

FRIGGA

Queen of the Gods

Frigga or Frigg is Mother of the Gods and Humanity, the patroness of the household and of married women. Frigga, the daughter of Fiorgyn and sister of Jörd, was eventually married to Odin. This wedding caused such general rejoicing in Asgard, where the goddess was greatly beloved, that ever after it was customary to celebrate its anniversary with feast and song, and the goddess being declared patroness of marriage, her health was always proposed with that of Odin and Thor at wedding feasts.

Frigga is the goddess of the atmosphere, or rather of the clouds, and as such is sometimes represented as wearing either snow-white or dark garments, according to her somewhat variable moods. She is queen of the gods, and she alone has the privilege of sitting on the throne Hlidskialf, beside her husband Odin. From thence she too, can look over all the world and see what is happening, and according to our ancestors' declarations, she possessed the knowledge of the future, which, however, no one could ever prevail upon her to reveal, thus proving that Northern women could keep a secret inviolate.



*“Of me the gods are sprung;
And all that is to come I know, but lock
In my own breast, and have to none reveal’d.”*

-BALDER DEAD (Matthew Arnold)

She is generally represented as a tall, beautiful, and stately woman, crowned with heron plumes, the symbol of silence or forgetfulness, and clothed in pure-white robes, secured at the waist by a golden girdle, from which hangs a bunch of keys, the distinctive sign of the Northern housewife, whose special patroness she is said to be. Although she often appears beside her husband, Frigga sometimes prefers to remain in her own palace, called Fensalir, the hall of mists or of the sea, where she diligently twirls her wheel or distaff, spinning golden thread or weaving long webs of bright-colored clouds.

In order to perform this work she owns a marvelous jeweled spinning wheel or distaff, which at night shines brightly in the sky in the shape of a constellation, known in the North as Frigga's Spinning Wheel, while the inhabitants of the South called the same stars Orion's Girdle.

To her hall Fensalir the gracious goddess invites all husbands and wives who had led virtuous lives on earth, so that they might enjoy each other's companionship even after death, and never be called upon to part again.

*“There in the glen, Fensalir stands, the house
Of Frea, honor'd mother of the gods,
And shows its lighted windows and the open doors.”*

-BALDER DEAD (Matthew Arnold)

The Stolen Gold

Frigga is considered the goddess of conjugal and motherly love, and is specially worshiped by married lovers and tender parents. This exalted office does not so entirely absorb all her thoughts, however, that she has no time for other matters; for we are told that she is very fond of dress, and whenever she appears before the assembled gods her attire is rich and becoming, and her jewels always chosen with much taste. This love of adornment once led her sadly astray, for, in her longing to possess some new jewel, she secretly purloined a piece of gold from a statue representing her husband, which had just been placed in his temple. The stolen metal was intrusted to the dwarfs, with instructions to fashion a marvelous necklace for her use. This jewel, once finished, was so resplendent that it greatly enhanced her charms and even increased Odin's love for her. But when he discovered the theft of the gold he angrily summoned the dwarfs and bade them reveal who had dared to touch his statue. Unwilling to betray the queen of the gods, the dwarfs remained obstinately silent, and, seeing that no information could be elicited from them, Odin commanded that the statue should be placed above the temple gate, and set to work to devise runes which should endow it with the power of speech and enable it to denounce the thief. When Frigga heard these tidings she trembled with fear, and implored her favorite attendant, Fulla, to invent some means of protecting her from Allfather's wrath. Fulla, who was always ready to serve her mistress, immediately departed, and soon returned, accompanied by a hideous dwarf, who promised to prevent the statue from speaking if Frigga would only deign to smile graciously upon him. This boon having been granted, the dwarf hastened off to the temple, caused a deep sleep to fall upon the guards, and while they were thus unconscious, pulled the statue down from its perch and broke it to pieces, so that it could never betray Frigga's theft in spite of all Odin's efforts to give it the power of speech.

Odin, discovering this sacrilege on the morrow, was very angry indeed; so angry that he left Asgard and utterly disappeared, carrying away with him all the blessings which he had been wont to shower upon gods and men. According to some authorities, his brothers Vili and Ve, took advantage of his absence to assume his form and secure possession of his throne and wife; but although they looked exactly like him they could not restore the lost blessings, and allowed the ice giants, or Jotuns, to invade the earth and bind it fast in their cold fetters. These wicked giants also pinched the leaves and buds till they all shriveled up, stripped the trees bare, shrouded the earth in a great white coverlet, and veiled it in impenetrable mists.

But at the end of seven weary months the true Odin relented and returned, and when he saw all the evil that had been done he drove the usurpers away, forced the frost giants to beat a hasty retreat, released the earth from her icy bonds, and again showered all his blessings down upon her, cheering her with the light of his smile.

Odin Outwitted

As has already been seen, Odin, although god of wit and wisdom, was sometimes outwitted by his wife Frigga, who, womanlike, was sure to obtain her will by some means. On one occasion the divine pair were seated upon Hlidskialf, gazing with interest upon the Winilers and Vandals, who were preparing for a battle which was to decide which people should henceforth have the supremacy. Odin gazed with satisfaction upon the Vandals, who were loudly praying to him for victory; but Frigga watched the movements of the Winilers with more attention, because they had entreated her aid. She therefore turned to Odin and coaxingly inquired whom he meant to favor on the morrow; he, wishing to evade her question, declared he would not yet decide, as it was time for bed, but would give the victory to those upon whom his eyes first rested in the morning.

This answer was shrewdly calculated, for Odin knew that his bed was so turned that upon waking he would face the Vandals, and he intended looking out from thence, instead of waiting until he had

mounted his throne. But, although so cunningly contrived, this plan was entirely frustrated by Frigga, who, divining his purpose, waited until he was sound asleep and then noiselessly turned his bed around so that he should face her favorites instead of his. Then she sent word to the Winilers to dress their women in armor and send them out in battle array at dawn, with their long hair carefully combed down over their cheeks and breasts.

*“Take thou thy women-folk, Maidens and wives:
Over your ankles
Lace on the white war-hose; Over your bosoms*

*Link up the hard mail-nets;
Over your lips
Plait long tresses with cunning; – So war beasts full-bearded
King Odin shall deem you,
When off the gray sea-beach
At sunrise ye greet him.”*

-THE LONGBEARDS' SAGA (Charles Kingsley)

These instructions were carried out with scrupulous exactness by the Winiler women, and when Odin awoke and sat up in bed early the next morning, his first conscious glance fell upon their armed host, and he exclaimed in surprise, “What Longbeards are those?” (In German the ancient word for long beards was Langobarden, which was the name used to designate the Lombards.) Frigga, upon hearing this exclamation, which she had foreseen, immediately cried out in triumph that Allfather had given them a new name, and was in honor bound to follow the usual Northern custom and give them also a baptismal gift.

*“A name thou hast given them, Shames neither thee nor them, Well can they wear it.
Give them the victory,*

First have they greeted thee; Give them the victory, Yoke-fellow mine!”

-THE LONGBEARDS' SAGA (Charles Kingsley)

Odin, seeing he had been so cleverly outwitted, gave them the victory, and in memory of this auspicious day the Winilers retained the name given by the king of the Gods, who ever after watched over them with special care, and vouchsafed them many blessings, among others a home in the sunny South, on the fruitful plains of Lombardy.

Fulla and Hlin

Frigga has, as her own special attendants, a number of beautiful maidens, one among them being Fulla (Volla), her sister according to some, to whom she intrusted her jewel casket. Fulla always presides over her mistress's dressing room, is privileged to put on her golden shoes, attends with her everywhere, is her confidante and adviser, and often suggests to her how best to help the mortals who implore her aid. Fulla is very beautiful indeed, and has long golden hair, which she wears flowing loose over her shoulders, restrained only by a golden cirlet or snood. As her hair is emblematic of the golden grain, this cirlet represents the binding of the sheaf. Fulla was also known as Abundia, or Abundantia, in some parts of Germany, where she was considered the symbol of the fullness of the earth.

Hlin, Frigga's second attendant, is the goddess of consolation, sent out to kiss away the tears of mourners and pour balm into hearts wrung by grief. She also listens with ever-open ears to the prayers

of mortals, repeats them to her mistress, and advises her at times how best to answer them and give the desired relief.

Gna

Gna is Frigga's swift messenger, who, mounted upon her fleet steed Hofvarpnir (hoof thrower), travels with marvelous rapidity through fire and air, over land and sea, and is therefore considered the personification of the refreshing breeze. Darting thus to and from, Gna sees all that is happening upon earth, and tells her mistress all she knows. On one occasion, as she was passing over Hunaland, she saw King Rerir, a lineal descendant of Odin, sitting mournfully by the shore, bewailing his childlessness. The queen of the Gods, who is also goddess of childbirth, upon hearing this took an apple (the emblem of fruitfulness) from her private store, gave it to Gna, and bade her carry it to the king. With the rapidity of the element she personified, Gna darted away, passed over Rerir's head, and dropped her apple into his lap with a radiant smile.

*“What flies up there, so quickly driving past?
Her answer from the cloud, as rushing by:
'I fly not, nor do drive, but hurry fast,
Hoof flinger swift through cloud and mist and sky.’”*

-ASGARD AND THE GODS (Wagner-Macdowall)

The king, after pondering for a moment upon the meaning of this sudden apparition and gift, returned home, his heart beating high with hope, gave the apple to his wife to eat, and to his intense joy was soon no longer childless, for his wife bore him a son, Volsung, the great Northern hero, who became so famous that he gave his name to all his race.

Lofn

Besides the three above-mentioned attendants, Frigga also has in her train the mild and gracious maiden Lofn (praise or love), whose duty it is to remove all obstacles from the path of lovers.

*“My lily tall, from her saddle bearing,
I led then forth through the temple, faring
To th' altar-circle where, priests among, Lofn's vows she took with unfalt'ring tongue.”*

-VIKING TALES OF THE NORTH (R. B. Anderson)

Lofn's duty is to incline obdurate hearts to love, to maintain peace and concord among mankind, and to reconcile quarreling husbands and wives. Syn (truth) guards the door of Frigga's palace, refusing to open it to those who are not allowed to come in. When she had once shut the door upon a would-be intruder there was no appeal which would avail to change her decision. She therefore presided over all tribunals and trials, and whenever a thing was to be vetoed the usual formula was to declare that Syn was against it.

Gefjon

Gefjon is also one of the maidens in Frigga's palace, and to her are intrusted all those who died virgins, whom she receives and makes happy forever. According to some mythologists, Gefjon did not always remain a virgin herself, but married one of the giants, by whom she had four sons. This same tradition goes on to declare that Odin sent her ahead of him to visit Gylfi, King of Sweden, and beg for some land which she might call her own. The king, amused at her request, promised her as much land as she could plow around in one day and night. Gefjon, nothing daunted, changed her four sons into oxen,

harnessed them to a plow, and began to cut a furrow so wide and deep that the king and his courtiers were amazed. But Gefjon continued her work without giving any signs of fatigue, and when she had plowed all around a large piece of land forcibly wrenched it away, and made her oxen drag it down into the sea, where she made it fast and called it Seeland.

“Gefjun drew from Gylfi, Rich in stored up treasure,

The land she joined to Denmark. Four heads and eight eyes bearing, While hot sweat trickled down them, The oxen dragged the reft mass That formed this winsome island.”

-NORSE MYTHOLOGY (R. B. Anderson)

As for the hollow she left behind her, it was quickly filled with water and formed a lake, at first called Logrum (the sea), but now known as Mälär, whose every indentation corresponds with the headlands of Seeland. Gefjon then married Skiold, one of Odin’s sons, and became the ancestress of the royal Danish race of Skioldungs, dwelling in the city of Hleidra or Lethra, which she founded, and which became the principal place of sacrifice for the heathen Danes.

Eira, Vara, Vör and Snotra

Eira, also Frigga’s attendant, is considered a most skillful physician. She gathers simples all over the earth to cure both wounds and diseases, and it is her province to teach her science to women, who were the only ones to practice medicine among the ancient nations of the North.

“Gaping wounds are bound by Eyra.” -VALHALLA (J. C. Jones)

Vara hears all oaths and punishes perjurers, while she rewards those who faithfully keep their word. Then there is also Vör (faith), who knows all that is to occur throughout the world, and Snotra, goddess of virtue, who has mastered every kind of study.

With such a band of followers it is no wonder that Frigga is considered an influential goddess; but in spite of the prominent place she occupied in Northern religion, she had no special temple or shrine, and was but little worshiped except in company with Odin.

Holda

While Frigga was not known by this name in southern Germany, there were other goddesses worshiped there, whose attributes were so exactly like hers, that they were evidently the same, although they bore very different names in the various provinces. Among them was the fair goddess Holda (Hulda or Frau Holle) who graciously dispensed many rich gifts, and as she presided over the weather, the people were wont to declare when the snowflakes fell that Frau Holle was shaking her bed, and when it rained, that she was washing her clothes, often pointing to the white clouds as her linen which she had put out to bleach. When long gray strips of clouds drifted across the sky they said she was weaving, for she too was supposed to be a very diligent weaver, spinner, and housekeeper.

This same Holda was also considered the owner of a magic fountain called Quickbom, which rivaled the famed fountain of youth, and of a chariot in which she rode from place to place, inspecting her domain. This wagon having once suffered damage, the goddess bade a wheelwright repair it, and when he had finished told him to keep the chips as his pay. The man, indignant at such a meager reward, kept only a very few; but to his surprise found them on the morrow changed to solid gold.

*“Fricka, thy wife –
This way she reins her harness of rams. Hey! how she whirls
The golden whip;
The luckless beasts
Unboundedly bleat;
Her wheels wildly she rattles;*

Wrath is lit in her look.” -WAGNER (Forman’s tr.)

It is said she gave flax to mankind and taught them how to use it, and in Tyrol the following story is told about the way in which she bestowed this invaluable gift:

The Discovery of Flax

There was once a peasant who daily left his wife and children down in the valley to take his sheep up the mountain to pasture; and as he watched his flock graze on the mountain side, he often had the opportunity to use his crossbow and bring down a chamois, whose flesh furnished his larder with food for many a day.

While pursuing some fine game one day he saw it disappear behind a boulder, and when he came to the spot, he was amazed to see a doorway in the neighboring glacier, for in the excitement of the pursuit he had climbed higher and higher until he was now on top of the mountain, where glittered the everlasting snow.

The shepherd boldly passed through the open door, and soon found himself in a wonderful jeweled and stalactite-hung cave, in the center of which stood a beautiful woman, clad in silvery robes, and attended by a host of lovely maidens crowned with Alpine roses.

In his surprise, the shepherd sank to his knees, and as in a dream heard the queenly central figure bid him choose anything he saw to carry away with him. Although dazzled by the glow of the precious stones around him, the shepherd’s eyes constantly reverted to a little nosegay of blue flowers which the gracious apparition held in her hand, and he now timidly proffered a request that it might become his. Smiling with pleasure, Holda, for it was she, gave it to him, telling him he had chosen wisely and would live as long as the flowers did not droop and fade. Then giving the shepherd a measure of seed which she told him to sow in his field, the goddess bade him begone; and as she, thunder pealed and the earth shook, the poor man found himself out upon the mountain side once more, and slowly wended his way home to tell his adventure to his wife and show her the lovely blue flowers and the measure of seed.

The woman reproached her husband bitterly for not having brought some of the precious stones which he so glowingly described, instead of the blossoms and seed; nevertheless the man sowed the latter, and often lingered near the field at nightfall to see his new crop grow, for to his surprise the measure had supplied seed enough for several acres.

Soon the little green shoots began to appear, and one moonlight night, while the peasant was gazing upon them, wondering what kind of grain they would produce, he saw a mistlike form hover above the field, with hands outstretched as if in blessing. At last the field blossomed, and countless little blue flowers opened their calyxes to the golden sun. When the flowers had withered and the seed was ripe, Holda came once more to teach the peasant and his wife how to harvest the flax stalks and spin, weave, and bleach the linen they produced. Of course all the people of the neighborhood were anxious to purchase both linen and flaxseed, and the peasant and his wife soon grew very rich indeed, for while he plowed, sowed, and harvested, she spun, wove, and bleached her linen.

When the man had lived to a good old age and seen his grandchildren and great grandchildren grow up around him, he noticed that his carefully treasured bouquet, whose flowers had remained fresh for many a year, had wilted and died.

Knowing that his time had come and that he too must soon die, the peasant climbed the mountain once more, came to the glacier, and found the doorway which he had long vainly sought. He vanished within, and was never seen or heard of again, for the legend states that the goddess took him under her care, and bade him live in her cave, where his every wish was gratified.

Ostara, the Goddess of Spring

The Saxon goddess Eástre, or Ostara, goddess of spring, whose name has survived in the English word Easter, is also identical with Frigga, for she too is considered goddess of the earth, or rather of Nature's resurrection after the long death of winter.

This gracious goddess was so dearly loved by the old Teutons, that even after Christianity had been viciously forced upon the people of the North, they still retained a pleasant recollection of her, utterly refused to have her degraded to the rank of a demon, like many of their other divinities, and transferred her name to their great Christian feast. It had long been customary to celebrate this day by the exchange of presents of colored eggs, for the egg is the type of the beginning of life; so the early Christians continued to observe this rule, declaring, however, that the egg is also symbolical of the resurrection. In various parts of Germany, stone altars can still be seen, which are known as Easter-stones, because they were dedicated to the fair goddess Ostara. They were crowned with flowers by the young people, who danced gaily around them by the light of great bonfires, – a species of popular games kept up until the middle of the 19th century, in spite of the priests' denunciations and of the repeatedly published edicts against them.

Bertha, the White Lady

In other parts of Germany, Frigga, Holda, or Ostara is known by the name of Brechta, Bertha, or the White Lady. She is best known under this title in Thuringia, where she was supposed to dwell in a hollow mountain, keeping watch over the Heimchen, the souls of unborn children, and of those who died unbaptized. Here Bertha watched over agriculture, caring for the plants, which her infant troop watered carefully, for each babe was supposed to carry a little jar for that express purpose. As long as the goddess was duly respected and her retreat unmolested, she remained where she was; but tradition relates that she once left the country with her infant train dragging her plow, and settled elsewhere to continue her kind ministrations. Bertha is the legendary ancestress of several noble families, and she is supposed to be the same as the industrious queen of the same name, the mythical mother of Charlemagne, whose era has become proverbial, for in speaking of the golden age in France and Germany it is customary to say, "in the days when Bertha spun."

As this Bertha is supposed to have developed a very large and flat foot, from continually pressing the treadle of her wheel, she is often represented in mediaeval art as a woman with a splay foot, and hence known as *la reine pédauque*.

As ancestress of the imperial house of Germany, the White Lady is supposed to appear in the palace before a death or misfortune in the family, and this thought was still so rife in 19th century Germany, that the newspapers in 1884 contained the official report of a sentinel, who declared that he had seen her flit past him in one of the palace corridors.

As Bertha was so renowned for her spinning, she naturally was regarded as the special patroness of that branch of female industry, and was said to flit through the streets of every village, at nightfall, during

the twelve nights between Christmas and January 6th, peering into every window to ascertain whether the work were all done.

The maidens whose work had all been carefully performed were rewarded by a present of one of her own golden threads or a distaff full of extra-fine flax; but wherever a careless spinner was found, her wheel was broken, her flax soiled, and if she had failed to honor the goddess by eating plenty of the cakes baked at that epoch of the year, she was cruelly punished.

In Mecklenburg, this same goddess is known as Frau Gode, or Wode, the female form of Wotan or Odin, and her appearance is always considered the harbinger of great prosperity. She is also supposed to be a great huntress, and to lead the Wild Hunt, mounted upon a white horse, her attendants being changed into hounds and all manner of wild beasts.

In Holland she was called Vrou-elde, and from her the Milky Way is known by the Dutch as Vrou-eldenstraat; while in parts of northern Germany she was called Nerthus (Mother Earth). Her sacred chariot was kept on an island, presumably Rugen, where the priests guarded it carefully until she appeared to take a yearly journey throughout her realm and bless the land. The goddess then sat in this chariot, which was drawn by two cows, her face completely hidden by a thick veil, respectfully escorted by her priests. The people seeing her pass did her homage by ceasing all warfare, laid aside their weapons, donned festive attire, and began no quarrel until the goddess had again retired to her sanctuary. Then both chariot and goddess were bathed in a secret lake (the Schwartzsee in Rügen), which swallowed up the slaves who had assisted at the bathing, and once more the priests resumed their watch over the sanctuary and grove of Nerthus or Hlodyn, to await her next apparition.

In Scandinavia, this goddess was also known as Huldra; and boasted of a train of attendant wood nymphs, who sometimes sought the society of mortals, to enjoy a dance upon the village green. They could always be detected, however, by the tip of a cow's tail which trailed from beneath their long snow-white garments. These Huldra folk were the special protectors of the herds of cattle on the mountain sides, and were said to surprise the lonely traveler, at times, by the marvelous beauty of the melodies they sang to beguile their labors.