

A VIKING BOLD.

Bjarni, son of Heriulf Bardsen, sailed his clinker-built ship through a fog and inadvertently discovered America 500 years before the Genovese gained these shores.

This is as certain as anything, taken on the word of a poet, can be. Saga and legend—there is no other proof beyond a certain large credibility. But if one is to accept King Alfred on the evidence of the Chronicles, there is no reason for refusing to acknowledge Bjarni, the son of Heriulf. The matter has been threshed out by the antiquaries and professors. Torfæus and Rafn, Miller, Anderson and Gravier, among a score of others, have argued the question to the bone. These learned men do not agree on details. But there are no longer any dissentient voices on the main fact at issue—that the vikings sailed into American harbors in the tenth century. It is possible that future research may upset this theory, but at present it is sound and accepted. So says the *Mail and Express*.

There is an ill-regulated theory that certain Irishmen preceded Columbus in his voyage of discovery. It has been bolstered up with certain specious facts by a learned man of Dublin. The professors will have none of it, however.

The vikings were stark and savage adventurers, sailing in all waters and robbing in all lands. They entered every port in England; they ravaged Scotland; they sailed up French rivers—Charlemagne wept at seeing their dark ships. They carried their forays into Africa. They were pirates, robbers, corsairs, thieves. The Norse Sagas read like a Newgate calendar, done by John Milton. Through all the black turbulence of crime and knavery there is heard a note of high quality—heroic, Homeric. There is something of this in the saga of the Worm Sea—a sea the Norse men fancied, where worms which would bore through the timbers of the ship until she sank swarmed in all the waves.

"Bjarni Grimalfson was driven with his ship into the Irish Ocean, and they came into a worm sea and straightway began the ship to sink under them. One boat they had, which was smeared with seal oil, for the sea worms do not attack that. They went into the boat and then saw that it could not hold them all. Then said Bjarni: 'Since the boat cannot give room to more than half of our men it is my counsel that lots should be drawn for those to go in the boat, for it shall not be according to rank.' This thought they all so high-minded an offer that no one would speak against it. Then did they so that lots were drawn, and it fell upon Bjarni to go into the boat and the half of the men with him, for the boat had not room for more. But when they had gone into the boat, then said an Icelandic man who was in the ship and had come with Bjarni from Iceland, 'Dost thou intend, Bjarni, to separate from me here?' Bjarni answered, 'so it falls out.' Then said the other, 'Very different was thy promise to my father, when I went with thee from Iceland, then thus to abandon me, for thou saidst we should both share the same fate.' Bjarni replied, 'It shall not be thus. Go thou down into the boat and I will go up into the ship, since I see that thou art so desirous to live.' Then went Bjarni up into the

ship, but this man down into the boat, and after that they continued their voyage until they came to Dublin, in Ireland, and told there these things. But it is most people's belief that Bjarni and his companions were lost in the worm sea, for nothing was heard of them since that time."

By kindly acts of this sort these pirates proved themselves akin to Byron's corsair, with his one virtue, and Mr. Gilbert's operate orphans. What manner of ship they sailed in you may see by visiting the museum in Christiania or by reading a book published by Prof. Anderson, of the University of Wisconsin. One of them dug out of the blue clay where it had lain for ten centuries may stand for a model. She is 78 feet long at her greatest length; 17 feet at her greatest width. She has twenty ribs; draws less than four feet of water; is clinker-built; carries one forty-foot mast; has sixteen slits on either side through which the twenty-foot oars swung. The only peculiarity the marine editor would notice is that her rudder was on the right side—the steerboard side, if you please, and thence, "starboard." The rudder was a large wooden blade fastened to a piece of timber projecting a foot from the side of the vessel.

II.

Red Erik was outlawed in Iceland, and sailing abroad to find a new home discovered Greenland. It was not an especially fertile land, but said he, "People will be attracted thither if it has a good name." He established a colony there in 986 A. D. Among the colonists there was a man named Heriulf Bardsen. After a few months his son Bjarni determined to follow him. He sailed westward with his sea rovers into fog and tempest, and in the end came to a land where low wooded shore hills crowded down to the sea. This land he knew well was not Greenland. He was in search of a father and not of a continent, so he put to sea again.

In a few days he came to another land, low-lying, flat and wooded. This, again, he knew was not Greenland, for there were no glaciers. He stood out to sea in a southwest wind for two days, and sighted land again—this time a white, mountainous land with glaciers. Four days more they sailed, and came to Greenland. Bjarni's search for a father ended more happily than Japhet's. He settled in the colony, and sold his boat to Leif. Leif, with a crew of thirty-five men, set out to explore these lands seen of Bjarni.

They sailed to the white, mountainous land with glaciers, named it Helluland and sailed on. They came to another land and named it Marckland and sailed on. A northwest wind bore them on for two days, and they came to a land with a island lying to the north of it. Between these a tide raced, and they sailed with it into a river, and then into a lake. They went ashore and camped for some time. They built houses and passed the winter there. There was salmon in the lake and deer in the wood. The climate was milder than that of Greenland, and day and night were more nearly equal. Tyrker, a German sailor who was with the party, discovered one day grape vines and grapes in the woods. In the spring they sailed back to Greenland.

The land they called, by reason of the grapes they had found, Vinland, or wine land.

A third trip was made by Leif's brother, Thorwald. He sailed up the river into the lake and found the huts of Leif. He and his men spent two winters there. They met a party of natives one day and slew all of them but one, who escaped. A few days later there came a fleet of skin-covered canoes, filled with natives. There was a fierce battle and Thorwald was slain. They buried him on a cape that jutted into the sea north of the river's mouth and sailed away to Greenland.

The next expedition was on a large scale. Karlsefne, a wealthy Norwegian, led out a colony of sixty men and five women. They found grapes and fields of wild corn, fish and deer. They traded with the high-cheeked, coarse-haired natives. That winter Karlsefne's wife had a child, who was called Snorri. Scandinavian antiquities say that the sculptor Thorwaldsen was one of his descendants. In the spring the colony returned to Iceland. One more attempt was made to colonize Vinland, but it was unsuccessful.

After the year 1013 it is not probable that it was visited by Europeans until Columbus drew the attention of Spanish adventurers to the forgotten land.

III.

There is little peradventure about these early voyages of the vikings. They are as much a part of authentic history as the doings, good and ill, of King's Knut or Charlemagne. The last writer of authority on the subject is Mr. Edward John Payne, of University College, Oxford. In the first volume of his "History of America," published a week or two ago, he shows how inevitable it was that the Norsemen, in the swing of the great Arctic current, should be led to America.

Their voyages are noticed in no fewer than seventeen ancient Icelandic documents. Mr. Payne points out that Adam, of Bremen, writing in the twelfth century, speaks of the new-found island in the great seas as a matter of certain knowledge from Danish sources, and mentions the voyages of Frieslanders thither in the preceding century.

The chief significance of these discoveries, sung in sagas and pictured in fabulous maps, lies in the fact that some knowledge of them must have been abroad in Western Europe; that at all events some remembrance of them survived to the time of Columbus.

A number of fanciful attempts to identify the landing place of the Norse discoverers were made a number of years ago. At one time the old mill at Newport, R. I., was pitched upon as a ruin of the settlement, but it was found that the mill had been built by Gov. Benedict Arnold, and this theory went to the ground. The Dighton rock and other stones, scratched with Indian hieroglyphics, were assumed to be records of these Norse adventurers, but a very little inquiry upset the assumption.

There is little probability that the harbor into which Bjarni Bardsen sent his high-prowed boat will ever be identified. One fact stands out of all the latter of theories and arguments: he discovered America. What part of America he discovered is a matter of less amount. That Columbus may have heard of this vaguely as one hears the gossip of seamen, is more than possible,