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THE LEGEND OF THE FROZEN LAKE.

(Translated from a Collection of Norwegian Folk-Lore and Village Legends, &c., published at Christiania.)

Once upon a time, in the early part of the winter, a traveller had to cross over a frozen lake where the ice was of varied and unknown thickness. Before venturing out on the ice he lighted his pipe, and, sitting down on a stone by the side of a road (which ran close to the lake shore, nearly at right angles with his own course), he thus communed with himself: "I am bound to cross this lake; but in so doing I run a considerable risk of losing my health, or even life, by falling through the ice. If I can manage to keep on the thick ice, and avoid the thin, of course I shall be all right as far as safety is concerned; but the road over the ice is not staked out yet, and there is not so much as a footprint on it. Perhaps some of these good people passing to and fro on the road may be able to give me some useful directions. At any rate, I will just ask them." And so he did, there being no lack of people to ask; and they all spoke kindly to him at first; and though they did not answer his questions satisfactorily as to the thickness of the ice, they seemed as willing and as anxious to direct his course as if their own safety had depended on it. What surprised the traveller immensely, however, and perplexed him not a little, was that, whereas all advised him earnestly, and some vehemently, no two of them gave him the same counsel, and no one seemed to speak from experience or trustworthy information. In a very few minutes the conversation became somewhat general, the counsellors became more and more excited; some warned him in rather discourteous terms against following the advice of others; and at last they began to quarrel amongst themselves. The poor man returned slightly disgusted to his stone, his pipe, and his meditations. "Now," thought he, "if I had only met *one* of these good people, I should as likely as not have followed his advice; but in the multitude of such counsellors there seems to be anything but wisdom." Just then two persons, evidently of superior rank, appeared upon the scene; and these were a Bishop and an Archbishop. The Bishop, taking on himself the office of chief speaker, did not wait to be asked, but at once thus addressed the traveller: "My son, I see thou art about to cross the frozen lake; and I come to tell thee that the ice is such and such a thickness, here and there respectively, and it is thy duty to believe me." "Well!" said the traveller, "it is scarcely fair or reasonable to talk about duty in such a matter; but if you really do know more about the ice than those good people yonder, and if you will give me any accurate information about it, I shall be most truly grateful to you." "My son," said the Bishop, "I perceive thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond

of iniquity. Here is no question of accurate information, but of saving faith. As for *knowing* more about the ice than those good people, the fact is that I know considerably less. All my knowledge of ice is derived from ancient history. I have not made myself in any way acquainted with this year's ice; nor do I consider that I am at liberty to do so with any view of forming, or helping others to form, an independent opinion. From my early youth I have been trained, and from early manhood hired and pledged, to declare to such as you that the ice is just so thick and just so thin, respectively here and there (no more and no less), as it was voted to me, or as it was supposed to have been voted to me, many hundred years ago by an assembly of good men, not one of whom ever saw ice in his life. The actual thickness or thinness is of no real importance. To adopt what we call the orthodox dimensions, is the one thing needful, and there is a special over-natural efficacy in adopting these, by which you will be enabled to skim over the thinnest ice in perfect safety, while the thickest ice will melt away under the feet of him who doubts, or is so unfortunate as to be influenced by measurement, testimony, calculation, or otherwise to consider it as thicker or thinner than he has been taught to believe it. Of course, when I say you must believe, I mean you must profess to believe, and act as if you did. Go now, my son, and be of good cheer." The traveller, if the truth must be told, did not think much of the Bishop's reasoning; but he was much taken with the good prelate's reverend appearance, peculiar dress, and phraseology; and still more by his authoritative and yet benign and fatherly manner. So, after remaining a few seconds, "perplexed with doubt and afraid of condemnation," he declared that he believed every word that the good Bishop had said to him, went boldly forth on the ice, was soon out of sight, and has never been heard of since. The Bishop tells everyone that the traveller got safely over the lake, and the Archbishop adds that it is "a most wholesome doctrine and very full of comfort."

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