

Stories of the Vikings

Mary MacGregor



STORIES OF THE VIKINGS

BY MARY MACGREGOR

LIGHTLY EDITED
BY RACHEL E. NORTH



CHARLOTTE MASON BEEHIVE
MELTON MOWBRAY

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Sample

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INTRODUCTION

STORIES of the Vikings was first published over one hundred years ago as part of a children's series from *T. C. & E. C. Jack* entitled *Stories from History*.

This charming little book, penned by Mary Macgregor, a prolific author of children's history books in the early twentieth century, regales its audience with the daring and exciting exploits of these fierce seafarers of so long ago.

The Viking Age has long since died out but it would perhaps do us well to remember how the history of these northmen is so entwined with our own, and the little stories contained within this book, written in a lively and engaging manner, will help us towards this understanding.

This new edition of the estimable work is published exclusively by Charlotte Mason Beehive, and is intended to be used over the course of one academic school year alongside another text, such as *Our Island Story*, by H. E. Marshall.

WHAT'S NEW ABOUT THIS EDITION?

1. Updated for Twenty-First Century students:-

Treating the text with great respect, we have occasionally made careful edits where deemed necessary, such as to correct factual errors, or to clarify information.

2. Short lessons:-

Short lessons are a key component of a Charlotte Mason education and therefore the chapters (lessons) have been arranged for completion within a twenty minute time-frame (including narration).

Some chapters have therefore been split into parts and the readings spread across more than one lesson. This is noted clearly by Roman numerals marking the text.

3. Narration¹ Breaks:-

You will find the narrative broken up periodically by three stars marking the break in text (***) . This indicates an appropriate place to pause the narrative and request a narration *if you feel it is necessary to do so*.

For beginner narrators, young children, and new students this may be a helpful tool but you do not need to stop at any or all stopping places. It is advised that you work towards the goal of being able to complete an entire episode before calling on narration.

4. Footnotes:-

As an aid to completing the course of study there are footnotes included in this edition, which connect the students to pictures as arranged in *History Pictures for a Living Education*.

Available as an additional purchase, *History Pictures for a Living Education: The Vikings* is highly recommended to complement your students' history studies. Designed to be used by all forms throughout a student's school career, this versatile resource is made up almost entirely of pictures, maps, and photographs, as it relates directly to the people, places, and historical events read about in the history lessons for this time period.

To maximise its efficiency and to avoid any extra prep work by parents and teachers, footnotes are littered throughout *Stories of the Vikings*, indicating when a picture is available to supplement the text.

All the pictures are numbered and they are referenced in the lesson text as follows:

¹ For more information on narration please see the 'Teacher's Guide and Lesson Plan'.

History Pictures for a Living Education: The Vikings, p. 10. No. 25.

We sincerely hope you find these additional edits and resources helpful, and that you will have a pleasant and engaging school year learning history with your students. If you have any questions or concerns please contact us through our website at charlottesmasonbeehive.co.uk.

RACHEL E. NORTH,
AUGUST 2021

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ABOUT THIS BOOK

THE history of the Vikings is not, as you might think, the story of a band of sea-pirates who roved the seas in search of plunder. It is rather the story of a race of brave and hardy Northmen who became sea-rovers because the rights and the freedom which their fathers had cherished were being taken from them.

Their fathers had lived on their own lands and had been freemen, but the sons were asked to become king's men and hold their land only at the king's pleasure. Rather than give up their ancient rights many of the Northmen became Vikings, and to them the sea-roving life was a noble one, full of high enterprise and ambition.

It was no easy matter to become a member of a Viking band. Even a great chief, before he could be admitted, must prove his strength and give an account of the deeds of prowess he had already done.

Thus it was an honour to belong to a band of Vikings, an honour which spurred the lads of the North to bold deeds, to mighty feats, that they might be counted worthy to become members of one or another of the famous bands.

It is of the customs and battles, of the lives and deaths of these wild Northmen that I have told you in this little book.

As these men are, as you will hear, ancestors of our own, you will perhaps wish to know more about them than I have been able to tell you. If that is so, when you grow older, you can read the Sagas or histories of these Northmen which were written by the Skalds, or, as we would call them, the poets of those olden days.

In these Sagas you will meet with many strange adventures and see many great battlefields which you will not find in this little book.

MARY MACGREGOR



The bright coloured Viking sails grew to be dreaded

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THE VIKINGS IN ENGLAND

ON a summer day over twelve hundred years ago, three ships with bright red sails drew near to one of the little ports of the Dorset coast in the south of England.²

The townsfolk saw the ships, and paying no heed to the bright sails, said carelessly one to another, "The merchantmen will be in port today." And the harbour-master gathered together a few of his men and hastened to the quay. For he, too, had seen the ships, and, as in duty bound, he went to meet them, to demand from the captains the port taxes which were lawfully due to the king.

But townsfolk and harbour-master alike had made a grievous mistake that summer day. For, as they soon discovered to their cost, and as the red sails might have forewarned them, the three ships were no peaceful merchantmen.

No sooner had the vessels drawn up along the quay than a wild, strange-looking crew sprang to the shore, drew their swords, and speedily slew the harbour-master and his few unarmed followers. They then entered the town, plundering and burning the houses of all, both rich and poor. Leaving the little town in ruins, the strange crew, dragging their booty with them, marched down again to the quay. There they embarked, and without delay sailed away out to sea. Perhaps you have already guessed that the strange crew was a Viking³ band, that the three ships were Viking ships. So, indeed, they were, and this summer day in the year seven hundred and eighty-nine was the first time that the wild Northmen had been seen in England, or in any part of Europe where the "White Christ" was worshipped.

2 History Pictures for a Living Education: The Vikings, p. 7 & 8. No. 01 & 02

3 History Pictures for a Living Education: The Vikings, p. 9. No. 03

But it was not long ere the bright-coloured Viking sails⁴ grew to be dreaded in England and also on the Continent. Their very appearance struck terror into the hearts of all men. Monks and armed men alike learned to flee dismayed before the fierceness of the wrath, the violence of the blows, of these foes who had come upon them from the distant North.

As the months and years passed, Viking bands, not with three ships alone, but with large fleets, came to invade and harry the land. Leaving their vessels to be guarded by a third of their number, the others marched into the open country to plunder the inhabitants. Should these venture to defend their goods, the Vikings did not hesitate to slay them or to carry them off as slaves.

Churches or monasteries in those days were the special spoil of the Northmen. For they knew that in these buildings they would find the richest store of gold and silver. Nor was there any reason why the warriors should spare the sacred buildings more than they spared the houses of the people. For the Vikings were pagans. That is to say, they were worshippers of their own gods Thor and Odin, the gods of storm and battle, and for priests and monks they had little respect and less fear.

Now it happened in those days that the holy men or women who founded monasteries, and reared churches dedicated to Christ and the saints, oftentimes chose as a site for these buildings some lone island, or some bold headland over which the storms would dash on wild and wintry nights. It was easy for the sea-rovers to reach such sanctuaries.

One of the most famous of these monasteries had been founded by St. Cuthbert on Lindisfarne or Holy Island⁵, a sea-girt island off

4 History Pictures for a Living Education: The Vikings, p. 16. No. 16

5 History Pictures for a Living Education: The Vikings, p. 17. No. 17

the coast of Northumberland. Here, four years after their attack on the little Dorset town, the red sails of the Vikings were once again to be seen. The monastery was no fortress built for defence, and the Vikings having landed at Lindisfarne, had not any difficulty in entering it. They slew the defenceless monks, took all the gold and silver that they could find, and burnt the monastery to the ground. Then, well satisfied with their adventure, they sailed away from Lindisfarne.

Other bands of sea-rovers now appeared here or there. One such band was seen on the south coast of Wales, and, after harrying there, sailed to Dublin bay. Here they found an island monastery which they treated as their fellows had treated the monastery of St. Cuthbert.

The success of these expeditions encouraged the Northmen to come in ever greater numbers to our western shores, while some among them sailed to France, to Italy, and to Spain. Even on the shores of the Black Sea and in Greece the tall Northmen with fair skins, blue eyes, and golden hair were known and dreaded.

In our own land the Northmen were next seen by the inhabitants of Iona⁶, on the west coast of Scotland.

Iona is hallowed to all boys and girls. They remember that on its lonely shore St. Columba landed when he was banished from the fair green isle of Erin. They remember, too, that he founded there his famous monastery, from which teachers went throughout Scotland and even to foreign lands to tell the story of the Cross. But the Vikings came to Iona, and they plundered the monastery there as ruthlessly as they had plundered any other sanctuary.

6 History Pictures for a Living Education: The Vikings, p. 18. No. 18

Then in many a church throughout the British Isles a new petition was added to the Litany, and the solemn and heartfelt cry arose, "From the fury of the Northmen, good Lord deliver us."

These forays all took place before the ninth century was many years old. They were but summer expeditions which the Vikings undertook for the sake of adventure, and for the love of plunder.

But before the end of the ninth century the Northmen had ceased to sail away to sea as soon as they had plundered a town or district. They had begun to think that it would be well to settle in the places which they could so easily make their own.

Accordingly they dwelt during the winter months in the castles or strongholds which they had pillaged. These strongholds might be in Scotland, where the power of the Pictish kings was growing too weak to strive with the bold adventurers; they might be in Ireland, where the chiefs were too busy warring with each other to pay much heed to the tall, fair strangers who were settling along their coast or in any other district which they had subdued.

Here, then, in different strongholds, the wild men of the North would dwell, sometimes helping against their foes the chiefs among whom they had settled, sometimes aiding the foes against the chiefs. But when summer came, the longing to rove would come upon them once more and they would sail away to plunder fresh towns, to capture other ships.

So eager, indeed, were the Vikings for adventure, so keen their thirst for battle, that if they could find no strange foe to fight they would challenge another band of Vikings to combat. Then swords would flash, arrows speed their flight, until the deck of one or other of the Viking ships was cleared, the crew killed or taken prisoners, and the ship with its treasures became the property of the conqueror.

Years passed away, and now the attacks of the Northmen on England and other countries were no longer mere summer cruises undertaken by some Viking chief as the mood might move him. But the forays changed into frequent and well-planned expeditions, until the story of the Vikings became well nigh the history of the kings of the north countries.

Even from the slight glimpse I have given you of these men, you can see that the Vikings were a bold and fearless race, that the age in which they lived was rough and warlike.

Yet it is not alone for their life of wild adventure that you will wish to know more of these roving Northmen. You will be interested in their history even as you are interested in the tales you sometimes hear of your great-grandmother or even your great-great-grandmother. For these old Pagans of the North are indeed relations of your own, as I am going to show you before this chapter ends.

Long before the summer day on which the three Viking ships appeared on the Dorsetshire coast, other three boats had sailed towards our shores. They came from north of the river Elbe in Germany, and sailed on and on until they reached the Isle of Thanet, on the south coast of England. In these ships were Saxons, who first conquered and then settled in the country. This was in the year four hundred and forty-nine.

The Anglo-Saxons, as these strangers were called after they had subdued England, were of the same race as the Northmen who about three hundred years later began to harry our coasts.

But during these three hundred years the Anglo-Saxons had lost the vigour and the independent spirit which had been theirs when first they left their own land. They had grown lazy, indolent, perhaps because having conquered the land there was no great need for them to use their strength. They had lost their free independent spirit

through the tyranny of the priests who had been sent by the Catholic Church to teach and train the new settlers in England.

It was to these indolent priest-ridden people that the Northmen came in the eighth century, bringing with them a healthy vigorous life.

It is from these, Norsemen and Danes alike, that we may trace our descent, and it is from them that we learned at least one of our institutions, which we still cherish as one of our most priceless possessions.

In free assemblies of the people the Northmen took part by speech, and if need be by action, in the decisions of kings and chiefs, and in our parliament today we cling to the same rights.

It is of the customs and beliefs, of the battles and discoveries of these our northern ancestors, that you are now going to read.

Sample

THE VIKINGS AT HOME

I

IN Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, in all the villages and towns around the shores of the Baltic, the Viking race was born.

It has been said that the name "Vikings" was first given to those Northmen who dwelt in a part of Denmark called Viken. However that may be, it was the name given to all the Northmen who took to a wild, sea-roving life, because they would often seek shelter with their boats in one or another of the numerous viks or bays which abounded along their coasts.

Thus the Vikings were not by any means all kings, as you might think from their name, nor, indeed, is the word pronounced "Vikings," but "Vik-ings" (or men of the Viks); yet among them were many chiefs of royal descent. These, although they had neither subjects nor kingdoms over which to rule, no sooner stepped on board a Viking's boat to take command of the crew, than they were given the title of king.

The Northmen did not, however, spend all their lives in harrying and burning other countries. When the seas were quiet in the long, summer days, they would go off, as I have told you, on their wild expeditions. But when summer was over, and the seas began to grow rough and stormy, the Viking bands would go home with their booty and stay there, to build their houses, reap their fields, and, when spring had come again, to sow their grain in the hope of a plenteous harvest.

There was thus much that the Viking lad had to learn beyond the art of wielding the battle-axe, poisoning the spear, and shooting an