***FREY****God of Fertility*

Frey, or Fro as he was called in Germany, is the God of Frith; peace, fertility, nature and plenty. He is the son of Njörd and Nerthus, or of NJörd and Skadi, and was born in Vanaheim. He therefore belongs to the race of the Vanas, the divinities of water and air, but was warmly welcomed in Asgard when he came thither as hostage with his father. As it was customary among the Northern nations to bestow some valuable gift upon a child when he cut his first tooth, the sir gave the infant Frey the beautiful realm of Alfheim, the home of all the Light Elves.

*“Alf-heim the gods to Frey
Gave in days of yore
For a tooth gift.”
              -SÆMUND’S EDDA (Thorpe’s tr.)*Here Frey, the God of the golden sunshine and the warm summer showers, took up his abode, charmed with the company of the elves and fairies, who implicitly obeyed his every order, and at a sign from him flitted to and fro, doing all the good in their power, for they were preeminently beneficent spirits.

Frey received from the Gods a marvelous sword (an emblem of the sunbeams), which had the power of fighting successfully, and of its own accord, as soon as it was drawn from its sheath. Because he carried this glittering weapon, Frey has sometimes been confounded with the sword-god Tyr or Saxnot, although he wielded it principally against the frost giants, whom he hated almost as much as did Thor.

*“With a short-shafted hammer fights conquering Thor;
Frey’s own sword but an ell long is made.”
              -VIKING TALES OF THE NORTH (R. B. Anderson)*

The dwarfs from Svartalfheim gave Frey the golden-bristled boar Gullin-bursti (the golden-bristled), a personification of the sun. The radiant bristles of this animal are considered symbolical either of the solar rays, of the golden grain, which at his bidding waved over the harvest fields of Midgard, or of agriculture, for the boar (by tearing up the ground with his sharp tusk) is supposed to have first taught mankind how to plow.

*“There was Frey, and sat
On the gold-bristled boar, who first, they say,
Plowed the brown earth, and made it green for Frey.”
              -LOVERS OF GUDRUN (William Morris)*

Frey sometimes rides astride of this marvelous boar, whose celerity is very great, and at other times harnesses him to his golden chariot, which is said to contain the fruits and flowers which he lavishly scatters abroad over the face of the earth.

Frey is, moreover, the proud possessor, not only of the dauntless steed Blodug-hofi, which dashes through fire and water at his command, but also of the magic ship Skidbladnir, a personification of the clouds. This vessel, navigating over land and sea, is always wafted along by favorable winds, and is so elastic that, while it can assume large enough proportions to carry the gods, their steeds, and all their equipments, it can also be folded up like a napkin and thrust out of sight.

*“Ivaldi’s sons
Went in days of old
Skidbladnir to form,
Of ships the best,
For the bright Frey,
Niörd’s benign son.”
              -LAY OF GRIMNIR (Thorpe’s tr.)*
**The Wooing of Gerda**

It is related in one of the lays of the Edda that Frey once ventured to ascend Odin’s throne Hlidskialf, and from this exalted seat cast a glance over all the wide earth. Gazing towards the frozen North, he saw a beautiful young maiden enter the house of the frost giant Gymir, and as she raised her hand to lift the latch her radiant beauty illuminated sea and sky.

A moment later, this lovely creature, whose name was Gerda, and who is considered as a personification of the flashing Northern lights, vanished within her father’s house, and Frey pensively wended his way back to Alfheim, his heart oppressed with longing to make this fair maiden his wife. Being deeply in love, he was melancholy and absentminded in the extreme, and began to behave so strangely that his father, Njörd, became greatly alarmed about his health, and bade his favorite servant, Skirnir, discover the cause of this sudden change. After much persuasion, Skirnir finally won from Frey an account of his ascent of Hlidskialf, and of the fair vision he had seen. He confessed his love and especially his utter despair, for as Gerda was the daughter of Gymir and Angur-boda, and a relative of the murdered giant Thiassi, he feared she would never view his suit with favor.

*“In Gymer’s court I saw her move,
The maid who fires my breast with love;
Her snow-white arms and bosom fair
Shone lovely, kindling sea and air.
Dear is she to my wishes, more
Than e’er was maid to youth before;
But gods and elves, I wot it well,
Forbid that we together dwell.”
              -SKIRNER’S LAY (Herbert’s tr.)*

Skirnir, however, consolingly replied that he could see no reason why his master should take such a despondent view of the matter, and proposed to go and woo the maiden in his name, providing Frey would lend him his steed for the journey, and give him his glittering sword in reward.

Overjoyed at the mere prospect of winning the beautiful Gerda, Frey handed Skirnir the flashing sword, and bade him use his horse, ere he resumed his interrupted day-dream; for ever since he had fallen in love he had frequently indulged in revery. in his absorption he did not even notice that Skirnir was still hovering near him, and did not perceive him cunningly steal the reflection of his face from the surface of the brook near which he was seated, and imprison it in his drinking horn, intending “to pour it out in Gerda’s cup, and by its beauty win the heart of the giantess for the lord” for whom he was about to go a-wooing. Provided with this portrait, with eleven golden apples, and with the magic ring Draupnir, Skirnir now rode off to Jötunheim, to fulfill his embassy. As soon as he came near Gymir’s dwelling he heard the loud and persistent howling of his watch dogs, which were personifications of the wintry winds. A shepherd, guarding his flock in the vicinity, told him, in answer to his inquiry, that it would be impossible for him to approach the house, on account of the flaming barrier which surrounded it; but Skirnir, knowing that Blodug-hofi would dash through any fire, merely set spurs to his steed, and, riding up to the giant’s door, soon found himself ushered into the presence of the lovely Gerda.

To induce this fair maiden to lend a favorable ear to his master’s proposals, Skirnir showed her the purloined portrait, and proffered the golden apples and magic ring, which she haughtily refused to accept, declaring that her father had gold enough and to spare.

*“I take not, I, that wondrous ring,
Though it from Balder’s pile you bring.
Gold lack not I, in Gymer’s bower;
Enough for me my father’s dower.”
              -SKIRNER’S LAY (Herbert’s tr.)*

Indignant at her scorn, Skirnir now threatened to use his magic sword to cut off her head; but as this threat did not in the least frighten the maiden, and she calmly defied him, he had recourse to magic arts. Cutting runes in his stick, he told her that unless she yielded ere the spell was ended, she would be condemned either to eternal celibacy, or to marry some hideous old frost giant whom she could never love.

Terrified into submission by the frightful description he gave of her cheerless future in case she persisted in her refusal, Gerda finally consented to become Frey’s wife, and dismissed Skirnir, promising to meet her future spouse on the ninth night, in the land of Buri, the green grove, where she would dispel his sadness and make him happy.

*“Burri is hight the seat of love;
Nine nights elapsed, in that known grove
Shall brave Niorder’s gallant boy
From Gerda take the kiss of joy.”
              -SKIRNER’S LAY (Herbert’s tr.)*

Delighted with his success, Skirnir hurried back to Alfheim, where Frey eagerly came to meet him, and insisted upon knowing the result of his journey. When he learned that Gerda had consented to become his wife, his face grew radiant with joy; but when Skirnir further informed him that he would have to wait nine nights ere he could behold his promised bride, he turned sadly away, declaring the time would appear interminable.

*“Long is one night, and longer twain;
But how for three endure my pain?
A month of rapture sooner flies
Than half one night of wishful sighs.”
              -SKIRNER’S LAY (Herbert’s tr.)*

In spite of this loverlike despondency, however, the time of waiting came to an end, and Frey joyfully hastened to the green grove, where he met Gerda, who became his happy wife, and proudly sat upon his throne beside him.

*“Frey to wife had Gerd;
She was Gymir’s daughter,
From Jotuns sprung.”
              -SÆMUND’S EDDA (Thorpe’s tr.)*

According to some mythologists, Gerda is not a personification of the aurora borealis, but of the earth, which, hard, cold, and unyielding, resists the Spring-God’s proffers of adornment and fruitfulness (the apples and ring), defies the flashing sunbeams (Frey’s sword), and only consents to receive his kiss when it learns that it will else be doomed to perpetual barrenness, or given over entirely into the power of the giants (ice and snow). The nine nights of waiting are typical of the nine winter months, at the end of which the earth becomes the bride of the sun, in the groves where the trees are budding forth into leaf and blossom.
Frey and Gerda, we are told, became the parents of a son called Fiolnir, whose birth consoled Gerda for the loss of her brother Beli. The latter had attacked Frey and had been slain by him, although the Sun-God, deprived of his matchless sword, had been obliged to defend himself with a stag horn which he hastily snatched from the wall of his dwelling.

**The Historical Frey**

Snorro-Sturleson, in his “Heimskringla,” or chronicle of the ancient kings of Norway, states that Frey was an historical personage who bore the name of Ingvi-Frey, and ruled in Upsala after the death of the semi-historical Odin and Njörd. Under his reign the people enjoyed such prosperity and peace that they declared their king must be a god. They therefore began to invoke him as such, carrying their enthusiastic admiration for him to such lengths that when he died the priests, not daring to reveal the fact, laid him in a great mound instead of burning his body, as had been customary until then. They then informed the people that Frey — whose name was the Northern synonym for “master” — had “gone into the mound,” an expression which eventually became the Northern phrase for death.

Only three years later the people, who had continued paying their taxes to the king by pouring the gold, silver, and copper coin into the mound by three different openings, discovered that Frey was dead. As their peace and prosperity had remained undisturbed, they decreed that his corpse should never be burned, and thus inaugurated the custom of mound burial, which in due time supplanted the funeral pyre in many places. One of the three mounds near Gamla Upsala still bears this god’s name. His statues were placed in the great temple there, and his name was duly mentioned in all solemn oaths, of which the usual formula was, “So help me Frey, Njörd, and the Almighty Asa” (Odin).

**Worship of Frey**

No weapons were ever admitted in Frey’s temples, the most celebrated of which were at Throndhjeim, and at Thvera in Iceland, where oxen or horses were offered up in sacrifice to him, and where a heavy gold ring was dipped in the victim’s blood ere the above-mentioned oath was solemnly taken upon it.

Frey’s statues, like those of all the other Northern divinities, were roughly hewn blocks of wood, and the last of these sacred images seems to have been destroyed by Olaf the Saint, who forcibly converted many of his subjects. Besides being God of Sunshine, fruitfulness, peace, and prosperity, Frey was considered the patron of horses and horsemen, and the deliverer of all captives.

*“Frey is the best
Of all the chiefs
Among the gods.
He causes not tears
To maids or mothers:
His desire is to loosen the fetters
Of those enchained.”
              -NORSE MVTHOLOGY (R. B. Anderson)*

**The Yule Feast**

One month of every year, the Yule month, or Thor’s month, was considered sacred to Frey as well as to Thor, and began on the longest night of the year, which bore the name of Mother Night. This month was a time of feasting and rejoicing, for it heralded the return of the sun. The festival was called Yule (wheel) because the sun was supposed to resemble a wheel rapidly revolving across the sky. This resemblance gave rise to a singular custom in England, Germany, and along the banks of the Moselle. Until within late years, the people were wont to assemble yearly upon a mountain, to set fire to a huge wooden wheel, twined with straw, which, all ablaze, was then sent rolling down the hill and plunged with a hiss into the water.

*“Some others get a rotten Wheele, all worn and cast aside,
Which, covered round about with strawe and tow, they closely hide;
And caryed to some mountaines top, being all with fire light,
They hurle it down with violence, when darke appears the night;
Resembling much the sunne, that from the Heavens down should fal,
A strange and monstrous sight it seemes, and fearful to them all;
But they suppose their mischiefs are all likewise throwne to hell,
And that, from harmes and dangers now, in safetie here they dwell.”
              -NAOGEORGUS*

All the Northern races considered the Yule feast the greatest of the year, and were wont to celebrate it with dance, feasting, and drinking, each God being pledged by name. The missionaries, perceiving the extreme popularity of this feast, thought best to encourage drinking to the health of the Lord and his twelve apostles when they first began to convert the Northern heathens. In honor of Frey, boar’s flesh was eaten on this occasion. Crowned with laurel and rosemary, the animal’s head was brought into the banquet hall with much ceremony — a custom long after observed at Oxford, where the following lines were sung:

*“Caput apri defero
Reddens laude Domino.
The boar’s head in hand bring I,
With garlands gay and rosemary.
I pray you all sing merrily
Qui estis in convivio.”
              -QUEEN’S COLLEGE CAROL, OXFORD*

The father of the family then laid his hand on this dish, which was called “the boar of atonement,” swearing lie would be faithful to his family, and would fulfill all his obligations — an example which was followed by all present, from the highest to the lowest. This dish could be carved only by a man of unblemished reputation and tried courage, for the boar’s head was a sacred emblem which was supposed to inspire every one with fear. For that reason a boar’s head was frequently used as ornament for the helmets of Northern kings and heroes whose bravery was unquestioned.

**God of Conjugal Happiness**

As Frey’s name of Fro is phonetically the same as the word used in German for gladness, he was considered the patron of every joy, and was invariably invoked by married couples who wished to live in harmony. Those who succeeded in doing so for a certain length of time were publicly rewarded by the gift of a piece of boar’s flesh, for which, in later times, the English and Viennese substituted a flitch of bacon or a ham.

*“You shall swear, by custom of confession,
If ever you made nuptial transgression,
Be you either married man or wife
If you have brawls or contentious strife;
Or otherwise, at bed or at board,
Offended each other in deed or word;
Or, since the parish clerk said Amen,
You wish’d yourselves unmarried again;
Or, in a twelvemonth and a day
Repented not in thought any way,
But continued true in thought and desire
As when you join’d hands in the quire.
If to these conditions, with all feare,
Of your own accord you will freely sweare,
A whole gammon of bacon you shall receive,
And bear it hence with love and good leave
For this our custom at Dunmow well known —
Though the pleasure be ours, the bacon’s your own.”
              -BRANDS POPULAR ANTIQUITIES*

At Dunmow, England, and in Vienna, Austria, this custom was kept up very long indeed, the ham or flitch of bacon being hung over the city gate, whence the successful candidate was expected to bring it down, after he had satisfied the judges that he lived in peace with his wife, but was not under petticoat rule. It is said that in Vienna this ham once remained for a long time unclaimed until at last a worthy burgher presented himself before the judges, bearing his wife’s written affidavit that they had been married twelve years and had never disagreed — a statement which was confirmed by all their neighbors. The judges, satisfied with the proofs laid before them, told the candidate that the prize was his, and that he only need climb the ladder placed beneath it and bring it down. Rejoicing at having secured such a fine ham, the man obeyed; but as he was about to reach upwards, he noticed that the ham, exposed to the noonday sun, was beginning to melt, and that a drop of fat threatened to fall upon and stain his Sunday coat. Hastily beating a retreat, he pulled off his coat, jocosely remarking that his wife would scold him roundly were he to stain it, a confession which made the bystanders roar with laughter, and which cost him his ham.

Another Yule-tide custom was the burning of a huge log, which had to last all night or it was considered of very bad omen indeed. The charred remains of this log were carefully collected, and treasured up to set fire to the log of the following year.

*“With the last yeeres brand
Light the new block, and
For good successe in his spending,
On your psaltries play,
That sweet luck may
Come while the log is a-tending.”
               -HESPERIDES (Herrick)*

This festival was so popular in Scandinavia, where it was celebrated in January, that King Olaf, seeing how dear it was to the Northern heart, transferred most of its observances to Christmas day, thereby doing much to reconcile the people to their change of religion.

As God of peace and prosperity, Frey is supposed to have reappeared upon earth many times, and to have ruled the Swedes under the name of Ingvi-Frey, whence his descendants were called Inglings. He also governed the Danes under the name of Fridleef. In Denmark he is said to have married the beautiful maiden Freygerda, whom he had rescued from a dragon. By her he had a son named Frodi, who, in due time, succeeded him as king.

This Frodi ruled Denmark in the days when there was “peace throughout all the world,” and because all his subjects lived in amity, he was generally known as Peace Frodi.

**How the Sea Became Salt**

This king once received from Hengi-kiaptr a pair of magic millstones, called Grotti, which were so ponderous that none of his servants nor even his strongest warriors could turn them. As Peace Frodi knew that the mill was enchanted and would grind anything he wished, he was very anxious indeed to set it to work, and, during a visit to Sweden, saw and purchased as slaves the two giantesses Menia and Fenia, whose powerful muscles and frames had attracted his attention.
On his return home, Peace Frodi led these women to the mill, and bade them turn the grindstones and grind out gold, peace, and prosperity — a wish which was immediately fulfilled. Cheerfully the women worked on, hour after hour, until the king’s coffers were overflowing with gold and his land with prosperity and peace.

*“Let us grind riches to Frothi!
Let us grind him, happy
In plenty of substance,
On our gladdening Quern.”
              -GROTTA-SAVNGR (Longfellow’s tr.)*

But when Menia and Fenia would fain have rested awhile, the king, whose greed had been excited, bade them work on. In spite of their cries and entreaties he forced them to labor hour after hour, allowing them only as much time to rest as was required for the singing of a verse in a song, until, exasperated by his cruelty, the giantesses resolved to have their revenge. Once while Frodi slept they changed their song, and grimly began to grind an armed host, instead of prosperity and peace. By their spells they induced the Viking Mysinger to land with his troops, surprise the Danes, who were wrapped in slumber, and slay them all.

*“An army must come
Hither forthwith,
And burn the town
For the prince.”
              -GROTTA-SAVNGR (Longfellow’s tr.)*

This Viking then placed the magic millstones Grotti and the two slaves on board his vessel, and bade the women grind for him, saying that he wanted salt, as it was a very valuable staple of commerce at that time. The women obeyed; the millstones went round, grinding salt in abundance; but the Viking, as cruel as Frodi, kept the women persistently at work, until they ground such an immense quantity of salt that its weight sunk the ship and all on board.

The ponderous millstones sank straight down into the sea in the Pentland Firth, or off the northwestern coast of Norway, making a deep round hole. The waters, rushing into the vortex and gurgling in the holes in the center of the stones, produced the great whirlpool, which is known as the Maelstrom. As for the salt, it soon melted; but such was the quantity ground by the giantesses that it tainted all the waters of the sea, which have ever since been very salt indeed.