Enough Ale to Fill Up the Sea – The What, Where, and How Much of Drinking in England

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The title of the class comes from a verse of a favorite song of mine, *Bring Us a Barrel*. This is a traditional English drinking song, performed by the Poxy Boggarts in this version. They mention many of the units of measure we need to know for this topic.

Tun	traditionally ~256 gallons but can range from 216 standard imperial gallons to 256 old English gallons. Changed to 252 in Queen Anne's reign to allow for better divisions (2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9).
Butt	½ a tun about 108 imperial gallons or ~126 wine gallons
Puncheon	1/3 a tun
Hogshead	¼ a tun about 48 gallons ale or 63 gallons wine
Barrel	1/8 a tun 32 to 36 gallons of ale
Firkin	8 gallons
Pottle	½ gallon
Gallons, Quarts, and Pints were known and are roughly the modern measure.	

Anglo-Saxon England had its beginning in a cup of wine and a pretty face [1].

> "In the meantime, the messengers returned from Germany, with eighteen ships full of the best soldiers they could get. They also brought along with them Rowen, the daughter of Hengist, one of the most accomplished beauties of that age. After their arrival, Hengist invited the king to his house, to view his new buildings, and the new soldiers that were come over. The king readily accepted of his invitation, but privately, and having highly commended the magnificence of the structure, enlisted the men into his service. Here he was entertained at a royal banquet; and when that was over, the young lady came out of her chamber bearing a golden cup full of wine, with which she approached the king, and making a low courtesy, said to him, "Lauerd king wacht heil!" The king, at the sight of the lady's face, was on a sudden both surprised and inflamed with her beauty; and calling to his interpreter, asked him what she said, and what answer he should make her. "She called you, 'Lord king,'" said the interpreter, "and offered to drink your health. Your answer to her must be, 'Drinc heil!'" Vortigern accordingly answered, "Drinc heil!" and bade her drink; after which he took the cup from her hand, kissed her, and drank himself."

Vortigern then asked for her hand in marriage and gave Kent as her bride price to Hengist.

But, this is Geoffrey of Monmouth. It is a nice story but most likely not true. Most modern scholars believe Geoffrey was really trying to develop a mythological history of Britain, like Virgil did with Rome. Given the nature of our Anglo-Saxon ancestors, it is not surprising that this is the founding myth of England.

The beginning story aside, we know for the sagas, poems, and recipes that the Anglo-Saxons knew of four drinks (primarily): beor, ealu, medu, and win. As we move through the time period, beer, cider and

spirits enter the scene as well. Looking at the medieval period as a whole though, the story is really one of beer, ale, and wine.

The location where one drinks also changes as we go through the ages. Drinking in the home is of course universal. In the early Anglo-Saxon period, you drink in the home or in the meadhall or beerhall. As we enter the Norman period, we gain alehouses, taverns, and inns.

Beor

What is *beor*? We really don't know. Tacitus [2] says that the alcoholic drink of the Germanic folk was a *liquor made from barley, or other grain, fermented to produce a certain resemblance to wine*. This is often interpreted to be ale but was it something else?

It is generally believed that *beor* was a strong drink. Pregnant women were advised to avoid *beor* but not ale. This also suggests that *beor* was a stronger drink. Some people believe that *beor* was a super-strength cider. Others dispute this saying that England really didn't have apples worthy of a cider at the time and that *beor* whatever it was, was a high status drink. We know mead was a high status drink and so, if cider is the other high status drink, why have two sweet drinks [3]? Why have pie and cake at the same feast? Because they are different.

Ann Hagan [4] makes a strong case that beor was probably a cider or an applejack. In French, cider is bere. Cider is the one ancient drink missing from the Anglo-Saxon record. William of Malmsbury tells us that there were groves of apple trees in England, certainly in Kent.

A further problem with *beor* is that the word is often used interchangeably with a generic alcohol. In later years, *beor* becomes beer, which is different than ale because of the addition of hops.

One thing we do know is that smaller drinking vessels than the typical cup, mug, and horn, have been found in grave digs (see photo below). Perhaps these are Anglo-Saxon "shot" glasses. These may have been use to drink the mysterious beor. The photo below is of a typical Anglo-Saxon claw beaker. This one is on the big side for a "shot" 17 cm tall and 8 cm in diameter. But smaller ones have been found.

So, we don't know what this stuff was. It probably would have been a cider, it could have been a barley wine, or it could have been a cold distilled spirit, like an applejack. It may have been sweet, or maybe not. If it is a super-cider, it may have gotten to around 18% ABV or if it was a freeze-distillate, it may have been around 50% ABV [5]. *Beor* most likely was a stronger drink, hence the Anglo-Saxon word *beordruncen*, very drunk.

Mead

We know mead was a high status drink. It is the drink of heroes for the Germanic people. The Nordic sagas and Anglo-Saxon poems all mention mead as a warrior's drink. But it is also the font of wisdom, the drink of skalds. In the *Edda*, there is the story about how mead was made and came to the gods.

After the war between the Aesir and the Vanir, they made a man out of a great jar and he was the wisest and best (i.e. good) man they could possibly make. He was a great traveller as well. On his travels, he encountered two mean-spirited dwarves who decided to kill him because he was so good and wise. They killed him and mixed his blood with honey into a drink. The dwarves then run afoul of a giant and give the mead to the giant to get out of a punishment. Odin then decides to find the missing skald and tricks the mead out of the giant and brings mead to the gods in Heaven.

Two quotes from the story are quite interesting:

> People sometimes think poets rather useless sort of men; but that was not the opinion of the gods, for when they made the first poet they made the very best man they could think of.
>
> So Odin brought the mead to heaven, where it remains to this day, and only those whom the gods love are permitted to drink of it.

(See the appendix for the full story.)[6]

Mead was extremely important to the early Anglo-Saxon warrior culture. The meadhall is where the king held court. Every major town would have had such a building. In the meadhall, the King would make pronouncements, reward service, give gifts, and other functions of ruling. The King was the ring-giver and the ring-breaker.

Several Old English words contain the root word for mead. Some interesting ones are: *medowerig* – weary from drinking mead – hung over; *medudream* – mead-joy; *medugal* – drunk with mead; *meduhall* – meadhall; *meoduburg* – mead town, happy town; and *meodoræden* – mead-drinking or assembly. Also, interestingly, the root *med* means reward and a *medgilda* is a hireling or mercenary. Perhaps the words arose from different sources but it is interesting that heroes were to be paid with mead [7].

Mead is also a sacred drink. In the meadhalls, warriors and companions would swear oaths, or *beots*, to achieve a task. Tacitus [8] notes that it was common Germanic custom to debate all important issues with strong drink but to avoid decisions until sober. The reasoning was similar to the Bacchanalian

phrase, *In Vino Veritas*, in wine there is truth. It was thought that under the influence of alcohol, a person was less able to lie or hide their true feelings about something.

These *beots* were sealed with a draught of mead and are known in later days as mead-pledges or mead-oaths. In later times, the same thing would occur with ale and be known as an ale-pledge. The word *beot* would change into boast over time.

Perhaps the most famous mead-oath is the one still repeated today by some:

> "I swear before this company that I shall fight to the death for my King. If my King or my Lord shall die, I shall take his place and fight as he would have fought. If any man here sees me taken with weak heart and run away, he shall remind me of this pledge made here before my kin."

This probably was a traditional oath but it is recorded as the oath sworn by the Huscarls of King Harold before the Battle of Hastings. King Harold Day is now an annual event in Waltham Abbey, Essex with reenactments, falconry, and Morris dancing.

However, as we move through the Anglo-Saxon period, mead becomes less common. This has to do with its status as a warrior's drink, the Christianization of England, and the increasing rarity of honey. As forests are cleared for villages and lumber, access to wild honey decreases. Abbeys and Monasteries did practice beekeeping. We have recipes for mead all throughout this period. But mead's high point is in the early period (400 to 700). The Church discourages mead as England moves away from paganism. After that, it is a much more rare drink [9].

Ale

We are on much stronger ground with ale. Ale was the common drink of the common person. This is mostly like the drink Tacitus is referring to. It is fermented grain and could be in several strengths.

A common myth is that people in the Medieval period drank ale all the time. That does become more true in the later period as water becomes more polluted due to tanneries and wooleries. As late as 1000 AD though, ale is not the only drink one might have during the day but it is the preferred one. Aelfric shows us this:

> Conversation with a student runs as follows [10]:
>
> *Ond hwæt drincst ðu?* (And what do you drink?) *Ealu, gif ic hæbbe, oððe wæter gif ic næbbe ealu* (Ale, if I have it, or water if I have no ale)
>
> *Ne drincst ðu win?* (Do you not drink wine) *Ic ne eom swa swedig ðæt ic mæge bicgean me win.* (I am not so wealthy that I may buy wine). *Ond win nys drenc cilda ne dysgra, ac ealdra ond wisra.* (Wine is not a drink for boys or fools but for old men and wise men.)

An interesting side note on Aelfric as well. In his homily[11], the *De Populo Israhel*, based on Exodus and Numbers, Aelfric gives some advice to his fellow English clergy: the fact that God could have made a font of wine "or what is more, of ale" instead of water is simply proof of the inscrutability of God's ways.

Ale was often made at home by women. Depending on the harvest, you may have an excess of grain to make some ale. You would brew the ale and you could sell the excess. You may have a room in your home or a spare table. It does become common enough and important enough that kings and the Church start regulating it.

In 694, Ine, King of Wessex, decrees a food tax of 84 gallons of Welsh Ale from each 10 hides of land [12]. A hide of land is enough land to support a family. Welsh Ale is considered the better grade of ale.

In the times of King Edgar the Peaceable (959 to 975), it was decreed that no man should drink more than a peg of ale at a time [13]. Mugs were about pottle sized (4 pints). Each "peg" is roughly a half-pint. The mugs were communal. This may be the origin of "taking someone down a peg." If you drank too much, you would need to drink to the next "peg" to make sure the next man got his full measure [14].

As we move into the Norman period, ale was THE drink for the common people at this time. The standard ration was a gallon per head per day. Ale did not have a long shelf life – about a week. It was an important source of calories for people in this time and so, it was felt that price protections were needed to ensure the general population had access.

King Henry III in 1256 fixes the price of ale with the price of grain [15].

> When a gallon of wheat is sold for 3 shillings or 3 shilling 4 penny and a ¼ of oats for 15 penny, then brewers in Cities ought and may well afford to sell two gallons (of ale) for a penny and out of cities sell 3 gallons for a penny. And when in a town 3 gallons is sold for a penny, out of town they ought and may sell 4. And this assize ought to be holden throughout the land.

The selling of ale becomes more regulated now as well. To indicate that you had extra ale for sale, you would put a bush or a pole outside of your home. The typical brewster sold less than 100 gallons per year.

When the stake was displayed, it was the signal for the ale-conner to come by, sample the brew, and declare its quality. How this worked is amazing. The conner would put on his badge of office, his leather breeches. He would go to the house, pour a sample on a stool, and try to sit on it for half-hour. He would then attempt to rise. If he was stuck, the ale had too much residual sugar and was declared unfit to drink. Otherwise, he would drink the sample that he sat in and declare it either of the first quality, the second quality, or unfit. If unfit, the ale stake was removed. If it passed, the alewife was given a branch of evergreen to hang over the door [16].

Likewise though, if the ale was routinely bad, the alewife could find herself thrown in the village pond [17].

Ale was part of the welfare system in medieval England. For special occasions, ale would be made and sold. The proceeds of that sale went for specific reasons. There were bid-ales for the needy, dirge-ales for a passing, bride-ales for newlyweds (hence the modern word bridal), and church-ales to raise parish funds. When a church-ale was announced, private brewing was not allowed [18].

Church-ales would become quite popular. Many churches and monasteries would have breweries as well as vineyards. Since it was now part of "god's work," the monks would become quite proficient at brewing and generally produced very good ale. In some part, the church-ale replaced the old Anglo-Saxon feasting tradition. There were often fairs, festivals, and markets associated with church-ales. In 1448 Henry VI passed a law barring fairs and markets on traditional feast days and Sunday [19]. This decree began to limit church-ales to some extent. Henry VIII would eventually decree that spiritual people (clergy and monks) could not brew for sale; only for their own use. In part, this was a response to Catholism and would lead to the Dissolution of Monasteries as well. An additional effect though was increase the number of public alehouses as some of these church breweries converted to a more secular cause [20].

Permanent alehouses start appearing in 13th century. By 1393, it was required for alehouse to display the stake referred above and these eventually become pub signs [21].

The Black Death marks a major turning point for alehouse and the consumption of ale. Prior to the plague, labor was cheap. There were plenty of people willing to work for low wages. But with the death of roughly 1/3 of the adult population, wages increased as the availability of labor decreased. The average laborer could now command 4.5 pence per day, enough to buy 3 loaves of bread, a joint of meat, and several gallons of ale [22].

Around this time, another change started happening with the brewing of ale and alehouses. It was becoming a man's job. Those church and monastic brewers were all men. Brewing became a guild activity and that meant men [23]. It was also becoming a full-time job.

Typical day for a brewer by trade in London: 6am shopping for victuals. At 9am the malt market opened and at 11 am, non-freeman were permitted to buy. Noon was lunchtime rush and the alehouse would remain open until 9pm when the church rang all fires out. As early as 1189, only stone breweries could brew at night to limit fires. With the above schedule, night was the primary time to brew [24].

Edward VI in 1552 started the licensing of alehouses. Initially, anyone could open an alehouse, but a justice could close it if necessary. With the passage of this Act, two local justices had to certify the good character of the alehouse owner before a license would be issued [25].

In the 15th century, a new brew appears on Old Blighty's shores, beer. Beer is distinguished from ale by the addition of hops. Ale brewing and beer brewing were required to be done separately. The Brewers Company of London stated "no hops, herbs, or other like thing be put into any ale or liquore wherof ale shall be made — but only liquor (water), malt, and yeast." More telling is this [26]:

> Ale is made of malte and water; and they the which do put any other thynge to ale than is rehersed, except yest, barme, or goddesgood [three words for yeast], doth sophysticat there ale. Ale for an Englysshe man is a naturall drinke. Ale muste haue these properties, it muste be fresshe and cleare, it muste not be ropy, nor smoky, nor it must haue no wefte nor tayle. Ale shulde not be dronke vnder.v.[6] dayes olde .... Barly malte maketh better ale than Oten malte or any other corne doth ... Beere is made of malte, of hoppes, and water; it is a naturall drynke for a doche [Dutch] man, and nowe of late dayes [recently] it is moche vsed in Englande to the detryment of many Englysshe men ... for the drynke is a colde drynke. Yet it doth make a man fatte, and doth inflate the bely, as it doth appere by the doche mennes faces and belyes.

Henry VI found in necessary to issue a proclamation to protect beer brewers from violence by ale brewers. The reason was, Flemish weavers were needed to help process English wool and the Flemish loved their hopped beer [27]. Of course, the English grew to love their beer too. Beer was cheaper than ale since it lasted longer, it could be made in larger batches.

Ale and beer become popular enough and are consumed enough that two kings issued proclamations about drinking interfering with archery practice. Both Edward III (circa 1335) and Henry VII (circa 1509) had to pass Acts to curb drinking (and by extension gaming) on Sundays as to not interfere with the mandatory archery practice [28].

As we look at the end of period (or a little after it), in 1688, 4,950,413 barrels of strong ale and 2,225,006 barrels of small beer were brewed [29].

Wine

Wine was the drink of Roman Britain. Wine-making in England itself though was never robust. Even today, English wine is not a thing to brag about. Most churches and monasteries would have a vineyard to a least produce sacramental wine. But even in Roman times, wine was heavily imported into England. Therefore, as Aelfric tells us above: wine is the drink of the wealthy and wise.

For most of this period, the medievalists had not discovered how preserve wine, either as the Romans did in sealed amphora or in bottles. So, the wine usually arrived in two shipments per year. In late autumn, the fleets brought the new wine. This would have been like a Nouveau Beaujolai. The second shipment was in the winter and it was reek wine, pressed from the lees of the first pressing [30].

In 1152, when Henry Plantagenet married Eleanor of Aquitaine. Bordeaux becomes part of England. The Norman English nobility loved wine. Henry abolishes some of taxes on the wine trade. By the first quarter of the 13thc, Bordeaux is exporting 20,000 tons of wine per year to England. In 1307, Edward II ordered 1000 tons of claret ~1,152,000 bottles for his wedding. The population of London at the time was less than 80000. The volume of wine imported into England in the 14th century would not be exceeded until 1920 [31].

By Henry VIII's time [32], 1 quart of wine per two persons was the norm at banquets and feasts.

Mead was drunk in meadhalls, ale in ale-houses, and wine in taverns. Taverns are descended from the Roman taverna. Wine was expensive and was generally the drink of the wealthy. However, another place to drink wine is the inn, which appears in later period and which served both ale and wine to travellers. The primary purpose of the inn is to provide lodging for travellers. Again, though, travel is generally the province of the wealthy, or at least those who could afford to not work their business or farm.

The Canterbury Tales gives us a glimpse of a typical inn and its patrons. At the Tabard Inn, the group of pilgrims are encouraged to tell their tales as a way to pass the time to Canterbury. The landlord hopes to "never to drink anything but wine or ale." Many of the travellers can be identified by their preferred drinks: the Summoner with his "strong wine, as red as blood", the Miller drunk on Ale, the Wife of Bath and her sweet wine, of which she says [33]:

> For after wine, of Venus must I think:
> For just as surely as cold produces hail,
> A liquorish mouth must have a liquorish tail.
> In women wine's no bar of impotence,
> This know all lechers by experience.

Chaucer himself enjoyed wine. His father was a wine merchant. In 1374, Edward III [34] granted him a pitcher of wine a day for life (8 pints) and then later Chaucer was granted a ton of wine per year.

Let's compare the number of taverns to alehouses. In 1272, there were only 3 taverns in London. By 1309, there were 354 taverns among the 1334 alehouses in London. By 1553, the number of taverns in various places is proscribed by law: 40 in London, six in Bristol, etc. Becoming a tavern owner was much harder than running an alehouse, tavern owners needed more than a license. They needed to be nominated, appointed, and assigned by high officers (aldermen, councilmen, burgesses, etc.) [35].

In addition to the rich, there was another class of drinker than frequented the taverns and inns, the students. These were the particular drunkards of the Middle Ages. They were technically part of the clergy so had to be disciplined through Church Law. They employed their Latin education to produce poems, songs, and satires in honor of their favorite things – wine, love, nature, adventure, and anarchy. The Carmina Burana is basically a manifesto for the students.

They referred to themselves as goliards. In another piece, the "Archpoet" gives their philosophy as such:

> In the public house to die
> Is my resolution
> Let wine to my lips be nigh
> At life dissolution
> The will make the angels cry
> With Glad elocution:
> Grant this drinker, God on high,
> Grace and absolution.

The goliards also produced this satire of the Divine Mass, call Missae de Potatoribus –Mass for Drinkers [36].

> Priest: Our Father, who art in glasses, hallowed be thy wine. May the cups of Bacchus come, may the storm by done in wine as it is in the tavern, give us this day our bread for the devouring, and forgive us our great cups, as we forgive not drinking, and lead us not into the absence of wine, but deliver us from our clothing.

As we close our period, in 1577 there was a census of all public houses in England. The census found that there were 14,202 alehouses, 1631 inns, and 329 taverns. That is 1 public house per 187 people in England at the time but that doesn't include home brewers and street vendors [37].

By the end of the medieval period, *beor* is unknown but spirits, especially gin, will soon take its place. Ale is still common but so is beer. Mead is a footnote. The high status drink is good French wine, drunk by the rich and elite. You would have your drink in a public alehouse, a tavern, or maybe an inn. But like the Anglo-Saxons of old, you would probably brag of your exploits, boast of the things you would do, sing with you comrades, and toast the health of those you admired. *Waes Hael!*

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[5] Gately*, Drink, a Cultural History of Alcohol,* p. 54

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[7] Peter S. Baker, *Introduction to Old English 2E*

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[9] Iain Gately*, Drink, a Cultural History of Alcohol,* p. 60

[10] Aelfric's Colloquy on the Occupations, lines 148, 149.

[11] Aelfric, *De Populo Israhel*

[12] Emerson*, An Essay on the History of Alcohol in England, Scotland, and Ireland*, p 1

[13] Emerson*, An Essay on the History of Alcohol in England, Scotland, and Ireland*, p 3

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[15] The Assize of Bread and Ale 51 Henry III 1266/7

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[22] Gately*, Drink, a Cultural History of Alcohol,* p. 85

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[26] Andrewe Boorde. A Compendyous Regymentor a Dyetary of helth. (1557), fol. G.ii - iii.

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Appendix

Full Story of How Odin Brought Mead to the Asgard.

[37] It happened almost at the beginning that the gods and the Vans went to war with each other, and long and fierce was the struggle between them. When peace was made at last, Njord, Frey, and Freyja found homes for themselves in Asgard, and henceforth they were all as one family.

While the council at which peace was made was being held, a great jar stood in the open space between the two parties, and when the meeting was over the gods were so glad to be rid of the troublesome war that they resolved to create something that should always remind them of the council. So they took the great jar and out of it they moulded the form of a man, and called him Kvaser.

Kvaser was grown up when he was born, and a wonderful man he was [38] too. In all the world there was nobody so wise as he; ask him any question, and he could answer it. He knew how the gods lived, how the world was made, and what sort of places heaven and hell were. Kvaser was good, too, as all really wise men are. He was a great traveller, always going from place to place, and always welcome, because wherever he went he made men wiser and better. People sometimes think poets rather useless sort of men; but that was not the opinion of the gods, for when they made the first poet they made the very best man they could think of.

But poets cannot keep out of trouble any easier than other men, and sometimes not half so well. One night as Kvaser was travelling along through one of those deep [39] valleys that run down to the sea in that country, he came to the house of two dwarfs with very queer names, Galar and Fjalar. They were not only little in size, but small and mean in nature, and like all other people of little nature, they were very envious and cruel, and they hated Kvaser because he was so much nobler than they. Galar had a dark, ugly face, which looked still uglier when he saw Kvaser coming towards the house.

"Fjalar! Fjalar!" he called out, "here comes the wise man who always talks in rhymes, and thinks he knows so much more than anybody else."

And when Fjalar saw the poet walking across the fields, a black shadow came over his face like a thunder-cloud. "Galar," he whis- [40] pered, looking around to see that nobody could hear, "we've got him alone; let's kill him, and see how much good his wisdom will do him."

Meanwhile Kvaser was slowly approaching the house, and the sea, as it dashed against the rocks, was making a song in his mind. If you had heard him sing it, you would have heard the voices of the waves as they toss their white caps and chase each other foaming and roaring and tumbling on the beach. When Kvaser came up to the dwarfs they pretended to be very glad to see him, and told him he was the one person above all others they had wanted to see, because they had a question they had been waiting a long time to ask him. Kvaser was so noble himself that he never thought evil of any one, and when they asked him to [41] go with them into a very dark and lonely part of the valley, so that nobody could hear their talk, he had no suspicion that they meant any harm; but no sooner had they come to the place than they struck him down from behind. Having killed him, they caught his blood in two jars and a kettle, and mixed it with honey, and so the wonderful mead as made. It took not only sweetness but life to make true poetry.

Not long after this Galar and Fjalar killed a giant named Gilling, and were punished for it too; for the giant's son, Suttung, when he discovered how his father had been put to death, took the dwarfs out to sea and put them on a little rocky island where they would certainly be drowned when the tide came in, and rowed off to leave them; but the rascals begged [42] so hard to be taken off, he finally promised to let them live if they would give him the mead. Then Suttung took the mead home and put it in his cellar, and told his daughter Gunlad to watch it day and night, for he knew what a precious drink it was. So the mead passed out of the dwarfs' hands into the keeping of a giant.

Now the gods were very fond of Kvaser, and when a long time had passed without any word from him, they asked Galar and Fjalar if they knew anything about him, and the dwarfs said he had been choked by his own wisdom; but Odin knew that this was a false story. He kept his own counsel, and said nothing about what he was going to do, but one day the gods missed him, and knew he had gone on one of his long journeys. [43] As he walked along nobody took him for a god; he looked like a very handsome labourer, and in fact that is what he really was. He had pretty much the whole world in his charge, and he had to work very hard to keep it in any kind of order. Words could hardly describe the beautiful country in which Odin took his way,—its deep, quiet green valleys, with the sparkling cold streams rushing through them; its steep mountains, crowned with fir and pine; its great crags standing out into the sea; and its fjords breaking the coast into numberless bays. Odin enjoyed it all, for the gods love beauty, but he was thinking all the time how he should get the mead out of the giant's cellar. He knew perfectly well that Suttung would never give it up willingly, and that he must get it either by force or by [44] stratagem. Suttung was very strong, and the cellar was cut out of the solid rock; and the more Odin thought about it the harder it seemed to him. If he had been a man he would have given up, but that was not his way; besides, he had loved Kvaser, and the mead was his blood, and he meant to bring it to heaven.

Now Suttung had a brother named Bauge, who was a farmer, and one afternoon, as his nine thralls were mowing in the fields, they saw a stranger coming towards them. It was a very uncommon thing to see a stranger in that out-of-the-way place, and the men all stopped work to watch him. He was a farm labourer like themselves, but he was very large in stature, and had a very noble face and manner.

"A fine meadow of grass," he said [45] in a deep musical voice as he joined them, "but you find it hard work; your scythes are dull."

They certainly did look tired and overworked.

"Hand me your scythes and I will whet them for you," continued the stranger. The thralls were very glad to have anybody do that for them, so they gave him their scythes without saying a word. In a moment the valley rang with the quick strokes of the stone on the hard metal, and the sparks flew in showers around them. The men had never seen such a whetting of scythes before, and their astonishment grew greater still when they found that the grass seemed to fall like magic before them. The mowing, which had been so hard, was now the easiest thing in the world.

[46] "Sell us the whetstone," they shouted, crowding around the stranger.

"Well," said he very coolly, "I will sell it, but I must have a good price for it."

Then each demanded it for himself, and while they were quarrelling as to which should have it, the stranger threw it high into the air, and bade them fight for it, which they did so fiercely that each slew his fellow with his scythe, and the stranger was left alone in the field. He threw the whetstone away, walked off, and as the sun was going down, came to the giant's house and asked if he might stay all night. Bauge was willing, as people were in those days, to give supper and a bed to the stranger, and asked him in.

After supper they talked together, and Bauge told the stranger that his [47] nine thralls had been fighting in the field and had killed each other, and that he was in great trouble because he did not know where to get men to do his work.

"I'll do it," said the stranger.

"Yes," said Bauge, "but you are only one.

"That is true," he answered, "but try me and I'll do the work of all nine."

Bauge looked as if he didn't believe it, but it was one good man gained, at least, and that was something.

"What shall I pay you?" continued Bauge, determined to finish the bargain before the man had time to change his mind. The stranger thought a few moments as if he were uncertain what pay he wanted.

"I'll do the work," he said slowly, [48] at last, "if you will give me a drink of the mead in your brother's cellar." Bauge was very much surprised; he could not understand how the man knew anything about the mead. He was very sure, however, that Suttung would not give him a drop of it, and he thought it was a good chance to get his work done for nothing. "Well," said he, "I can't promise you that, for Suttung takes precious good care of the mead, but I will do what I can to help you get it."

So the bargain was made, and the next morning the stranger was at work; and all summer, early and late, he was in the fields doing the work of nine men. Bauge often wondered what kind of a man his new farm-hand was; but so long as the work was done he cared for nothing more, and he asked no ques- [49] tions. The stranger once said his name was Bolverk, and that was all he ever said about himself. The months went by, winter came, the work was all done, and Bolverk demanded his pay.

"We'll go and ask my brother for it," said Bauge; so they both went to Suttung. Bauge told his brother the bargain he had made with his workman, and asked for a little of the mead.

"No" said Suttung very crossly, looking suspiciously at Bolverk; "it's no bargain of mine, and not a drop shall you have."

Bolverk seemed not at all surprised at his ill fortune, and Bauge thought that he had gotten his work done for nothing; but after they had gone a little way together and were hidden from the house by the trees, [50] Bolverk drew out an auger from under his clothing.

"Bauge," said he, "you promised to help me get that mead. I am going into Suttung's cellar for it."

Bauge smiled at the idea of cutting through a thick rock and getting into the cellar with that auger, but when it was handed to him he took it without saying a word and began to bore. It was an astonishing auger, for no sooner had he pressed it against the rock than it began to fly around with wonderful rapidity, the chips of stone fairly making a cloud about him. Once he stopped, for he was afraid he really would get into the cellar, and told Bolverk he had bored through, but Bolverk knew that couldn't be true, because the chips still flew out, so he told Bauge to go on. In a little time the au- [51] ger slipped through. Bauge looked around, but there was no Bolverk, and while he stared in every direction a large worm crept up the rock and into the hole. When Bauge caught sight of it he thrust the auger hastily into the hole, but Bolverk's voice answered back from the cellar, "Too late, Bauge; you needn't bore any longer."

Then Bauge suspected that a man who had done the work of nine men summer, and suddenly changed himself into a worm, must be somebody more than common. Bolverk was actually in Suttung's house, but how was he to get out again with the mead?

Gunlad, the young lady who had been charged by her father to watch the precious drink day and night, was sitting quietly beside it, when she [52] was suddenly surprised, and not a little frightened, by the apparition of a young and beautiful man standing before her. What the handsome young man said to her nobody knows, but he probably told her he was very much exhausted, and hinted that she was very lovely; that he had never seen any one he admired so much before. At any rate, he persuaded her to let him drink three draughts of the mead, only three. They were certainly the most astonishing draughts anybody ever heard of, for with the first he emptied one jar, with the second he emptied the other jar, and with the third he finished the kettle.

And now another wonderful change took place. Bolverk had entered as a worm, but no sooner had he drunk the mead than in an instant he be- [53] came an eagle, and before Gunlad knew what had happened, with splendid wings outspread he was rising upward in broad, easy flight. Through the still air, faster and faster, higher and higher, in wide circles that swept far round the summits of the mountains, in swift majestic flight he rose until the earth had vanished out of sight, and his mighty pinions beat against the gates of Asgard.