

and sometimes treated with greater cruelty than they intended to inflict. There is no trace, in the earlier period, of needless cruelty on their part, except the fact, which seems needless to us but was by no means so in that age, of their making any such attacks at all. It was only later, by contact with the South, that they learnt to torture; but we cannot say that they met easy deaths when they were captured (see for example page 68).¹ Nor was their life easy; hard fare, heavy labour at the oar, exposure in open boats to all the storms of the North, difficult navigation of unknown seas, comfortless and homeless wanderings in hostile lands,—the fate of a galley-slave in everything but freedom and the chances of glory and gold.

It was not a heroic life, as we count heroism to-day. The thirst for gold, torn from fine reliquaries and shrines and the jewelled covers of psalm-books, to be hammered into arm-rings or hoarded in holes, seems childish to a modern reader; and the traffic in slaves, which formed the largest and most lucrative part of the Viking's booty, shocks our sentiments. But in the ninth century the Viking could plead ample precedent; he was only doing what the most civilised were doing; his fault was that he did it rather more skilfully. For indeed he was, in his time, the most capable of mankind; not fully matured, but not without his own high civilisation, having more than the rudiments of domestic comforts and graces, more than

¹ Also see a paper by Mr. H. St. G. Gray, on "Danes' Skins on Church Doors"; *Saga-book of the Viking Club*, V.