

## THE LIVERY OF PROTEUS

BY LLOYD MORRIS

ON a Scandinavian promontory fretted by a gray sea whose waters are never utterly tranquil, stands a forgotten stimulus, and the crudely set architecture of a cyclopean memorial.

Sometimes the girdling ocean heaves slowly in long swells, and out of the white mists that wrap about its breast comes a low moan, as if a multitudinous dead lying within its sombre depths was stirring restlessly, and complaining through a heavy sleep. Rarely its surface shimmers into quick ripples; often the storm-wind tramples over its wrinkled face, and towering walls of dark water crested with white, come roaring in wild succession to burst upon the shore and, sweeping far up the strand, hiss among the dune-grass and smite with javelins of spray, the dumb witness of dead men signalling down the clangorous years of change.

All the magic of ancient legend and shadowy history lingers about the solitary mounds and tumbled menhirs, many an one such as this, to be seen arching up against the sky-line from the bare fell-sides of the countries of northern Europe: eastward from Ireland to the Baltic strand.

Love and devotion built them; and before the driven brine was launched against them in aerial attack, salt tears had fallen upon them; and from their freshly heaped sides were tossed back upon the night, wild farewells and the flaring lights of failing torches.

In fear and defiance their runic characters were graven: that memory of the dead might not pass from time; nor knowledge of their hardily-won faiths, which upheld them above the brute-beast, from succour of the generation of men—devoured by the laughing mystery of the ocean; and the travailing of deep with deep as some shuddering purpose went forth to unfold.

How great an interment was here: something more than warrior, something stranger than skald; and to mark the decease, but the green mound and some waving grasses.

Here in these tumuli the warrior sleeps with dented helm and blunted spear. Here the aged skald is laid, his pagan rhyme muted in dust that was once his lips. Snowed over by snows, beaten with rains, they lie within sound of the strife of wind and ocean; and the brine-laden gale whistles over them the music to which they sang with a great pagan joy of life; to which they tugged at the long sweeps of their leaping ships; and to which they slept on the unsleeping waters.

Here, too, in these barrows was borne to sepulture a colossal mythology. Together in the adventure of life, pagan and paganism were exposed to the final hazard: every hurtling arrow menaced the gods; the circling axe shattered a heaven; and with every warrior borne from stricken field to his tomb, were carried his gods, his jotuns and his hereafter, already sepultured in a lifeless brain.

There are none now that call upon Odin; the altars of Thor are shattered—and the peaceful peasant wends his way to the Lutheran church on the hill.

There are none that see the elves tripping lightly in the moonlight, nor the nixies rise from the translucent water and, with fair breasts gleaming in the light of the moon, sing their seductive song and comb their blonde hairs with pink shells. There are none who stare through the night affrighted at the ruddy light of Thor's red beard flaring across the sky, and the tumult of his chariot wheels rolling down the west. None see the Valkmeyjar, the battle-maids whose riding is as the riding of gods and heroes, ride out on the tempest: their helms of gold, and a red dew dripping from the tossing manes of their steeds as they summon the warrior fiercely exultant to his last mortal combat, and happy entry into the hall of Odin lit with shields and wainscoted with spears; where dead men rise up ever, and all the airs that blow, are shouts of joyous battle and wassail that know no satiety nor end.

All, all, that titanic imagery wherein the primitive Scandinavian mind expressed so earnestly its ideas of good and evil is become as the music of a pleasing tale—and the peasant plodding a lonely way to market, hears nothing in the wind but the wind; sees only a storm-wrack sweeping across the sky, and a ripple on the water.

Here indeed were matter for the moralist; from which to recite brave tales on the superior altitude of present human understanding. Here, too, might the cynic point a disturbing finger and say that History repeats itself. Here might the pensive traveller stay his step and wonder over the fashion of some morrow leashing its little moment beside the shapes of today and, in ironic little tributes to the antique fantasies of us dead and gone, pronounce the doom of its own faiths; and all the cherishments of an infinite generation of men foetal in eternity.

Can no thought be so fine but that Time shall respect its fairness; no belief so earnest but for all the days it shall be true? The wonder of eras becomes an era's sport; the dearest hopes of nations at last by peoples are despised; and the agonies and tumults of aspiring epochs recede to senseless symbols recording an effluxion of dimensioned time.

The possibilities of Time crowd us down; vociferous modernities in an infinity of repetition deride the elder days for that they muttered and shouted and lo, there was only foolishness; they clutched and behold nothing was in their futile hands.

Goes there not, also, some pilgrim through eternity, telling above the sweeping crescendo of life's vast integrations, that the finalities nourished in yesterdays shone in their hour as steadfastly and true upon the unknown, as do in their turn the effulgencies of futurity's more sumptuous years. Sounds there, also, no far utterance calling from epoch to epoch over sundering oblivions of finite disquietudes that the ignorance of humanity is habitual; that there is in the slightest weed wherewith the hedgerow is green a secret that is the tyranny of time; that in the wind is more than the wind; and on the face of the waters a going forth that has no wap nor wan.

Though the things that we wrought, the hands that shaped, and the brain that directed be resolved again into constituent parts beneath mounded earth; yet the abyssal intention that projected them has no solemn funerals there. Though ever for ever to-morrow's shapes of splendour dim the lustre of today's accomplishment till they be but faded rustling wreaths garlanding Time's greedy adornment; yet the thread upon which they are strung remains impalpable, irrefragable, infinite.

For the virtue of creation does not lie at the point of the biolo-

gist's knife, nor is sealed in any test tube. It is superior to any combination of pigments laid upon canvas; and all our cabbala holds no incantation potent enough to conjure it into terms of sensual perception.

The poem has yet to be written, the harmony evolved, the marble chipped, the theorem erected and ethic or philosophy enunciated which shall incarnate that profound in all things and ever unbeheld; which speaking all tongues informs no ear; is fugitive to the understanding and known to the lad whistling along the furrow—the elusive residuum of research and vivifying principle gliding through History.

We are conscious of it nodding from you to itself in me; manifesting itself subjectively in the happy ideals of happy hours before sorrow laid its first harsh stricture upon our boyish days; in our crescive arrogancies before the certitudes of our prime crumbled in the crucible of experience; in the bland sagacities of our mellowed autumn, before age imposed its tyranny upon an humbleness that asks at last but that the sun's bright rays, and delicate warm airs may fall gently, and the food be soft to mumble in the mouths of poor Harlequin and Pantaloon.

From swaddling band to winding sheet, a litter of discarded spiritual clothing marks the passage of the individual human entity. Objectively, also, we gaze with pensive eye of wonderment or dilated stare of the apalled trembling upon the giddy verge of ecstasy, at the already unrolled tapestry of Time's expression, and at the stupendous adumbration of things yet to be as the ineffable out-folds through gross animalism to mental abstraction; and returns again unto itself in ratiocinations too remote for perception.

The hues of physical glory, the deliquescence of disgusting rotteness; tiny splotch of protoplasm, human brain; the riot of material abandon, the austerities of spiritual extremities, are but the sport and play of its circumstantial masquerades.

Fetish, totem, runic stave; pictograph, Tintoretto; Elgin Marbles, Pauline Epistles; Buddhist dagops, Christian shrine; pagan altar and shrieking sacrifice, stately cathedral, solemn chaunt and the reverential ear inclined to the worshipful mass as sunbeams slanting through glowing windows stain with borrowed tints heads bowed to prayer; the Unkulunkulu of the Amazulu, Brahman Veda, Zor-

astorian Avesta, Buddhist Tripitaka, Alcoran, the Kings of Confucius—these, and such as these are its liveries.

Here, too, in this northern land where over the grave of skald and warrior and mythology, stars glint like frosted sword-blades in the deep blue dome of Odin's halls; here was a Livery of Proteus—not a mean and dishonored habiliment, but a tapestry whose fashion once of gold, now is silver warp in today's tailorings; and yet shall be sober thread in the woof of imperfect shadows of gigantic happenings in a realm beyond the present mind; wherein the Supernal weaves and weaves and weaves.

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