers. It seems that at one time they traversed the Amarvatnsheioi (the Eagle Moores) and plundered the herd of Borgarord, but quickly went back to Hveravellir, where they had established very livable quarters and made connections with other outlaws.

One of these outlaws was Ames Paison (featured in the play), who was guilty of many small and large robberies. Others in the band were Abraham Sveinsson, Hjortur Indridason and Gudmundur Jonsson. They seem to have swelt in various places in the inner highlands. One place up there was known as: "Eyvindarhola" (hole). But of course all the places that tradition has connected to Eyvind and his places of abode, are not necessarily authentic, and some traces of dwellings and trails may be those of other former outlaws. But the name of Eyvind is the most famous and popular among all the outlaws and stories and legends about him abound.

Eyvind was the leader of the band and the others were periodically send down to habitations to stock up on provisions (stolen of course). Eyvind and Halla stayed mainly in the mountains, and naturally their existence depended in a large extent on the sheep

they could pillage from the flocks in summer pastures up in the mountains. They also caught birds with snares and slingshots (they had no guns) and they fished in the inland waters. When the geese and swans were molting and could not fly, they could be picked by hand. There was also some vegetation such as Iceland moss, etc. Eyvind was a master at weaving baskets and at making other useful articles from willow and other pliable shrubs, and a child's carriage or cradle that he had woven was considered a masterpiece for into the 19th century.

It is practically impossible to reconstruct, chronologically, their varied wanderings during the next few years. The Band was constantly hunted and had to flee from place to place. Occasionally, one or another of the Band was captured, but seem to have escaped again. One time it appeared their home at Hveraulir was discovered and Halla was captured and brought down to habitation. It is said that she was dressed in skins for out clothing and that she refused to talk much. Asked about observances of religion, she recounted the Eyvind would say prayers morning and evening. The Systumaour (Sheriff) of Hunavatnssysla had Halla taken onwards to Borgarórd where there was an overnight stop at Grimstunguheiói (plateau) so called Dauosmannskvísl (a river). The tired guards slept and in the morning found that Halla was gone. The guards were also missing one of their fastest horses and a sack of provisions. Eyvind had come to free his wife from her captors.

In the year 1762, the prowling authorities were successful in surprising the Band. (There is a detailed description given of the manhunt by 33 men and 45 horses beginning September 7 and the finding of the dwelling on October 3. There is a description of the house in detail and a recounting of a large store of provisions cached away in a cave near the dwellings. This included about 75 sheep carcasses and sheepskins, so that ownership could be ascertained by the ear markings). The posse saw no person around, but they found the trail of 5 horses and two persons leading them up to Arnarfellsjökull (glacier). They followed high up to the glacier but returned at sundown without finding their quarry. They gathered what they could of Eyvind's provisions and took them with them. They then set fire to the house and burned all things useful, thus destroying the refuge of the poor fugitives who were now fleeing in the forbidding wilderness.

From then on there is no sign of the outlaws in Arnessysla, but it is believed they had with them in their flight, a few of the barest necessities, some sheepskins for warmth, a few belongings and food. They had 5 horses and it is thought that only Eyvind, Halla and maybe one child were in this flight. From the provisions found by the followers (at the dwellings) it is believed that they had a child about 10 years old. They

had other children that had died (or had been exposed in the open to die, by Halla herself, for Eyvind could not bring himself to perform such a cruel deed). It is believed that Halla and the child rode, while Eyvind and Ames (if he was with them at the time) walked and that there were three packhorses.

The story of Eyvind and Halla in the next period have many discrepancies. But it is believed that Abraham and Ames had forsaken them and the next winter was the worst in their lives.

The child died (some say that Ames killed the child while the parents were absent, believing that the child would die anyway, and this was made one less to partake of their meager food supplies). It is also told that Eyvind, in desperation, went to his brother at Skipholt (secretly) and received a little aid. Halla bore a child around Easter time and both were near death from hunger. It was cold in the but and they had had no food for many days. Eyvind nevertheless insisted on reading the Easter Gospel. After this, he heard a sound from outside the but and found a big beautiful horse (that had gotten lost in a snowstorm) wandering in the wilderness. Eyvind captured and slaughtered the horse feeling that this was sent from God to save them. The horsehide was hung in the doorway to shelter them against the cold blasts.

The owner of this horse was Einar Brynjolfsson (son of the Sheriff Brynjolfur Sigurdson mentioned at the beginning of the story). Einar set great store by his horse and hunted for it all summer. In September, he and five men came upon Eyvind's but and recognized the horse. Eyvind and Halla gave themselves up. But once more on the journey to civilization, they managed to escape. There is a long story of their ups and downs and various places of refuge.

Of capture and escape once more (Ames was captured and he finished his term in jail and lived to a ripe old age). When Halla was captured, once more Eyvind used a clever ruse to free her. The stories of these various episodes do not tally among historians, but at any rate, Eyvind and Halla lived between the big central glaciers (Eiriksajokull and Langijokull and beyond Kerlingarfjoll (mountains) before the final capture. Around this time, twenty years had passed since Eyvind was first wanted by the law (1746 - 1766) and from the beginning of time it was recognized as an unwritten law, that an outlaw having survived the rigorous life in the mountains should get his freedom after twenty years. Many were there who sympathized and even admired Eyvind and Halla for their fortitude, and they were given permission to live in their old home, Hrafnararoareyrei. They died around 1780 or 1783. Some say that Halla died first and that they could not be buried in hallowed ground (having been outside the law). But this is not a certainty. Pall Melsted (a historian) claims to have spoken with an old old

man who, in his childhood, knew Halla when she was an old woman. He has said that Halla outlived Eyvind and he believes they were both buried in the churchyard at Stao in Grundavik.

This story has, on the whole, been harder on Halla than on Eyvind. But there is a pleasant glow cast around her last days by storytellers. The old man (mentioned above) says she sorrowed greatly after Eyvind's death. She came often to church, but had a strange habit of never entering the church proper, but stood near the outer door and listened to the service.

The story is told that one day in Spring, Halla looked up to the mountains as they glowed in the bright sunshine, and said: "Fagurt er a fjollunum nuna " (Now it is beautiful up on the mountains). Next morning Halla had disappeared. Some time later the body of a woman was found, presumably by death in a snowstorm, and at her side were two dead sheep, which she had stolen and tied to her belt. This was supposed to be the body of Halla, Eyvind's wife and companion in dire adventures. But the story is likely much embellished by imaginative recitings of legendary history. They likely thought this was a fitting and heroic end for such a Viking spirit.