

Holger Danske

Folk-Lore And Legends: Scandinavia

Scandinavian

Intermediate
3 min read

Author's note: This story comes from Denmark.

The Danish peasantry of the present day relate many wonderful things of an ancient hero whom they name Holger Danske, *i.e.* Danish Holger, and to whom they ascribe wonderful strength and dimensions.

Holger Danske came one time to a town named Bagsvoer, in the isle of Zealand, where, being in want of a new suit of clothes, he sent for twelve tailors to make them. He was so tall that they were obliged to set ladders to his back and shoulders to take his measure. They measured and measured away, but unluckily a man, who was on the top of one of the ladders, happened, as he was cutting a mark in the measure, to give Holger's ear a clip with the scissors. Holger, forgetting what was going on, thinking that he was being bitten by a flea, put up his hand and crushed the unlucky tailor to death between his fingers.

It is also said that a witch one time gave him a pair of spectacles which would enable him to see through the ground. He lay down at a place not far from Copenhagen to make a trial of their powers, and as he put his face close to the ground, he left in it the mark of his spectacles, which mark is to be seen at this very day, and the size of it proves what a goodly pair they must have been.

Tradition does not say at what time it was that this mighty hero honoured the isles of the Baltic with his actual presence, but, in return, it informs us that Holger, like so many other heroes of renown, "is not dead, but sleepeth." The clang of arms, we are told, was frequently heard under the castle of Cronberg, but in all

Denmark no one could be found hardy enough to penetrate the subterranean recesses and ascertain the cause. At length a slave, who had been condemned to death, was offered his life and a pardon if he would go down, proceed through the subterranean passage as far as it went, and bring an account of what he should meet there. He accordingly descended, and went along till he came to a great iron door, which opened of itself the instant he knocked at it, and he beheld before him a deep vault. From the roof in the centre hung a lamp whose flame was nearly extinct, and beneath was a huge great stone table, around which sat steel-clad warriors, bowed down over it, each with his head on his crossed arms. He who was seated at the head of the board then raised himself up. This was Holger Danske. When he had lifted his head up from off his arms, the stone table split throughout, for his beard was grown into it.

“Give me thy hand,” said he to the intruder.

The slave feared to trust his hand in the grasp of the ancient warrior, and he reached him the end of an iron bar which he had brought with him. Holger squeezed it so hard, that the mark of his hand remained in it. He let it go at last, saying—

“Well! I am glad to find there are still men in Denmark.”

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