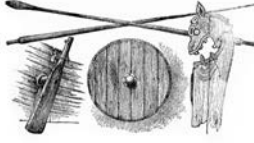




Chapter 1

Leif the Lucky



WAY, way in the far north, in the land of ice and snow, dwelt the Norsemen or Vikings. A bold, daring race, they knew no fear. They plowed the mighty waves of the sea in their small open vessels. These ships were only about fifty feet long but strongly built and seaworthy, with either a dragon or a sea monster carved onto the bow. They carried terror—these little vessels—to the people who watched their dreaded prows plunging slowly through the waves and coming toward their shores.

Out to the west of the Norsemen's land lay the island of Iceland. Here the Vikings planted a flourishing colony of happy, prosperous people. And here dwelt Erik the Red and his family.

This Erik the Red was as brave and fierce a warrior as ever lived, with a temper hard to control. Once upon a time, he fell out with a neighbor, and in his anger, killed the man. Such actions would not do, even in the Norsemen's country, so Erik the Red was banished from Iceland.

Soon a Norse ship was plowing the angry waves of the Atlantic Ocean under the command of the exiled Erik. He was determined to seek his fortune in some new land and daringly headed his vessel for the west, not knowing what lay before him.

Finally, one day the outlines of a rugged, forbidding coast came in sight. For three years, Erik and his followers explored



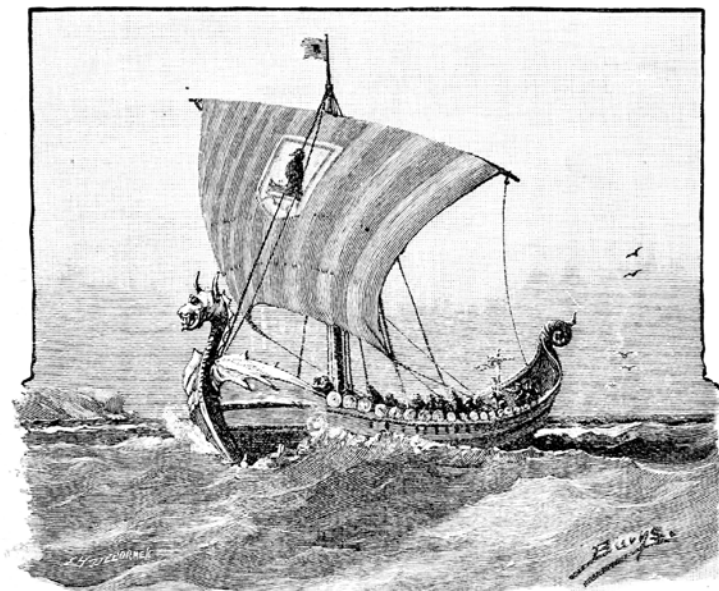
They chose the pleasantest place to make their home

the shores of the land they had found. At last, they chose the pleasantest place they had seen to make their home. Erik the Red named the new country Greenland, for, as he wisely said, “It is well to give it a pleasing name, you know, if we want others to be tempted to join us here.”

This was just what Erik did want. He wanted to found a colony in Greenland. So he returned to Iceland and told the people wonderful tales about the beautiful land he had discovered. His stories so appealed to the adventurous spirit

of his people that, when he set sail from Iceland the second time, twenty-five ships were needed to carry the colonists who went with him. Sad to say, eleven of the twenty-five ships were lost on the way. The other fourteen reached Greenland in safety, and the new colonists went busily to work building themselves homes.

One day Bjarni the Traveler came to the hall of Erik the Red. He told a tale of a strange new land he had seen, far across the sea where no man had sailed before. When sailing west from Iceland, a terrible storm had arisen, and the winds had blown his vessel toward the south. For days and days, he had sailed on without knowing where he was. Then he had come in sight of a thickly wooded land very different from what he had heard Greenland to be. But when asked about the land, Bjarni could tell little, for he had not set foot on the shores. Erik and his people laughed at Bjarni. He must be a coward; why else would he have chosen to leave the new land unexplored?



A Viking ship

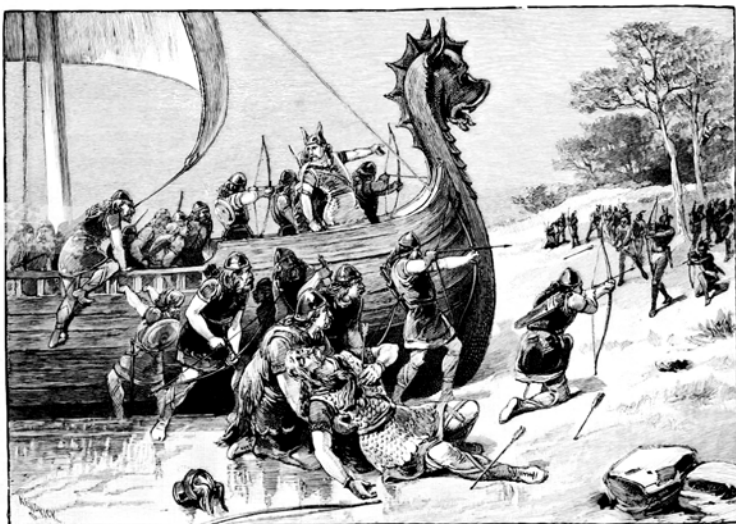
The people thought much about Bjarni's tale. More than any other, Leif, the son of Erik, longed to find that land. He asked his father to go adventuring with him, but Erik said, "No, my son. I am needed here. You must go."

Leif called for thirty-five strong and true men. "Let us sail to this new country and see if we can find wood for our ships, and perhaps even gold and silver to sell to the kings of Europe," he said. The men came forward, and their dragon-headed vessel set sail in the summer.

They sailed southwest for many days. The first place they saw was a land of ice and mountains. No green thing grew; Leif called it Helluland or Stone Land. This was probably Labrador. Then they reached a level country covered with trees. Leif named it Markland. This was probably Newfoundland. Still sailing onward, the little ship with its brave crew came to a beautiful country filled with trees, grass, and flowers. This was probably Nova Scotia. Here they landed and carried all their baggage ashore. The place was so beautiful they resolved to put up wooden huts and spend the winter in them.

Explorations were cautiously made, but no inhabitants were to be seen. One of the men went for a ramble and came across tangles of grapevines, covered with luscious fruit, hanging from trees. Leif was delighted and named the country Vinland on account of the vines. They gathered grapes, cut wood for their ships, and settled down to spend the winter in this pleasant spot. The cold came on, but the Norsemen did not mind it. They had plenty of food and great fires; besides which, they were accustomed to cold weather.

In the spring, they loaded their ships with timber and dried grapes and sailed for home. With fair winds, they soon reached Greenland. Here they told their story of the wonderful new land. People came from far and near to hear the



Thorvald was killed by a poisoned arrow

tale, and Leif received the name “The Lucky” and was held in high honor.

In due time, Erik the Red died, and after that, Leif sailed no more. His father’s kingdom was now his. He was needed at home to rule the land.

Leif’s brother, Thorvald, wished to go to Vinland to explore the country further, so Leif offered his ship to his brother. Thorvald fitted himself out and sailed for the new country. But he was not as lucky as his brother. He found Leif’s huts and spent two winters there. Then, early in the second spring, he sailed further south. Until this time, the Norsemen had met no people, but here in these southern lands, they did. Hostilities arose with them, and Thorvald was killed in a skirmish with the native people by a poisoned arrow. His men buried him on the shore and set sail for home as soon as the weather allowed them to leave.

Others of Leif’s family sailed to Vinland, but the settlements there were all eventually abandoned. Fighting with the local inhabitants made life in Vinland uncertain, so the

Norsemen returned to the lands of their fathers. Before long, they lost all interest in the new world. It would be another five hundred years before Europeans rediscovered the land where Leif the Lucky had first set foot.