Norse Mythology

by Rasmus Bjorn Anderson

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A comprehensive study of the Eddas, Norse cosmology, Aesir gods, and mythic symbolism.

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AN INTRODUCTION, VOCABULARY AND INDEX.

FORMERLY PROFESSOR OF THE SCANDINAVIAN LANGUAGES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, EX-U. S. MINISTER TO DENMARK, AUTHOR OF "AMERICA NOT DISCOVERED BY COLUM- BUS," "VIKING TALES OF THE NORTH," ETC.

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WHO HAS NOT ONLY REFRESHED HIMSELF AT THE CASTALIAN FOUNTAIN, BUT

ALSO COMMUNED WITH BRAGE, AND TAKEN DEEP DRAUGHTS

r~F\HE race is subject to the same laws as the indi- -*- vidual. The recollections of our earliest childhood and youth have the deepest roots in our inner life, and are the last to be forgotten. While the most recent events may fail to impress themselves upon our memory in our old age, the things that happened in our

child- hood remain bright and clear to the soul, and the advancing years seem only to give them additional lus- ter and distinctness. Here, if anywhere, it is true that distance lends enchantment to the view. If it were possible for these memories to disappear and be effaced, then man would be cut off from his root, and there would remain only the fragment of a real man. Within his narrower circle the individual repeats the experi- ence of the whole race.

This fact is well illustrated by the old' folk-lore \j

story in which the traveler is referred to a very old man for the information he is seeking. After a long journey, he comes to an old man with snow-white hair and wrinkled face. This aged person is not, however, able to answer the traveler's questions, but refers him to his brother, a person much older than himself.

After journeying a long distance, he comes to this aged brother, and discovers that he is much older than the first one he met, although he actually looks much younger. Nor is he able to supply the traveler with the desired information, but refers him to a third brother, who is still older than the other two. Finally, after long and weary journeys, our traveler finds the third one, also, but is surprised to find that he looks the youngest, although he is, in fact, by far the oldest of the brothers. From him the desired knowledge is obtained.

This story contains an important truth, and despite its romantic garb, it presents a faithful picture of the effect of time upon our inheritance from our forefathers. The most ancient life, the oldest traditions, the oldest poetry, are at the same time the very youngest, and they can never grow old. This ancient life, these old traditions and this old poetry are largely preserved in what we call our mythology. In our mythological rec- ords we find the most vigorous life. In them we may safely look for memories from time's morning and for that fountain of youth where these memories dwell, and whence they well forth. There we may chat about the imaginative, prophetic and poetic childhood of our race with that one of the brothers who actually is the oldest, but who looks the youngest of the three. These mythological records are themselves the spring in which we all need to be baptized if we desire to be imbued

with strength for the work we have to do in life and to become truly rejuvenated. In these old myths, tra- ditions and ballads our poetry needs to be immersed now and then as in a fountain of youth, otherwise it will grow old and feeble, and either degenerate into mere reflections, metaphysics and abstractions, or lose itself in commonplace descriptions and platitudes.

What we claim for this work is, that it is the first complete and systematic presentation of the Norse mythol- ogy in the English language ; and this, we think, is a sufficient reason for our asking a humble place upon your bookshelves. And, while we make this claim, we fully appreciate the value of the many excellent trea- tises and translations that have appeared on this subject in England. We do not undervalue the labors of Dasent, Thorpe, Pigott, Carlyle, etc., but none of these give a comprehensive account of all the deities and the myths in full. There is, indeed, no work outside of Scandinavia that covers the whole ground. So far as America is concerned, the only work on Norse mythol- ogy that has hitherto been published in this country is Barclay Pennock's translation of the Norse Pro- fessor Rudolph Keyser's

Religion of the Northmen. This is indeed an excellent and scholarly work, and a val- uable contribution to knowledge ; but, instead of pre- senting the mythology of the Norsemen, it interprets it ; and Professor Keyser is yet one of the most emi- nent authorities in the exposition of the Asa doctrine.

Pennock's translation of Keyser is a book of three hun- dred and forty-six pages, and of these only sixteen are devoted to a presentation of the mythology itself ; and it is, as the reader may judge, nothing but a very brief synopsis. The remaining three hundred and thirty pages contain a history of Old Norse literature, an interpre- tation of the Odinic religion, and an exhibition of the manner of worship among the heathen Norsemen. In a word, Pennock's book presupposes a knowledge of the subject ; and for one who has this, we would recommend Pennock's Keyser as the best work extant in English. We are indebted to it for many valuable paragraphs in this volume.

This subject has, then, been investigated by many able writers ; and, in preparing this volume, we have borrowed from their works all the light they could shed upon our pathway. The authors we have chiefly consulted are named in the accompanying list. While we have used their very phrase whenever it Wao oCZ venient, we have not followed them in a slavish manner. We have made such changes as in our judgment seemed necessary to give our work harmony and sym- metry throughout. We at first felt disposed to give the reader a mere translation either of N. M. Petersen, or of N. F. S. Grundtvig, or of P. A. Munch; but upon further reflection we came to the conclusion that we could treat the subject more satisfactorily to ourselves, and fully as acceptably to our readers, by sketching out a plan

of our own, and making free use of all the best writers upon this subject. And as we now review our pages, we find that N. M. Petersen has served us the most. Much of his work has been appropriated in an almost unchanged form.

Although many of the ideas set forth in this work may seem new to American readers, yet they are by no means wholly original. Many of them have for many years been successfully advocated in Scandinavian countries, and to some extent, also, in Germany and England. Our aim has not at present been so much to make original investigations, as — that which is far more needed and to the purpose — to give the fruits of the labors performed in the North, and call the attention of the American public earnestly to the wealth stored up in the Eddas and Sagas of Iceland. No one can doubt the correctness of our position in this matter, when he reflects that we are now drawing near the close of the mneteeyith century, and have not yet had a complete Norse mythology in the English language, while the number of Greek and Roman mythologies is legion. Bayard Taylor said to us, recently, that the Scandinavian languages, in view of their rich literature, in view of the light which this literature throws upon early English history, and in view of the importance of Icelandic in a successful study of English and Anglo- Saxon, ought to be taught in every college in Vinland; and that is the very pith of what we have to say in this preface.

While Mallet's Northern Antiquities is a very val- uable work, we cannot but make known our regrets that Blackwell's edition of it ever was published. Mr. Blackwell has in many ways injured the cause which he evidently intended to promote. While we, therefore, urge caution in the use of Mallet's Northern Antiquities by Blackwell, we can with all our heart recommend such writers upon the North as Dasent, Laing, Thorpe, G-osse, Pennock, Boyesen, Marsh, Fiske, the Howitts, Pigott, Lord Dufferin, Maurer,

M5bius, Morris, Mag- nusson, Vigfusson, Hjaltalin, and several others.

It is sincerely hoped that by this our effort we may, at least for the present, fill a gap in English lit- erature, and accomplish something in awakening among students some interest in Norse mythology, history, literature and institutions. Let it be remembered that Carlyle, and many others of our best scholars, claim that it is from the Norsemen we have derived our vital energy, our freedom of thought, and, in a measure that we do not yet suspect, our strength of speech.

We are conscious that our work contains many imperfections, and that others might have performed the task better ; and with this preface we commend our book to the kind indulgence of the critic and the reader.

University of Wisconsin, May 15, 1875.

The following authors have been consulted in preparing this work, and to them the reader is referred, if he wishes to make special study of the subject of Norse mythology.

Of the Elder Edda we haye used Benjamin Thorpe's translation and Sophus Bugge's edition of the original. It has been found necessary to make a few altera- tions in Thorpe's translation. Of the Younger Edda we have used Dasent's translation and Sveinbjorn Egilsson's edition of the original. Of modern Scan- dinavian writers we have confined ourselves mainly to N. M. Petersen, N. F. S. Grundtvig, P. A. Munch, Rudolph Keyser, Finn Magnusson, and Christian Win- ther. Other authors borrowed from more or less are: H. W. Longfellow, H. G. Moller, R. Nyerup, E. G. Geier, M. Hammerich, F. J. Mone, Jacob Grimm, Thomas Keightly, Thomas Carlyle, Max Miiller, and Geo. W. Cox.

The recent excellent work of Alexander Murray has been referred to on the subject of Greek mythol- ogy. It claims on its title-page to give an account of Norse mythology; but we were surprised to find

that the author dismisses the subject with fifteen pages and a few wood-cuts of questionable value.

The philological notes are chiefly based upon the Icelandic Dictionary recently published by Macmillan & Co., and edited by Gudbrand Vigfusson, of Oxford University, England. It is indeed a scholarly work, and marks a new epoch in the study of the Icelandic lan- guage.

To all who are interested in northern literature, we take great pleasure in recommending the following re- cent publications:

1. The Myths of the Rhine, translated from the French of X. B. Saintine by Prof. M. Scheie De Vere. This work gives an admirable sketch of primitive Teutonic times, of the Druids and their creed, of the Odinic religion and worship, and of a great variety of old customs and traditions. The translation is excel- lent, and it contains, moreover, a large number of very fine illustrations by Gustave Dore\

2. On pp. 375-382 of this work is given a brief syn- opsis of the Niblung story, showing its mythical con- nection with the gods of the North, giving the origin and history of the cursed ring (the Niblung hoard), etc. The Niblung story has been handed down to us in four versions, three Norse and one German. The Norse are : (a) Fragmentary Lays in the Elder Edda ; (b) The Volsunga Saga; (c) The Vilhina Saga. The German

is The Nioelungen-Lied. In addition to these are numerous fragmentary accounts of the story, among which may be mentioned The Faroe Sigurd's Saga, some

old Danish popular ballads, several Norse and German folk-lore stories, parts of The Book of the Heroes (Helden- buch), etc. There are also, both in Icelandic and in German, various additions and variations, conspicuous among which are TJie Lay of Hildebrand, and the so- called Klage (Lament), the latter containing the lam- entations of Etzel, Hildebrand and Ditrich over the dead, and the former treating of the return of Hilde- brand with Ditrich of Bern after the fall of the Nib- lungs. During the last hundred years a whole army of writers have been busy, especially in Germany and Scan- dinavia, in publishing in the original languages, in translating, in criticizing, in dramatizing, in lecturing and commenting on the Niblung literature. If all the editions of the four prominent versions, the additions, variations, the fragmentary poems and sagas, and the folk-lore stories belonging to the Niblung cycle, were collected, they would make a large library ; and if we add to this all the translations and all the essays and com- mentaries, the result would be a most formidable col- lection of books and pamphlets. The following are the names of some of the more prominent Scandinavian and German writers on this subject: P. E. Miiller, Unger, Bngge, Munch, Keyser, Petersen, Grundtvig, Bodmer, Von der Hagen, Schlegel, the brothers Grimm, Simrock, Lachmann, Mone, Jordan, Braunsfeld, Fischer, Holtz- mann, Volmer, Menzel, Bartsch, Geibel, Wagner, Mass- mann, Raszmann and Rehorn. In English, we have essays and criticism by Max Miiller, Thomas Carlyle and H. W. Longfellow {Poets and Poetry of Europe). There

are in all three English translations of the German Ki- belungen-Lied. The first is by Birch (London, 1848); the second by Lettsom (London, 1850), and the third is a most excellent transprosing, or retelling in prose, by Auber Forestier (Chicago, 1877*). This is the first American edition of the Niblung epic, and it is to be recommended to all who wish to make a beginning in searching this wonderful mist-land, both for the easy, graphic and dramatic prose in which it is told, and for the scholarly and exhaustive introduction, which en- larges upon the various versions and traces their origin back to the gods of Asgard.

During the present decade we have had what may be termed a pan-Teutonic epoch of the Niblung liter- ature. The various versions found in different countries have been combined and fashioned into one grand epic for the whole Teutonic race. Of such versions we have three, namely : (a) W. Jordan's Nibelunge (erster Theil, Sigfridsage ; Zweiter Theil, Hildelrants HeimJcehr) ; (b) W. R. Wagner's great musical and dramatic tetralogy called the Nibelungen Ring, performed under royal pat- ronage and imperial countenance at Baireuth in 1876; (c) The Story of Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs, by William Morris (London, 1877).

The intimate relation between the Niblung epic and Norse mythology is evident, and the reader is requested to regard this paragraph as supplementary to our note on page 382.

* Echoes from Mist-Land, or the Nibelungen Lay revealed to Lovers of Ko- mance and Chivalry, by Auber Forestier. Chicago : Scott, Foresman & Co.

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WHAT IS MYTHOLOGY AND WHAT IS NORSE MYTHOLOGY ?

The word mythology (ixuftoXoyia, from iiuftoq, word, tale, fable, and loyoq, speech, discourse,) is of Greek ori- gin, and our vernacular tongue has become so adulter- ated with Latin and Greek words ; we have studied Latin and Greek in place of English, Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Gothic so long that we are always in a quandary {qu'en dirai-je ?), always tongue-tied when we attempt to speak of something outside or above the daily returning cares of life. Our own good old English words have been crowded out by foreign ones; this is our besetting sin. But, as the venerable Professor George Stephens remarks in his elaborate work on Eunic Monuments, we have watered our mother tongue long enough with bastard Latin; let us now brace and steel it with the life-water of our own sweet and soft and rich and shining and clear-ringing and manly and world-ranging, ever-dearest English.

Mythology is a system of myths; a collection of popular legends, fables, tales, or stories, relating to the gods, heroes, demons or other beings whose names have been preserved in popular belief. Such tales are not found in the traditions of the ancient Greeks, Hindoos

and Egyptians, only, but every nation has had its sys- tem of mythology; and that of the ancient Norsemen is more simple, earnest, miraculous, stupendous and divine than any other mythological system of which we have record.

The myth is the oldest form of truth; and mythol- ogy is the knowledge which the ancients had of the Divine. The object of mythology is to find God and come to him. Without a written revelation this may be done in two ways: either by studying the intellect- ual, moral and physical nature of man, for evidence of the existence of God may be found in the proper study of man; or by studying nature in the outward world in its general structure, adaptations and dependencies; and truthfully it may be said that God manifests him- self in nature.

Our Norse forefathers (for it is their religion we are to present in this volume) had no clearly-defined knowl- edge of any god outside of themselves and nature. Like the ancient Greeks, they had only a somewhat vague idea about a supreme God, whom the rhapsodist or skald in the Elder Edda (HyndluljoS 43, 44) dare not name, and whom few, it is said, ever look far enough to see. In the language of the Elder Edda:

Then comes another Yet more mighty ;

But Mm dare I not Venture to name. Few further may look Than to where Odin To meet the wolf goes.

Odin goes to meet the Fenriswolf in Eagnarok (the twilight of the gods; that is, the final conflict between all good and evil powers) ; but now let the reader com- pare the above passage from the Elder Edda with the following passage from the seventeenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles:

Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' Hill and said : Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too super- stitious ; for as I passed by and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

It was of this same unknown God that one of the ancient Greek poets had said, that in him we live and move and have our being. Thus did the Greeks find Jehovah in the labyrinth of their heathen deities; and when we claim that the Norse mythology is more divine than any other system of mythology known, we mean by this assertion, that the supreme God is men- tioned and referred to oftener, and stands out in bolder relief in the Norseman's heathen belief, than in any other.

It is a noticeable fact that long before Christianity was introduced or had even been heard of in Iceland, it is recorded that Ingemund the Old, a heathen Norse- man, bleeding and dying, prayed God to forgive Rolleif, his murderer.

Another man of the heathen times, Thorkel Maane, a supreme judge of Iceland, a man of unblemished life and distinguished among the wisest magistrates of that

island during the time of the republic, avowed that he would worship no other God but him who had created the sun; and in his dying hour he prayed the Father of Light to illuminate his soul in the darkness of death. Arngrim Jonsson tells us that when Thorkel Maane had arrived at the age of maturity and reflection, he disdained a blind obedience to traditionary custom, and employed much of his time in weighing the estab- lished tenets of his countrymen by the standard of reason. He divested his mind of all prejudice; he pondered on the sublimity of nature, and guided him- self by maxims founded on truth and reason. By these means he soon discovered not only the fallacy of that faith which governed his countrymen, but became a convert to the existence of a supreme power more mighty than Thor or Odin. In his maker he acknowledged his God, ard to him alone directed his homage from a conviction that none other was worthy to be honored and wor- shiped. On perceiving the approach of death, this pious and sensible man requested to be conveyed into the open air, in order that, as he said, he might in his last moments contemplate the glories of Almighty God, who has created the heavens and the earth and all that in them is.

Harald Fairfax (Haarfager), the first sovereign of Nor- way, the king that united Norway under his scepter in the year 872, is another remarkable example in this respect. He was accustomed to assist at the public offerings made by his people in honor of their gods. As no better or more pure religion was known in those days, he acted with prudence in not betraying either contempt or disregard for the prevailing worship of the country, lest his subjects, stimulated by such example, might become indifferent, not only to their sacred, but

also to their political, duties. Yet he rejected from his heart these profane ceremonies, and believed in the existence of a more powerful god, whom he secretly adored. I swear, he once said, never to make my offerings to an idol, but to that God alone whose om- nipotence has formed the world and stamped man with his own image. It would be an act of folly in me to expect help from him whose power and empire arises from the accidental hollow of a tree or the peculiar form of a stone.

Such examples illustrate how near the educated and reflecting Norse heathen was in sympathy with Christianity, and also go far toward proving that the object of mythology is to find God and come to him.

.Still we must admit that of this supreme God our forefathers had only a somewhat vague conception ; and to many of them he was almost wholly unknown. Their god was a natural human god, a person. There can be no genuine poetry without impersonation, and a perfect system of mythology is a finished poem. Mythology is, in fact, religious truth expressed in poetical language. It ascribes all events and phenomena in the outward world to a personal cause. Each en use is some divinity or other — some god or demon, in this man- ner, when the ancients heard the echo from the woods or mountains, they did not think, as we now do, that the waves of sound were reflected, but that there stood a dwarf, a personal being, who repeated the words spoken by themselves. This dwarf had to have a his- tory, a biography, and this gave rise to a myth. To our poetic ancestors the forces of nature were not veiled under scientific names. As Carlyle truthfully remarks, they had not yet learned to reduce to their fundamental elements and lecture learnedly about this beautiful,

green, rock-built, flowery earth, with its trees, mount, ains and many-sounding waters; about the great deep sea of azure that swims over our heads, and about the various winds that sweep through it. When they saw the black clouds gathering and shutting out the king of day, and witnessed them pouring out rain and ice and fire, and heard the thunder roll, they did not think, as we now do, of accumulated electricity discharged from the clouds to the earth, and show in the lecture room how something like these powerful shafts of lightning could be ground out of glass or silk, but they ascribed the phenomenon to a mighty divinity — Thor — who in his thunder-chariot rides through the clouds and strikes with his huge hammer, Mjolner. The theory of our forefathers furnishes food for the imagination, for our poetical nature, while the reflection of the waves of sound and the discharge of electricity is merely dry reasoning — mathematics and physics. To our ances- tors Nature presented herself in her naked, beautiful and awful majesty; while to us in this age of New- tons, Millers, Oersteds, Berzeliuses and Tyndalls, she is enwrapped in a multitude of profound scientific phrases. These phrases make us flatter ourselves that we have fathomed her mysteries and revealed her secret work- ings, while in point of fact we are as far from the real bottom as our ancestors were. But we have robbed ourselves to a sad extent of the poetry of nature. Well might Barry Cornwall complain:

O ye delicious fables! where the wave And the woods were peopled, and the air, with things

So lovely! Why, ah! why has science grave Scattered afar your sweet imaginings?

The old Norsemen said: The mischief-maker Loke cuts for mere sport the hair of the goddess Sif, but

the gods compel him to furnish her new hair. Loke gets dwarfs to forge for her golden hair, which grows almost spontaneously. We, their prosaic descendants, say: The heat (Loke) scorches the grass (Sif's hair), but the same physical agent (heat) sets the forces of nature to work again, and new grass with golden (that is to say bright) color springs up again.

Thus our ancestors spoke of all the workings of nature as though they were caused by personal agents; and instead of saying, as we now do, that winter fol- lows summer, and explaining how the annual revolu- tions of the earth produce the changes that are called seasons of the year, they took a more poetical view of the phenomenon, and said that the blind god Hoder (winter) was instigated by Loke (heat) to slay Balder (the summer god).

This idea of personifying the visible workings of nature was so completely developed that prominent faculties or attributes of the gods also were subject to impersonation. Odin, it was said, had two ravens, Hugin and Mucin; that is, reflection and memory. They sit upon his shoulders, and whisper into his ears. Thor's strength was redoubled whenever he girded him- self with Megingjarder, his belt of strength ; his steel gloves, with which he wielded his hammer, produced the same effect. Nay, strength was so eminent a char- acteristic with Thor that it even stands out apart from him as an independent person, and is represented by his son Magne (strength), who accompanies him on his journeys against the frost-giants.

In this manner a series of myths were formed and combined into a system which we now call mythology; a system which gave to our fathers gods whom they worshiped, and in whom they trusted, and which gives

to us a mirror in which is reflected the popular lift., the intellectual and moral characteristics of our ancestors. And these gods were indeed worthy of reverence ; they were the embodiments of the noblest thoughts and purest feelings, but these thoughts and feelings could not be awakened without a personified, image. As soon as the divine idea was born, it assumed a bodily form, and, in order to give the mind a more definite compre- hension of it, it was frequently drawn down from heaven and sculptured in wood or stone. The object was by images to make manifest unto the senses the attributes of the gods, and thus the more easily secure the devotion of the people. The heathen had to see the image of God, the image of the infinite thought embodied in the god, or he would not kneel down and worship. This idea of wanting something concrete, something within the reach of the senses, we find deeply rooted in human nature. Man does not want an ab- stract god, but a personal, visible god, at least a visible sign of his presence. And we who live in th/7 broad daylight of revealed religion and science ought not to be so prone to blame our forefathers for paying divine honors to images, statues and other representations or symbols of their gods, for the images were, as the words imply, not the gods themselves to whom the heathen addressed his prayers and supplications, but merely the symbols of these gods; and every religion, Christianity included, is mythical in its development. The tendency is to draw the divine down to earth, in order to rise with it again to heaven. When God suffers with us, it becomes easier for us to suffer; when he redeems us, our salvation becomes certain. God is in all systems of religion seen, as it were, through a glass — neve*- face to face. No one can see Jehovah and live.

Even as in our present condition our immortal soul cannot do without the visible body, and cannot without this reveal itself to its fellow-beings, so our faith requires a visible church, our religion must assume some form in which it can be apprehended by the senses. Our faith is made stronger by the visible church in the same manner as the mind gains knowl- edge of the things about us by means of the bodily organs. The outward rite or external form and cere- monial ornament, which are so conspicuous in the Roman and Greek Catholic churches, for instance, serve to awaken, edify and strengthen the soul and assist the

memory in recalling the religious truths and the events in the life of Christ and of the saints more vividly and forcibly to the mind; besides, pictures and images are to the unlettered what books are to those educated in the art of reading. Did not Christ himself combine things supersensual with things within the reach of the senses? The purification and sanctification of the soul he combined with the idea of cleansing the body in the sacrament of baptism. The remembrance of him and of his love, how he gave his body and blood for the redemption of fallen man, he combined with the eating of bread and drinking of wine in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He gave his religion an outward, visible form; and, just as the soul is mirrored in the eyes, in the expression of the countenance, in the gest- ures and manners of the body, so our faith is reflected in the church. This is what is meant by myth- ical development; and when we discover this tendency to cling to visible signs and ceremonies manifesting itself so extensively even in the Christian church of our own time, it should teach us to be less severe in judging and blaming the heathen for their idol-worship.

As long as the nations have inhabited the earth, there have been different religions among men; and how could this be otherwise? The countries which they have inhabited; the skies which they have looked upon ; their laws, customs and social institutions ; their habits, language and knowledge ; have differed so widely that it would be absurd to look for uniformity in the manner in which they have found, comprehended and worshiped God. Nay, this is not all. Even among Christians, and, if we give the subject a careful exami- nation, even among those who confess one and the same faith and are members of one and the same church, we find that the religion of one man is never perfectly like that of another. They may use the same prayers, learn and subscribe to the same confession, hear the same preacher and take part in the same ceremonies, but still the prayer, faith and worship of the one will differ from the prayer, faith and worship of the other. Two persons are never precisely alike, and every one will interpret the words which he hears and the cere- monies in which he takes part according to the depth and breadth of his mind and heart — according to the extent and kind of his knowledge and experience, and according to other personal peculiarities and character- istics. Even this is not all. Every person changes his religious views as he grows older, as his knowledge and experience increase, so that the faith of the youth is not that of the child, nor does the man with silvery locks approach the altar with precisely the same faith as when he knelt there a youth. For it is not the words and ceremonies, but the thoughts and feelings, that we combine with these symbols, that constitute our religion ; it is not the confession which we learned at school, but the ideas that are suggested by it in our

minds, and the emotions awakened by it in our hearts, that constitute our faith.

If the preachers of the Christian religion realized these truths more than they generally seem to do, they would perhaps speak with more charity and less scorn and contempt of people who differ from them in their (I

religious views. They would recognize in the faith of others the same connecting link between God and man for them, as their own faith is for themselves. They would not hate the Jew because he, in accordance with the Mosaic commandment, offers his prayers in the synagogue to the God of his fathers; nor despise the heathen because lie, in want of better knowledge, in childlike simplicity lifts his hands in prayer to an

im- age of wood or stone; for, although this be perishable dust, he still addresses the prayer of his inmost soul to the supreme God, even as the child, that kisses the picture of his absent mother, actually thinks of her.

The old mythological stories of the Norsemen abound in poetry of the truest and most touching character. These stories tell us in sublime and wonderful speech of the workings of external nature, and may make us cheerful or sad, happy or mournful, gay or grave, just as we might feel, if from the pinnacle of Gausta Fjeld we were to watch the passing glories of morning and evening tide. There is nothing in these stories that can tend to make us less upright and simple, while they contain many thoughts and suggestions that we may be the better and happier for knowing. All the so-called disagreeable features of mythology are nothing but distortions, brought out either by ill-will or by a superficial knowledge of the subject; and, when these distortions are removed, we shall find only things beau- tiful, lovely and of good report. We shall find the

simple thoughts of our childlike, imaginative, poetic and prophetic forefathers upon the wonderful works of their maker, and nothing that we may laugh at, or despise, or pity. These words of our fathers, if read in the right spirit, will make us feel as we ought to feel when we contemplate the glory and beauty of the heavens and the earth, and observe how wonderfully all things are adapted to each other and to the wants of man, that the thoughts of him who stands at the helm of this ship of the universe (Skidbladner) must be very deep, and that we are sensible to the same joys and sufferings, are actuated by the same fears and hopes and passions, that were felt by the men and women who lived in the dawn of our Gothic history. We will begin to realize how the great and wise Creator has led our race on — slowly, perhaps, but nevertheless surely — to the consciousness that he is a loving and righteous Father, and that he has made the sun and moon and stars, the earth, and all that in them is, in their sea- son.

The Norse mythology reflects, then, the religious, moral, intellectual and social development of our ancestors in the earliest period of their existence. We say our ancestors, for we must bear in mind that in its most original form this mythology was common to all the Teutonic nations, to the ancestors of the Americans and the English, as well as to those of the Norsemen, Swedes and Danes. Geographically it extended not only over the whole of Scandinavia, including Iceland, but also over England and a considerable portion of France and Germany. But it is only in Iceland, that weird island of the icy sea, with the snow-clad volcano Mt. Hecla for its hearth, encircled by a wall of glaciers, and with the roaring North Sea for its grave, — it is

only in Iceland that anything like a complete record of this ancient Teutonic mythology was put in writing and preserved; and this fact alone ought to be quite sufficient to lead us to cultivate a better acquaintance with the literature of Scandinavia. To use the words of that excellent Icelandic scholar, the Englishman George Webbe Dasent: It is well known, says he, that the Icelandic language, which has been preserved almost incorrupt in that remarkable island, has remained for many centuries the depository of literary treasures, the common property of all the Scandinavian and Teutonic races, which would otherwise have per- ished, as they have perished in Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and England. There was a

time when all these countries had a common mythology, when the royal race in each of them traced its descent in varying genealogies up to Odin and the gods of Asgard. Of that mythology, which may hold its own against any other that the world has seen, all memory, as a systematic whole, has vanished from the mediaeval literature of Teutonic Europe. With the introduction of Christianity, the ancient gods had been deposed and their places assigned to devils and witches. Here and there a tradition, a popular tale or a superstition bore testimony to what had been lost; and, though in this century the skill and wisdom of the Grimms and their school have shown the world what power of restoration and reconstruction abides in intelli- gent scholarship and laborious research, even the genius of the great master of that school of criticism would have lost nine-tenths of its power had not faith- ful Iceland preserved through the dark ages the tivo Eddas, which present to us, in features that cannot be mistaken, and in words which cannot die, the very form

and fashion of that wondrous edifice of mythology which our forefathers in the dawn of time imagined to them- selves as the temple at once of their gods and of the worship due to them from all mankind on this middle earth. For man, according to their system of belief, could have no existence but for those gods and stalwart divinities, who, from their abode in Asgard, were ever watchful to protect him and crush the common foes of both, the earthly race of giants, or, in other words, the chaotic natural powers. Any one, therefore, that desires to see what manner of men his forefathers were in their relation to the gods, how they conceived their theogony, how they imagined and constructed their cosmogony, must betake himself to the Eddas, as illustrated by the Sagas, and he will there find ample details on all these points; while the Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic literatures only throw out vague hints and allusions. As we read Beowulf and the Traveler's Song, for instance, we meet at every step references to mythological stories and myth- ical events, which would be utterly unintelligible were it not for the full light thrown upon them by the Ice- landic literature. Thus far Dasent's opinion.

The Norse mythology, we say, then, shows what the religion of our ancestors was; and their religion is the main fact that we care to know about them. Knowing this well, we can easily account for the rest. Their re- ligion is the soul of their history. Their religion tells us what they felt ; their feelings produced their thoughts, and their thoughts were the parents of their acts. When we study their religion, we discover the unseen and spiritual fountain from which all their outward acts welled forth, and by which the character of these was determined.

The mythology is neither the history nor the poetry

nor the natural philosophy of our ancestors; but it is the germ and nucleus of them all. It is history, for it treats of events; but it is not history in the ordinary acceptance of that word, for the persons figuring therein have never existed. It is natural philosophy, for it in- vestigates the origin of nature; but it is not natural philosophy according to modern ideas, for it personifies and deifies nature. It is metaphysics, for it studies the science and the laws of being ; but it is not metaphysics in our sense of the word, for it rapidly overleaps all categories. It is poetry in its very essence; but its pic- tures are streams that flow together. Thus the Norse mythology is history, but limited to neither time nor place; poetry, but independent of arses or theses; phi- losophy, but without abstractions or syllogisms.

We close this chapter with the following extract from Thomas Carlyle's essays on Heroes and Hero-worship; an extract that undoubtedly will be read with interest and pleasure:

In that strange island — Iceland — burst up, the geologists say, by fire, from the bottom of the sea ; a wild land of barren- ness and lava ; swallowed, many months of the year, in black tempests, yet with a wild, gleaming beauty in summer-time; towering up there, stern and grim, in the North Ocean ; with its snow-jokuls, roaring geysers, sulphur pools and horrid vol- canic chasms, like the waste, chaotic battle-field of frost and fire — where of all places we least looked for literature or written memorials ; the record of these things was written down. On the seaboard of this wild land is a rim of grassy country, where cattle can subsist, and men, by means of them and of what the sea yields ; and it seems they were poetic men, these — men who had deep thoughts in them, and uttered musically their thoughts. Much would be lost had Iceland not been burst up from the sea — not been discovered by the Northmen! The old Norse poets were many of them natives of Iceland.

Saemund, one of the early Christian priests there, who per- haps had a lingering fondness for paganism, collected certain of

their old pagan songs, just about becoming obsolete tben — poems or chants, of a mythic, prophetic, mostly all of a reli- gious, character: this is what Norse critics call the Elder or Poetic Edda. Edda, a word of uncertain etymology, is thought to signify Ancestress. Snorre Sturleson, an Iceland gentleman, an extremely notable personage, educated by this Sseniund's grandson, took in hand next, near a century afterwards, to put together, among several other books he wrote, a kind of prose synopsis of the whole mythology, elucidated by new fragments of traditionary verse ; a work constructed really with great ingenuity, native talent, what one might call unconscious art ; ■xliogether a perspicuous, clear work — pleasant reading still. This is the Younger or Prose Edda. By these and the numer- ous other Sagas, mostly Icelandic, with the commentaries, Icelandic or not, which go on zealously in the North to this day, it is possible to gain some direct insight even yet, and see that old system of belief, as it were, face to face. Let us forget that it is erroneous religion: let us look at it as old thought, and try if Wc cannot sympathize with it somewhat.

"he primary characteristic of this old Northland mythology I fin! to be impersonation of the visible workings of nature — ■ earnest, simple recognition of the workings of physical nature, as a thing wholly miraculous, stupendous and divine, What we now lecture of as science, they wondered at, and fell down in awe before, as religion. The dark, hostile powers of nature they figured to themselves as Jotuns (giants), huge, shaggy beings, of a demoniac character. Frost, Fire, Sea, Tempest, these are Jotuns. The friendly powers, again, as Sumnier-hea* the Sun, are gods. The Empire of this Universe is divided between these two ; they dwell apart in perennial internecine feud. The gods dwell above in Asgard, the Garden of the Asas, or Divin- ities ; JotunJieim, a distant, dark, chaotic land, is the home of the Jotuns.

Curious, all this; and not idle or inane if we will look at the foundation of it. The power of Fire or Flame, for instance, which we designate by some trivial chemical name, thereby hid- ing from ourselves the essential character of wonder that dwells in it, as in all things, is, with these old Northmen, Loge, a most swift, subtle demon, of the brood of the Jotuns. The savages of the Ladrones Islands, too (say some

Spanish voyagers), thought. Fire, which they had never seen before, was a devil, or god,

that bit you sharply when you touched it, and lived there upon dry wood. From us, too, no chemistry, if it had not stupidity to help it, would hide that flame is a wonder. What is flame? Frost the old Norse seer discerns to be a monstrous, hoary Jotun, the giant TJirym, JTrym, or Rime, the old word, now nearly obsolete here, but still used in Scotland to signify hoar-frost. Rime was not then, as now, a dead chemical thing, but a living Jotun, or Devil ; the monstrous Jotun Rime drove home his horses at night, sat combing their manes; — which horses were Hail-clouds, or fleet Frost-winds. His cows — no, not his, but a kinsman's, the giant Hymer's cows — are Icebergs. This Hymer looks at the rocks with his devil-eye, and they split in the glance of it.

Thunder was then not mere electricity, vitreous or resin- ous; it was the god Donner (Thunder), or Thor, — god, also, of the beneficent Summer-heat. The thunder was his wrath; the gathering of the black- clouds is the drawing down of Thor's angry brows; the fire-bolt bursting out of heaven is the all- rendiug hammer flung from the hand of Thor. He urges his loud chariot over the mountain tops — that is the peal; wrath- ful he blows in his red beard — that is the rustling storm- blast before the thunder begins. Balder, again, the White God, the beautiful, the just and benignant, (whom the early Christian missionaries found to resemble Christ,) is the sun — beautifulest of visible things: wondrous, too, and divine still, after all our astronomies and almanacs ! But perhaps the nota- blest god we hear tell of is one of whom Grimm, the German etymologist, finds trace: the god Wiinsch, or Wish. The god Wish, who could give us all that we wished/ Is not this the sincerest and yet the rudest voice of the spirit of man? The rudest ideal that man ever formed, which still shows itself in the latest forms of our spiritual culture. Higher considerations have to teach us that the god Wish is not the true God.

Of the other gods or Jotuns, I will mention, only for ety- mology's sake, that Sea-tempest is the Jotun vEgir, a very dan- gerous Jotun; and now to this day, on our river Trent, as I learn, the Nottingham bargemen, when the river is in a certain flooded state (a kind of back-water or eddying swirl it has, very dangerous to them), call it Eager. They cry out, Have a care ! there is the Eager coming! Curious, that word surviving, like the peak of a submerged world! The oldest Nottingham barge-

men had believed in the god iEgir. Indeed, our English blood, too, in good part, is Danish, Norse, — or rather, at the bottom, Danish and Norse and Saxon have no distinction, except a superficial one — as of Heathen and Christian, or the like. But all over our island we are mingled largely with Danes proper — from the incessant invasions there were ; and this, of course, in a greater proportion along the east coast ; and greatest of all, as I find, in the north country. From the Humber upward, all over Scotland, the speech of the common people is still in a singular degree Icelandic ; its Germanism has still a peculiar Norse tinge. They, too, are Normans, Northmen — if that be any great beauty!

Of the chief god, Odin, we shall speak by-and-by. Mark, at present, so much: what the essence of Scandinavian, and, indeed, of all paganism, is : a recognition of the forces of nature as godlike, stupendous, personal agencies — as gods and demons. Not inconceivable to us. It is the infant thought of man open- ing itself with awe and wonder on this ever stupendous uni- verse. It is strange, after our beautiful Apollo statues and clear smiling mythuses, to come down upon the Norse gods brewing ale to

hold their feast with Aegir, the Sea-J6tun; sending out Thor to get the caldron for them in the Jotun country ; Thor, after many adventures, clapping the pot on his head, like a huge hat, and walking off with it — quite lost in it, the ears of the pot reaching down to his heels ! A kind of vacant hugeness, large, awkward gianthood, characterizes that Norse system; enormous force, as yet altogether untutored, stalking helpless, with large, uncertain strides. Consider only their primary my thus of the Creation. The gods having got the giant Ymer slain — a giant made by warm winds and much confused work out of the conflict of Frost and Fire — determined on constructing a world with him. His blood made the sea; his flesh was the Land ; the Rocks, his bones ; of his eyebrows they formed Asgard, their gods' dwelling; his skull was the great blue vault of Immensity, and the brains of it became the Clouds. What a Hyper-Brobdignagian business! Untamed thought; great, giantlike, enormous; to be tamed, in due time, into the compact greatness, not giantlike, but godlike, and stronger than gianthood of the Shakespeares, the Goethes! Spiritually, as well as bodily, these men are our progenitors.

WHY CALL THIS MYTHOLOGY NORSE? OUGHT IT NOT RATHER TO BE CALLED GOTHIC OR TEUTONIC?

IN its original form, the mythology, which is to be presented in this volume, was common to all the Teutonic nations; and it spread itself geographically oyer England, the most of France and Germany, as well as over Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Iceland. But when the Teutonic nations parted, took possession of their respective countries, and began to differ one nation from the other, in language, customs and social and political institutions, and were influenced by the pecu- liar features of the countries which they respectively inhabited, then the germ of mythology which each na- tion brought with it into its changed conditions of life, would also be subject to changes and developments in harmony and keeping with the various conditions of climate, language, customs, social and political institu- tions, and other influences that nourished it, while the fundamental myths remained common to all the Teu- tonic nations. Hence we might in one sense speak of a Teutonic mythology. That would then be the my- thology of the Teutonic peoples, as it was known to them while they all lived together, some four or five hundred years before the birth of Christ, in the south- eastern part of Russia, without any of the peculiar feat- ures that have been added later by any of the several

branches of that race. But from this time we have no Teutonic literature. In another sense, we must recognize a distinct German mythology, a distinct English mythology, and even make distinction between the my- thologies of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway.

That it is only of the Norse mythology we have anything like a complete record, was alluded to in the first chapter; but we will now make a more thorough examination of this fact.

The different branches of the Teutonic mythology died out and disappeared as Christianity gradually became introduced, first in France, about five hundred years after the birth of Christ; then in England, one or two hundred years later; still later, in Germany, where the Saxons, Christianized by Charlemagne about A.D. 800, were the last heathen people.

But in Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Iceland, the original Gothic heathenism lived longer and more independently than elsewhere, and had more favorable oppor- tunities to grow and mature. The ancient mythological or pagan religion flourished here until about the middle of the eleventh century; or, to speak more accurately, Christianity was not completely introduced in Iceland before the beginning of the eleventh century; in Den- mark and Norway, some twenty to thirty years later; while in Sweden, paganism was not wholly eradicated before 1150.

Yet neither Norway, Sweden nor Denmark give us any mythological literature. This is furnished us only by the Norsemen, who had settled in Iceland. Shortly after the introduction of Christianity, which gave the Norsemen the so-called Roman alphabetical system instead of their famous Eunic futhorc, there was put in writing in Iceland a colossal mythological and his-

torical literature, which is the full-blown flower of Gothic paganism. In the other countries inhabited by Gothic (Scandinavian, Low Dutch and English) and Germanic (High German) races, scarcely any mythological literature was produced. The German Niebe- lungen-Lied and the Anglo-Saxon Beowulf's Drapa are at best only semi-mythological. The overthrow of hea- thendom was too abrupt and violent. Its eradication was so complete that the heathen religion was almost wholly obliterated from the memory of the people. Occasionally there are found authors who refer to it, but their allusions are very vague and defective, besides giving unmistakable evidence of being written with pre- judice and contempt. Nor do we find among the early Germans that spirit of veneration for the memories of the past, and desire to perpetuate them in a vernacular literature ; or if they did exist, they were smothered by the Catholic priesthood. When the Catholic priests gained the ascendancy, they adopted the Latin language and used that exclusively for recording events, and they pronounced it a sin even to mention by name the old pa- gan gods oftener than necessity compelled them to do so. Among the Norsemen, on the other hand, and to a considerable extent among the English, too, the old religion flourished longer; the people cherished their traditions; they loved to recite the songs and Sagas, in which were recorded the religious faith and brave deeds of their ancestors, and cultivated their native speech in spite of the priests. In Iceland at least, the priests did not succeed in rooting out paganism, if you please, before it had developed sufficiently to produce those beautiful blossoms, the Elder and Younger Eddas. The chief reason of this was, that the people continued to use their mother-tongue, in writing as well as in speak-

ing, so that Latin, the language of the church, never got a foothold. It was useless for the monks to try to tell Sagas in Latin, for they found but few readers in that tongue. An important result of this was, that the Saga became the property of the people, and not of the favored few. In the next place, our Norse Icelandic ancestors took a profound delight in poetry and song. The skald sung in the mother-speech, and taking the most of the material for his songs and poems from the old mythological tales, it was necessary to study and become familiar with these, in order that he might be able, on the one hand, to understand the productions of others, and, on the other, to compose songs himself. Among the numerous examples which illustrate how tenaciously the Norsemen clung to their ancient divin- ities, we may mention the skald Hallfred, who, when he was baptized by the king Olaf Tryggvesson, declared bravely to the king, that he would neither speak ill of the old gods, nor refrain from mentioning them in his

The reason, then, why we cannot present a complete and thoroughly systematic Teutonic or German or Eng- lish or Danish or Swedish Mythology, is not that these did not at some time exist, but because their records are so defective. Outside of Norway and Iceland, Christianity, together with disregard of past memories, has swept most of the resources, with which to construct them, away from the surface, and there remain only deeply buried ruins, which it is difficult to dig up and still more difficult to polish and adjust into their orig- inal symmetrical and comprehensive form after they have been brought to the surface. It is difficult to gather all the scattered and partially decayed bones of the mythological system, and with the breath of human

intellect reproduce a living vocal organism. Few have attempted to do this with greater success than the brothers Grimm.

For the elucidation of our mythology in its Ger- manic form, for instance, the materials, although they are not wholly wanting, are yet difficult to make use of, since they are widely scattered, and must be sought partly in quite corrupted popular legends, partly in writings of the middle ages, where they are sometimes found interpolated, and where we often least should expect to find them. But in its Norse form we have ample material for studying the Asa-mythology. Here we have as our guide not only a large number of skaldic lays, composed while the mythology still flour- ished, but even a complete religious system, written down, it is true, after Christianity had been introduced in Iceland, still, according to all evidence, without the Christian ideas having had any special influence upon its delineation, or having materially corrupted it. These lays, manuscripts, etc., which form the source of Norse mythology, will be more fully discussed in another chapter of this Introduction.

We may add further, that if we had, in a complete system, the mythology of the Germans, the English, etc., we should find, in comparing them with the Norse, the same correspondence and identity as we find exist- ing between the different branches of the Teutonic family of languages. We should find in its essence the same mythology in all the Teutonic countries, we should find this again dividing itself into two groups, the Ger- manic and the Gothic, and the latter group, that is, the Gothic, would include the ancient religion of the Scan- dinavians, English, and Low Dutch. If we had sufficient means for making a comparison, we should find that

any single myth may have become more prominent, may have become more perfectly developed by one branch of the race than by another; one branch of the great Teutonic family may have become more attached to a certain myth than another, while the myth itself would remain identical everywhere. Local myths, that is, myths produced by the contemplation of the visible workings of external nature, are colored by the atmos- phere of the people and country where they are fostered. The god Frey received especial attention by the Asa- worshipers in Sweden, but the Norse and Danish Frey are still in reality the same god. Thunder produces not the same effect upon the people among the towering and precipitous mountains of Norway and the level plains of Denmark, but the Thor of Norway and of Denmark are still the same god; although in Norway he is tall as a mountain, his beard is briers, and he rushes upon his heroic deeds with the strength and frenzy of a berserk, while in Denmark he wanders along the sea-shore, a youth, with

golden locks and downy beard.

It is the Asa-mythology, as it was conceived and cherished by the Norsemen of Norway and Iceland, which the Old Norse literature properly presents to us, and hence the myths will in this volume be presented in their Norse dress, and hence its name, Norse Mythol- ogy. From what has already been said, there is no reason to doubt that the Swedes and Danes professed in the main the same faith, followed the same religious customs, and had the same religious institutions; and upon this supposition other English writers upon this subject, as for instance Benjamin Thorpe, have entitled their books Scandinavian Mythology. But we do not know the details of the religious faith, customs and

institutions of Sweden and Denmark, for all reliable inland sources of information are wanting, and all the highest authorities on this subject of investigation, such as Eudolph Keyser, P. A. Munch, Ernst Sars, N. M. Petersen and others, unanimously declare, that although the ancient Norse-Icelandic writings not unfrequently treat of heathen religious affairs in Sweden and Den- mark, yet, when they do, it is always in such a manner that the conception is clearly Norse, and the delineation is throughout adapted to institutions as they existed in Norway. We are aware that there are those who will feel inclined to criticise us for not calling this mythol- ogy Scandinavian or Northern (a more elastic term), but we would earnestly recommend them to examine carefully the writings of the above named writers before waxing too zealous on the subject.

As we closed the previous chapter with an extract from Thomas Carlyle, so we will close this chapter with a brief quotation from an equally eminent scholar, the author of Chips from a German Workshop. In the second volume of that work Max Miiller says:*

There is, after Anglo-Saxon, no language, no literature, no mythology so full of interest for the elucidation of the earliest history of the race which now inhabits these British isles as the Icelandic. Nay, in one respect Icelandic beats every other dia- lect of the great Teutonic family of speech, not excepting Anglo-Saxon and Old High German and Gothic. It is in Icelandic alone that we find complete remains of genuine Teutonic heathendom. Gothic, as a language, is more ancient than Icelandic ; but the only literary work which we possess in Gothic is a translation of the Bible. The Anglo-Saxon literature, with the exception of the Beowulf, is Christian. The old heroes of the Niebelunge, such as we find them represented in the Suabian epic, have been converted into church-going knights ; whereas, in the ballads of

* Max Miiller's Eeview of Dr. Dasent's The Norseman in Iceland.

the Elder Edda, Sigurd and Brynhild appear before us in their full pagan grandeur, holding nothing sacred but their love, and defying all laws, human and divine, in the name of that one almighty passion. The Icelandic contains the key to many a riddle in the English language and to many a mystery in the English character. Though the Old Norse is but a dialect of the same language which the Angles and Saxons brought to Britain, though the Norman blood is the same blood that floods and ebbs in every German heart, yet there is an accent of defi- ance in that rugged northern speech, and a spring of daring madness in that throbbing northern heart, which marks the Northman wherever he appears, whether in Iceland or in Sicily, whether on the Seine or on the Thames. At the beginning of the ninth century, when the great northern

exodus began, Europe, as Dr. Dasent remarks, was in danger of becoming too comfortable. The two nations destined to run neck-and-neck in the great race of civilization, Frank and Anglo-Saxon, had a tendency to become dull and lazy, and neither could arrive at perfection till it had been chastised by the Norsemen, and finally forced to admit an infusion of northern blood into its sluggish veins. The vigor of the various branches of the Teutonic stock may be measured by the proportion of Norman blood which they received; and the national character of England owes more to the descendants of Hrolf Ganger* than to the followers of Hengist and Horsa.

But what is known of the early history of the Norsemen? Theirs was the life of reckless freebooters, and they had no time to dream and ponder on the past, which they had left behind in Norway. Where they settled as colonists or as rulers, their own traditions, their very language, were soon forgotten. Their language has nowhere struck root on foreign ground, even where, as in Normandy, they became earls of Rouen, or, as in these isles, kings of England. There is but one exception — Iceland. Ice- land was discovered, peopled and civilized by Norsemen in the ninth century ; and in the nineteenth century the language spoken there is still the dialect of Harald Fairhair, and the stories told there are still the stories of the Edda, or the Vener- able Grandmother. Dr. Dasent gives us a rapid sketch of the first landings of the Norse refugees on the fells and forths of Iceland. He describes how love of freedom drove the subjects

* The founder of Normandy in France.

of Harald Fairhair forth from their home ; how the Teutonic tribes, though they loved their kings, the sons of Odin, and sovereigns by the grace of God, detested the dictatorship of Harald. He was a mighty warrior, so says the ancient Saga, and laid Norway under him, and put out of the way some of those who held districts, and some of them he drove out of the land ; and besides, many men escaped out of Norway because of the overbearing of Harald Fairhair, for they would not stay to be subjects to him. These early emigrants were pagans, and it was not till the end of the tenth century that Christianity reached the Ultima Thule of Europe. The missionaries, however, who converted the freemen of Iceland, were freemen themselves. They did not come with the pomp and the pretensions of the church of Rome. They preached Christ rather than the Pope ; they taught religion rather than theology. Nor were they afraid of the old heathen gods, or angry with every custom that was not of Christian growth. Sometimes this tolerance may have been carried too far, for we read of kings, like Helge, who mixed in their faith, who trusted in Christ, but at the same time invoked Thor's aid whenever they went to sea or got into any difficulty. But on the whole, the kindly feeling of the Icelandic priesthood toward the national traditions and customs and prejudices of their converts must have been beneficial. Sons and daughters were not forced to call the gods whom their fathers and mothers had worshiped, devils ; and they were allowed to use the name of Allfadir, whom they had invoked in the prayers of their childhood, when praying to Him who is our Father in Heaven.

The Icelandic missionaries had peculiar advantages in their relation to the system of paganism which they came to combat. Nowhere else, perhaps, in the whole history of Christianity, has the missionary been brought face to face with a race of gods who were believed by their own worshipers to be doomed to death. The missionaries had only to proclaim that Balder was dead, that the mighty Odin and Thor were dead.

The people knew that these gods were to die, and the message of the One Everliving God must have touched their ears and their hearts with comfort and joy. Thus, while in Germany the priests were occupied for a long time in destroying every trace of hea- thenism, in condemning every ancient lay as the work of the 4

devil, in felling sacred trees and abolishing national customs, the missionaries of Iceland were able to take a more charitable view of the past, and they became the keepers of those very poems and laws and proverbs and Runic inscriptions which on the continent had to be put down with inquisitorial cruelty. The men to whom the collection of the ancient pagan poetry of Iceland is commonly ascribed were men of Christian learning : the one,* the founder of a public school ; the other,f famous as the author of a history of the North, the Heimskringla (the Home-Circle — the World). It is owing to their labors that we know anything of the ancient religion, the traditions, the max- ims, the habits of the Norsemen. Dr. Dasent dwells most fully on the religious system of Iceland, which is the same, at least in its general outline, as that believed in by all the members of the Teutonic family, and may truly be called one of the various dialects of the primitive religious and mythological language of the Aryan race. There is nothing more interesting than reli- gion in the whole history of man. By its side, poetry and art, science and law, sink into comparative insignificance.

* Ssemund the Wise. t Snorre Sturleson.

NORSE MYTHOLOGY COMPARED WITH THE GREEK.

DR. DASENT says the Norse mythology may hold its own against any other in the world. The fact that it is the religion of our forefathers ought to be enough to commend it to our attention ; but it may be pardonable in us to harbor even a sense of pride, if we find, for instance, that the mythology of our Gothic ancestors suffers nothing, but rather is the gainer in many respects by a comparison with that world-famed paganism of the ancient Greeks. We would therefore invite the attention of the reader to a brief comparison between the Norse and Greek systems of mythology.

A comparison between the two systems is both inter- esting and important. They are the two grandest sys- tems of cosmogony and theogony of which we have record, but the reader will generously pardon the writer if he ventures the statement already at the outset, that of the two the Norse system is the grander. These two, the Greek and the Norse, have, to a greater extent than all other systems of mythology combined, influenced the civilization, determined the destinies, socially and polit- ically, of the European nations, and shaped their polite literature. In literature it might indeed seem that the Greek mythology has played a more important part. We admit that it has acted a more conspicuous part, but we imagine that there exists a wonderful blindness,

among many writers, to the transcendent influence of the blood and spirit of ancient Norseland on North European, including English and American, character, which character has in turn stamped itself upon our literature (as, for instance, in the case of Shakespeare, the Thor among all Teutonic writers) ; and, furthermore, we rejoice in the absolute certainty to which we have arrived by studying the signs of the

times, that the com- parative ignorance, which has prevailed in this country and in England, of the history, literature, ancient religion and institutions of a people so closely allied to us by race, national characteristics, and tone of mind as the Norsemen, will sooner or later be removed ; that a school of Norse philology and antiquities will ere long flourish on the soil of the Vinland of our ancestors, and that there is a grand future, not far hence, when Norse mythology will be copiously reflected in our elegant literature, and in our fine arts, painting, sculpturing and music.

The Norse mythology differs widely from the Greek. They are the same in essence ; that is to say, both are a recognition of the forces and phenomena of nature as gods and demons; but all mythologies are the same in this respect, and the differences, between the various mythological systems, consist in the different ways in which nature has impressed different peoples, and in the different manner in which they have comprehended the universe, and personified or deified the various forces and phenomena of nature. In other words, it is in the ethical clothing and elaboration of the myths, that the different systems of mythology differ one from the other. In the Vedic and Homeric poets the germs of mythology are the same as in the Eddas of Norseland, but this common stock of materials, that is, the forces and phe- nomena of nature, has been moulded into an infinite

variety of shapes by the story-tellers of the Hindoos, Greeks and Norsemen.

Memory among the Greeks is Mnemosyne, the mother of the mnses, while among the Norsemen it is repre- sented by Munin, one of the ravens perched upon Odin's shoulders. The masculine Heimdal, god of the rainbow among the Norsemen, we find in Greece as the feminine Iris, who charged the clouds with water from the lakes and rivers, in order that it might fall again upon the earth in gentle fertilizing showers. She was daughter of Thaumas and Elektra, granddaughter of Okeanos, and the swift-footed gold-winged messenger of the gods. The Norse Balder is the Greek Adonis. Frigg, the mother of Balder, mourns the death of her son, while Aphrodite sorrows for her special favorite, the young rosy shepherd, Adonis. Her grief at his death, which was caused by a wild boar, was so great that she would not allow the lifeless body to be taken from her arms until the gods consoled her by decreeing that her lover might continue to live half the year, during the spring and summer, on the earth, while she might spend the other half with him in the lower world. Thus Balder and Adonis are both summer gods, and Frigg and Aphrodite are goddesses of gardens and flowers. The Norse god of Thunder, Thor (Thursday), who, among the Norse- men, is only the protector of heaven and earth, is the Greek Zeus, the father of gods and men. The gods of the Greeks are essentially free from decay and death. They live forever on Olympos, eating ambrosial food and drinking the nectar of immortality, while in their veins flows not immortal blood, but the imperishable ichor. In the Norse mythology, on the other hand, Odin him- self dies, and is swallowed by the Fenriswolf ; Thor con- quers the Midgard-serpent, but retreats only nine paces

and falls poisoned by the serpent's breath ; and the body of the good and beautiful Balder is consumed in the flames of his funeral pile. The Greek dwelt in bright and sunny lands, where the change from summer to winter brought with it no feelings of overpowering gloom. The outward nature exercised a cheering influ- ence upon him, making him happy, and this happiness he exhibited in his mythology. The Greek cared less to commune with the silent mountains, moaning winds, and heaying sea; he spent his life to a

great extent in the cities, where his mind would become more interested in human affairs, and where he could share his joys and sorrows with his kinsmen. While the Greek thus was brought up to the artificial society of the town, the hardy Norseman was inured to the rugged independence of the country. While the life and the nature surround- ing it, in the South, would naturally have a tendency to make the Greek more human, or rather to deify that which is human, the popular life and nature in the North would have a tendency to form in the minds of the Norsemen a sublimer and profounder conception of the universe. The Greek clings with tenacity to the beautiful earth; the earth is his mother. Zeus, sur- rounded by his gods and goddesses, sits on his golden throne, on Olympos, on the top of the mountain, in the cloud. But that is not lofty enough for the spirit of the Norsemen. Odin's Valhal is in heaven; nay, Odin himself is not the highest god; Muspelheim is situated above Asaheim, and in Muspelheim is Gimle, where reigns a god, who is mightier than Odin, the god whom Hyndla ventures not to name.

In Heroes and Hero Worship, Thomas Carlyle makes the following striking comparison between Norse and Greek mythology: To me, he says, there is in the

Norse system something very genuine, very great and manlike. A broad simplicity, rusticity, so very different from the light gracefulness of the old Greek paganism, distinguishes this Norse system. It is thought, the gen- uine thought of deep, rude, earnest minds, fairly opened to the things about them, a face-to-face and heart-to- heart inspection of things — the first characteristic of all good thought in all times. Not graceful lightness, half sport, as in the Greek paganism ; a certain homely truthfulness and rustic strength, a great rude sincerity, discloses itself here. Thus Oarlyle.

As the visible workings of nature are in the great and main features the same everywhere; in all climes we find the vaulted sky with its sun, moon, myriad stars and flitting clouds; the sea with its surging bil- lows; the land with its manifold species of plants and animals, its elevations and depressions; we find cold, heat, rain, winds, etc., although all these may vary widely in color, brilliancy, depth, height, degree, and other qual- ities ; and as the minds and hearts of men cherish hope, fear, anxiety, passion, etc., although they may be influ- enced and actuated by them in various ways and to various extents ; and as mythology is the impersonation of nature's forces and phenomena as contemplated by the human mind and heart, so all mythologies, no matter in what clime they originated and were fostered, must of necessity have their stock of materials, their ground- work or foundation and frame in common, while they may differ widely from each other in respect to peculiar characteristics, both in the ethical elaboration of the myth and in the architectural effect of the tout ensemble. Thus we have a tradition about a deluge, for instance, in nearly every country on the globe, but no two nations tell it alike. In Genesis we read of Noah and his ark,

and how the waters increased greatly upon the earth, destroying all flesh that moved upon the earth except- ing those who were with him in the ark. In Greece, Deukalion and his wife Pyrrha become the founders of a new race of men. According to the Greek story, a great flood had swept away the whole human race, except one pair, Deukalion and Pyrrha, who, as the flood abated, landed on Mt. Parnassos, and thence descend- ing, picked up stones and cast them round about, as Zeus had commanded. From these stones sprung a new race — men from those cast by Deukalion, and women from those cast by his wife. In

Norseland, Odin and his two brothers, Vile and Ve, slew the giant Ymer, and when he fell, so much blood flowed from his wounds, that the whole race of frost-giants was drowned, except a single giant, who saved himself with his household in a skiff (ark), and from him descended a new race of frost-giants. Now this is not a tradition carried from one place to the other ; it is a natural expression of the same thought; it is a similar effort to account for the origin of the land and the race of man. A people devel- ops its mythology in the same manner as it develops its language. The Norse mythology is related to the Greek mythology to the same extent that the Norse language is related to the Greek language, and no more; and comparative mythology, when the scholar wields the pen, is as interesting as comparative philology.

The Greeks have their chaos, the all-embracing space, the Norsemen have Ginungagap, the yawning abyss between Niflheim (the nebulous world) and Muspelheim (the world of fire). The Greeks have their titans, cor- responding in many respects to the Norse giants. The Greeks tell of the Melian nymphs ; the Norsemen of the elves, etc. ; but these comparisons are chiefly inter-

esting for the purpose of studying the differences between the Norse and Greek mind, which reflects itself in the expression of the thought.

The hard stone weeps tears, both in Greece and in Norseland; but let us notice how differently it is expressed. In Greece, Niobe, robbed of her children, was transformed into a rugged rock, down which tears trickled silently. She becomes a stone and still con- tinues her weeping —

Et lacrymas etiamnum marmora manant,

as the poet somewhere has it. In Norseland all nature laments the sad death of Balder, even the stones weep for him (grata Baldr).

Let us take another idea, and notice how differently the words symbolize the same truth or thought in the Bible, in Greece, and in Norseland. In the Bible:

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury : for all they did cast in of their abundance ; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.

A rich Thessalian offered to the temple at Delphi one hundred oxen with golden horns. A poor citizen from Hermion took as much meal from his sack as he could hold between two fingers, and he threw it into the fire that burned on the altar. Pythia said, that the gift of the poor man was more pleasing to the gods than that of the rich Thessalian.

In Norseland the Elder Edda has it:

Knowest thou how to pray? Knowest thou how to offer? Better not pray at all Than to offer too much, Better is nothing sent Than too much consumed.

In these few and simple words are couched the same thought as in the Jewish and Greek accounts just given. It is this identity in thought, with diversity of depth, breadth, beauty, simplicity, etc., in the expression or symbol that characterizes the differences between all mythological systems. Each has its own peculiari- ties stamped upon it, and in these peculiarities the spirit of the people, their tendency to thorough investi- gation or superficiality, their strength or weakness, their profoundness or frivolity, are reflected as in a mirror.

The beauty of the Greek mythology consists not so much in the system, considered as a whole, as in the separate single groups of myths. Each group has its own center around which it revolves, each group moves in its own sphere, and there develops its own charming perfection, without regard to the effect upon the system of mythology considered as a whole. Each group is exquisite, and furnishes an inexhaustible fountain of legendary narrative, but the central thought that should bind all these beautiful groups into one grand whole is weak. Nay, the complex multiplicity into which it constantly kept developing, as long as the Greek mind was in vigorous activity, was the cause that finally shat- tered it. Is not this same spirit, which we find so distinctly developed in the Greek mythology, this want of a centralizing thought, most wonderfully and per- fectly reflected in the social and political characteristics of the Greek states, and in all the more recent Ro- mance nations? Each Greek state developed a pecu-

liar beauty and perfection of its own; but between the different states (Sparta, Athens, etc.,) there was no strong bond of union which could keep them together, and hence all the feuds and civil wars and final disso- lution. In the Norse mythology, on the other hand, the centralizing idea or thought is its peculiar feature; in it lies its strength and beauty. In the Norse my- thology, the one myth and the one divinity is inextri- cably in communion with the other; and thus, also, the idea of unity, centralization, is a prominent feature, and one of the chief characteristics of the Teutonic nations. While the Greek mythology foreshadowed all the petty states of Greece, as well as those of South Europe and South America, the Norse mythology fore- shadowed the political and social destinies of united Scandinavia, united Great Britain, united Germany, and the United States of North America. When the Greeks unite, they fall. We Northerners live only to be united. As we would be led to suppose, from a study of the physical and climafcical peculiarities of Greece and Norseland, we find that the Greek mythology forms an epic poem, and that the Norse is a tragedy. Not only the mythology, considered as a whole, but even the character of its speech, and of its very words and phrases, must necessarily be suggested and modified by the external features of the country. Thus in Greece, where the sun's rays never scorch, and where the north- ern winds never pierce, we naturally find in the speech of the people, brilliancy rather than gloom, life rather than decay, and constant renovation rather than pro- longed lethargy. But in the frozen-bound regions of the North, where the long arms of the glaciers clutch the valleys in their cold embrace, and the death -portending avalanches cut their way down the mountain-sidef,

the tongue of the people would, with a peculiar inten- sity of feeling, dwell upon the tragedy of nature.

The Danish poet Grundtvig expressed a similar idea more than sixty years ago, when he said that the Asa-Faith unfolds in five acts the most glorious drama of victory that ever has been composed, or ever could be composed, by any mortal poet. And Hauch defines these five acts as follows:

Act II. The time preceding the death of Balder. Act III. The death of Balder.

Act IV. The time immediately succeeding the death of Balder.

Act V. Ragnarok, the Twilight of the gods, that is, the decline

and fall immediately followed by the regeneration of the world.

It is an inestimable peculiarity of the Norse mythol- ogy, that it, in addition to beginning with a theogony (birth of the gods), also ends with a theoktony (death of the gods). In the Greek mythology, the drama lacks the fifth or final act, and we have only a prosaic account of how the people at length grew tired of their gods, and left them when they became old and feeble. But the Eddas have a theoktonic myth, in which the heroic death of the gods is sung with the same poetic spirit as their youthful exploits and victories. As the shades of night flee before the morning dawn, thus Valhal's gods had to sink into the earth, when the idea, that an idol is of no consequence in this world, first burst upon the minds of the idol-worshipers. This idea spontaneously created the myth of Ragnarok. All the elements of its mythical form were foreshadowed in the older group of Norse conceptions. The idea of Ragnarok was suggested already in the Creation; for the gods are there represented as proceeding from giants, that is, from an evil, chaotic source, and, moreover, that

which can be born must die. The Greeks did not release the titans from their prisons in Tartaros and bring them up to enter the last struggle with the gods. Signs of such a contest flitted about like clouds in the deep-blue southern sky, but they did not gather into a deluging thunder-storm. The ideas were too broken and scattered to be united into one grand picture. The Greek was so much allured by the pleasures of life, that he could find no time to fathom its depths or rise above it. And hence, when the glories of this life had vanished, there remained nothing but a vain shadow, a lower world, where the pale ghosts of the dead knew no greater happiness than to receive tidings from this busy world.

The Norseman willingly yields the prize to the Greek when the question is of precision in details and external adornment of the figures; but when we speak of deep significance and intrinsic power, the Norseman points quietly at Kagnarok, the Twilight of the gods, and the Greek is silent.

The Goth, as has before been indicated, concentrated life; the Greek divided it into parcels. Thus the Greek mythology is frivolous, the Norse is profound. The frivolous mind lives but to enjoy the passing mo- ment; the profound mind reflects, considers the past and the future. The Greek abandoned himself wholly to the pleasures of this life, regardless of the past or future. The Norseman accepted life as a good gift, but he knew that he was merely its transient pos- sessor. Over every moment of life hangs a threatening sword, which may in the next moment prove fatal. Life possesses no hour of the future. And this is the peculiar characteristic of the heroic life in the North, that our ancestors were powerfully impressed with the

uncertainty of life. They constantly witnessed the interchange of life and death, and this nourished in them the thought that life is not worth keeping, for no one knows how soon it may end. Life itself has no value, but the object constantly to be held in view is to die an honorable death. While we are permitted to live, let us strive to die with honor, it is said in Bjarkemaal; and in the lay of Hamder of the Elder Edda we read:

Though now or to-morrow we shsil die,—

It is this same conception of the problem of life that in the Christian religion has assumed a diviner form. Though his ideas were clothed in a ruder form, the Norseman still reached the same depth of thought as when the Christian says: I am ready to lay down my life, if I may but die happy, die a child of God; for what is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

The Norseman always concentrated his ideas as much as possible. For this reason he knew but three sins — perjury, murder, and adultery; that is, sin against God, sin against the state, and sin against fellow-man; and all these are in fact but one sin — deceitfulness. In the same manner the Norseman concentrated his ideas in regard to the punishment of sin. When the Eddas tell us about the punishment of the wicked, they sum it all up in Naastrand (the strand of corpses), that place

far from the sun, that large and terrible cave, the doors of which open to the north. This cave is built of serpents wattled together, and the heads of all the ser- pents turn into the cave, filling it with streams of poison, in which perjurers, murderers and adulterers have to wade. The suffering is terrible; gory hearts hang outside of their breasts; their faces are dyed in blood; strong venom-dragons fiercely run through their hearts; their hands are riveted together with ever- burning stones; their clothes are wrapped in flames; remorseless ravens tear their eyes from their heads:

The point to be observed is, that all the punish- ment here described is the same for all the wicked.

But with this, the versatile Greek is not content. He multiplies the sins and the punishments. Tartaros is full of despair and tears, and the wicked there suffer a variety of tortures. Enormous vultures continually gnaw the liver of Tityos, but it always grows again. Ixion is lashed with serpents to a wheel, which a strong wind drives continually round and round. Tan- talos suffers from an unceasing dread of being crushed by a great rock that hangs over his head; he stands in a stream of water that flows up to his throat, and he almost perishes from thirst; whenever he bends his head to drink the water recedes; delicious fruits hang over his head; whenever he stretches out his hand they evade his grasp. Thus it is to be tantalized. The

Danaides must fill a cistern that has holes in the bot- tom; all the water they pour in runs out equally fast. Sisyphos, sweating and all out of breath, rolls his huge stone up the mountain side; when he reaches the sum- mit, the stone rolls down again.

The fundamental idea is always the same. It is always punishment for sin; but it is expressed and illustrated in so many different ways. The variety enhances the beauty. The Greek mythology is rich, for profuseness of illustration is wealth. The Norse mythology is poor, because it is so strong; it consumes all its strength in the profoundness of its thought. The Norse mythology excels in the concentratedness and strength of the

whole system; the Greek excels in the beauty of the separate groups of myths. The one is a religion of strength, the other of beauty.

The influence that the outward features of a coun- try exercise upon the thoughts and feelings of men, especially during the vigorous, imaginative, poetic and prophetic childhood of a nation, can hardly be over- estimated. Necessarily, therefore, do we find this influ- ence affecting and modifying a nation's mythology, which is a child-like people's thoughts and feelings, contemplating nature reflected in a system of religion. Hence, it is eminently fitting, in comparing the Norse mythology with the Greek, to take a look at the home of the Norsemen. We, therefore, cordially invite the traveler from the smooth-beaten tracks of southern Eu- rope to the mountains, lakes, valleys and fjords of Norseland. You may come in midsummer, when Bal- der (the summer sunlight) rules supreme, when the radiant dawn and glowing sunset kiss each other and go hand in hand on the mountain tops ; but we would also invite you to tarry until Balder is slain, when the

wintry gloom, with its long nights, sits brooding over the country, and Loke (Thok, fire) weeps his arid tears (sparks) over the desolation he has wrought.

Norway is dark, cloudy, severe, grand, and majestic. Greece is light, variegated, mild, and beautiful. No one can long more deeply for the light of summer, with its mild and gentle breezes from the south, than the Norse- man. When he has pondered on his own thoughts dur- ing the loug winter, when the sun entirely or nearly disappeared from above the horizon, and nothing but northern lights flickered and painted the colors of the rainbow over his head, he welcomes the spring sun with enthusiastic delight. It was this deep longing for Balder that drove swarms of Norsemen on viking expeditions to France, Spain, and England; through the pillars of Hercules to Italy, Greece, Constantinople and Palestine, and over the surging main to Iceland, Greenland and Vinland. It is this deep longing for Balder that every year brings thousands of Norsemen to alight upon our shores and scatter themselves to their numberless settle- ments in these United States. Still every Norse emi- grant, if he has aught in him worthy of his race, thinks he shall once more see those weird, gigantic, snow-capped mountains, that stretched their tall heads far above the clouds and seemed to look half anxiously, half angrily after him as his bark was floating across the deep sea.

There is something in the natural scenery of Nor- way— a peculiar blending of the grand, the picturesque, the gigantic, bewildering and majestic. There is some- thing that leaves you in bewildering amazement, when you have seen it, and makes you ask yourself, Was it real or was it only a dream? Norway is in fact one huge imposing rock, and its valleys are but great clefts

in it. Through these clefts the rivers, fed by vast gla- ciers upon the mountains, find their way to the sea. They come from the distance, now musically and chat- tingly meandering their way beneath the willows, now tumbling down the slopes, reeking and distorted by the rocks that oppose them, until they reach some awful precipice and tumble down some eight hundred to a thousand feet in a single leap into the depths below, where no human being ever yet set his foot. We are not overdrawing the picture. You cannot get to the foot of such falls as the Voring Force or Ejukan Force, but you may look over the precipice from above and see the waters pouring like fine and fleecy wool into the seething caldron, where you can discern through the vapory mists shoots of foam at the bottom, like rockets of water, radiating in every direction.

You hear a low rumbling sound around you, and the very rock vibrates beneath your feet; and as you hang half giddy over the cliff, clasping your arms around some young birch- tree that tremblingly leans over the brink of the steep, and turn your eyes to the huge mountain mass that breasts you, — its black, melancholy sides seemingly within a stone's throw, and its snow-white head far in the clouds above, — your thoughts involuntarily turn to Mm, the God, whom the skald dare not name, to him at whose bidding Gausta Fjeld and Eeeking Force sprang from Ginungagap, from the body of the giant Ymer, from chaos. You look longer upon this won- derful scene, and you begin to think of Eagnarok, of the Twilight of the gods. Once seen, and the grand picture, which defies the brush of the painter, will for- ever afterwards float before your mind like a dream.

Make a journey by steamer on some of those noble and magnificent fjords on the west coast of Norseland.

The whole scenery looks like a moving panorama of the finest description. The dark mountains rise almost perpendicularly from the water's edge to an enormous height ; their summits, crowned with ice and snow, stand out sharp and clear against the bright blue sky; and the ravines on the mountain tops are filled with huge glaciers, that clasp their frosty arms around the valley, and send down, like streams of tears along the weather- beaten cheeks of the mountains, numerous waterfalls and cascades, falling in an endless variety of graceful shapes from various altitudes into the fjord below. Sometimes a solitary peak lifts its lordly head a thousand feet clear above the surrounding mountains, and towering like a monarch over all, it defiantly refuses to hold com- munion with any living thing save the eagle. Here and there a force appears, like a strip of silvery fleecy cloud, suspended from the brow of the mountain, and dashing down more than two thousand feet in one leap ; and all this marvelously grand scenery, from base to peak, stands reflected, as deep as it is lofty, in the calm, clear, sea-green water of the fjord, perfect as in a mirror.

There is no storm; the deep water of the fjord is silent and at rest. Not even the flight of a single bird ruffles its glassy surface. As the steamer glides gently along between the rocky walls, you hear no sound save the monotonous throbbing of the screw and the conse- quent splashing of the water. All else is still as death. The forces hang in silence all around, occasionally overarched by rainbows suspended in the rising mist. The naked mountains have a sombre look, that would make you melancholy were it not for the overpowering grandeur. Sunshine reaches the water only when the sun's rays fall nearly vertically, in consequence of the immense height of the mountains' sides, whose enor-

mous shadows almost perpetually overshade the narrow fjord. The noonday sun paints a streak of delicate palish green on one side, forming a striking contrast to the other dark overshadowed side of the profound fjord. It is awe-inspiring. It is stupendous. It is sol- emnly grand. You can but fancy yourself in a fairy land, with elves and sprites and neckens and trolls dancing in sportive glee all around you.

Words can paint no adequate picture of the stu- pendousness, majesty and grandeur of Norse scenery; but can the reader wonder any longer that this coun- try has given to the world such marvelous productions in poetry, music and the fine arts? Nay, what is more to our purpose at present, would you not look for a grand and marvelous mythological system from the poetic and imaginative childhood of the nation that inhabits this land ? Knock, and it shall be opened unto you ! and entering the solemn halls and palaces of the gods, where all is cordiality and purity, you will find there perfectly reflected the wild and tumultuous

conflict of the elements, strong rustic pictures, full of earnest and deep thought, awe-inspiring and wonderful. You will find that simple and martial religion which inspired the early Norsemen and developed them like a tree full of vigor extending long branches over all Europe. You will find that simple and martial religion which gave the Norsemen that restless unconquerable spirit, apt to take fire at the very mention of subjection and con- straint; that religion which forged the instruments that broke the fetters manufactured by the Eoman emperors, destroyed tyrants and slaves, and taught men that nature having made all free and equal, no other reason but their mutual happiness could be assigned for making them dependent. You will find

that simple and martial religion which was cherished by those vast multitudes which, as Milton says, the populous North

poured from her frozen loins to pass

Rhene or the Danaw, when her barbarous sons Came like a deluge on the South and spread Beneath Gibraltar and the Libyan sands.

But it may be necessary for the reader to refresh him- self with a few draughts of that excellent beverage kept in Mimer's gushing fountain, and drink with his glit- tering horn, before he will be willing to accept these and many more such statements that we will make in the course of this introduction.

To return to our theme. The gods of Norseland are stern and awe-inspiring; those of Greece are gentle and lovely. In the Norse mythology we find deep devo- tion, but seldom tears. In the Greek, there are violent emotions and the tears flow copiously. In Norseland, there is plenty of imagination; but it is not of that light, variegated, butterfly, soap-bubble nature as in Greece. In the Norse mythology there is plenty of cor- diality and sincerity, and the gods treat you hospitably to flesh of the boar, Ssehrimner; and the valkyries will give you deep draughts from bowls flowing with ale. In Greece there is gracefulness, a perfect etiquette, and you dine on ambrosia and nectar ; there Eros and Psyche, the graces and muses, hover about you like heavenly cherubs. Graces and muses are wanting in Norseland, The Norse mythology is characterized throughout by a deep and genuine sincerity; the Greek, on the other hand, by a sublime gracefulness; but, with Carlyle, we think that sincerity is better than grace.

But the comparison between Norse and Greek mythology is too vast a field for us to attempt to do

justice to it in this volume. It would be an interest- ing work to show how Norse and Greek mythologies respectively have colored the religious, social, political and literary character of Greek and Eomance peoples on the one hand, and Norsemen and Teutons on the other. Somebody will undoubtedly in due time be inspired to undertake such a task. We must study both, and when they are harmoniously blended in our nature, we must let them together shape our political, social and literary destinies, and, tempered by the Mosaic-Christian religion, they may be entitled to some consideration even in our religious life.

IN all that has been said up to this time Eoman mythology has not once been mentioned. Why not? Properly speaking, there is no such thing. It is an historical fact, that nearly the whole Roman literature, especially that part of it which may be called hettes-lettres, is scarcely anything but imitation. It did not,

like the Greek and Old Norse, spring from the popular mind, by which it was cherished through centuries; but at least a large portion of it was produced for pay and for ornament, mostly in the time of the tyrant Augustus, to tickle his ear and gild those chains that were artfully forged to fetter the peoples of southern Europe. This is a dry but stubborn truth, and^ it is wonderful with what tenacity the schools in all civilized lands have clung to the Roman or Latin language, after it had become nothing but a mere corpse; as though it could be expected that any genuine culture could be derived from this dead monster.

It is, however, an encouraging fact that the Teutonic races are indicating a tendency to emancipate themselves from the fetters of Roman bondage, and happy should we be if our English words were emancipated therefrom. We should then use neither emancipate, nor tendency, nor indicate, but would have enough of Gothic words to use in place of them. Ay, the signs

of the times are encouraging. Look at what is being done at Oxford and Cambridge, in London and in Edinburgh. Behold what has been done during these later years by Dasent, Samuel Laing, Thorpe, Carlyle, Max Mliller, Cleasby, Vigfusson, Magnusson, Morris, Hjaltalin, and others. And look at the publications of the Clarendon press, which is now publishing Icelandic Sagas in the original text. This is right. Every scrap of Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon literature must be published, for we must see what those old heroes, who crushed Eome and instituted a new order of things, thought in every direction. "We must find out what their aspirations were. To the credit of the Scandinavians it must here be said, that they began to appreciate their old Icelandic literature much sooner than the rich Englishman realized the value of the Anglo-Saxon, and that the English are indebted to Kasmus Rask, the Danish scholar, for the most valuable contribution to Anglo-Saxon studies; but it must also be admitted, in the first place, that* the Scandinavians have done far too little for Icelandic, and, in the next place, that without a preparation in Icelandic, but little progress could be made in the study of Anglo-Saxon. But England, with its usual liberality in literary matters, is now rapidly making amends for the past. And well she might. In the publication of the Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon literature she is the greatest gainer, for it is nothing less than a bridge, that will unite her present and past history. Maurer and Mobius are watching with Argos eyes the interests of Teutonic studies in Germany.

Greek should be studied, for that is no imitation. It is indigenous. It is a crystal clear stream flowing unadulterated from the Castalian fountain of Parnassos.

Our warfare, therefore, is not against Greek, but against Latin. We have suffered long enough with our necks under the ponderous Eoman joke in all its various forms ; take it as fetters forged by the Eoman emperors, as crosiers in the hands of the Koman popes, or as rods in the hands of the Koman school-masters. The Goths severed the fetters of the Eoman emperors, Luther and the Germans broke the crosiers of the Koman popes, but all the Teutons have submissively kissed the rod of the Roman school-master, although this was the most dangerous of the three : it was the deadly weapon concealed in the hand of the assassin.

The Romans were a people of robbers both in a political and in a literary sense. Nay, the Roman writ- ers themselves tell us that the divine founder of the city, Romulus, was a captain of rodders; that Mars, the god of ivar, was his father ; and that a wolf (rapa- city), descending from the mountains to drink, ran at the cry

of the child and fed him under a fig-tree, caressing and licking him as if he had been her own son, the iufant hanging on to her as if she had been his mother. This Romulus began his great exploits by hilling his own brother. When the new city seemed to want women, to insure its duration, he proclaimed a magnificent feast throughout all the neighboring vil- lages, at which feast were presented, among other things, the terrible shows of gladiators. While the strangers were most intent upon the spectacle, a number of Ro- man youths rushed in among the Sabines, seized the youngest and fairest of their wives and daughters, and carried them off by violence. In vain the parents and husbands protested against this hreach of hospitality. This same Romulus ended his heroic career by being assassinated by his friends, or, as others say, torn in

pieces in the senate-house. Certain it is that the Ro- mans murdered him, and then declared him the guard- ian spirit of the city; thus worshiping as a god, by name Quirinus, him whom they could not bear as a king. Such falsehoods as the one the senate invented, when they said that Romulus, whom they had mur- dered, had been taken up into heaven, the Roman writers tell us were constantly taught to the Romans by Numa Pompilius, and by other Sabine and Etrurian priests; and such instruction laid the foundation of their myths. The history of Romulus is, in fact, in miniature, the history of Rome.

But in spite of this, and much else that can in justice be said against Rome and Latin, we cannot afford to throw the language and literature of the Romans en- tirely overboard. Their history was too remarkable for that ; besides, many scribbled in Latin down through the middle ages, and the Latin language has played so conspicuous a part in English literature, and in the sciences, that no educated man can very well do with- out it. What we respectfully object to is making it the foundation of all education, this bringing the scholar up, so to speak, on Latin language, history and litera- ture; this nourishing and moulding the tender heart and mind on Roman thought, — thus making the man, intellectually and morally, a slave bound in Roman chains, while we free-born Goths, the descendants of Odin and Thor, ought to begin our education and receive our first impressions from our own ancestors. The tree should draw its nourishment from its own roots; and we Americans are the youngest and most vigorous branch of that glorious Gothic tree, the beau- tiful and noble Ygdrasil in the Norse cosmogony, whose three grand roots strike down among the Anglo-Saxons,

Scandinavians, and Germans. In order fully to com- prehend the man, we must study the life of the child ; and in order to comprehend ourselves as a people, we must study our own ancient history and literature and make, ourselves thoroughly acquainted with the imagi- native and prophetic childhood of the Teutonic race. We must give far more attention than we do, first, to English and Anglo-Saxon, and we must, as we have heard Dr. S. H. Carpenter, of the University of Wis- consin, most truthfully remark, begin with the most modern English, and then follow it step by step, cen- tury by century, back to the most ancient Anglo-Saxon. A living language can be learned ten times as fast as a dead one, and we would apply Dr. Carpenter's* princi- ple still further. We would make one of the living Romanic languages (French, Italian, or Spanish,) a key to the Latin; and above all, we would make modern Greek a preparation for old classic

Greek. It cannot be controverted that children learn to read and write a language much sooner and easier if they first learn to speak it, even though the book-speech may differ con- siderably from the dialect which the child learned from his mother ; ample evidence of which fact may be found in the different counties of England and Scotland and throughout the European countries.

In the next place, that is, next after English and Anglo-Saxon, we must study German, Mseso-Gothic and the Scandinavian languages, and especially Icelandic, which is the only living key to the history of the mid- dle ages, and to the Old Norse literature. It is the only language now in use in an almost unchanged form, through a knowledge of which we can read the litera-

* Author of English of the Fourteenth Century and of An Introduction to the Study of the Anglo-Saxon Language.

ture of the middle ages. We must by no means forget that we have Teutonic antiquities to which we stand in an entirely different and far closer relation than we do to Greece or Eome. And the Norsemen have an old literature, which the scholar must of necessity be famil- iar with in order to comprehend the history of the middle ages.

When we have thus done justice to our own Teu- tonic race we may turn our attention to the ancient peoples around the Mediterranean Sea, the most impor- tant of which in literary and historical respects are the Hebrews, Greeks and Komans. The antiquities of these peoples will always form important departments in our colleges and universities, and it is our duty to study them; but they should not, as they still to a great extent do, constitute the all-absorbing subject of our attention, the summa summarum, the foundation and superstructure of our education and culture.

It has been argued by some that the Latin is more terse than English ; but did the reader ever reflect that it takes about sixty syllables in Latin to express all that we can say in English with forty syllables ? The large number of inflectional endings have also been lauded as a point of superior excellence in the Latin; but as a language grows and makes progress, it grad- ually emancipates itself from the thraldom of inflection and contents itself with the abstract, spiritual chain that links the words together into sentences; and did the reader ever run across this significant truth, expressed by George P. Marsh, who says that in Latin you have to be able to analyse and parse a sentence before you can comprehend it, while in Eng- lish you must comprehend the sentence before you can analyse or parse ? Forward has been and will

forever be the watchword of languages. They must either progress or die.

"When the question is asked, whether Hebrew, Greek or Latin should be preferred by the student, we answer that the choice is not a difficult one to make, and our opinion has in fact already been given. Latin is the language of a race of robbers ; most of it is nothing but imitation, and besides it is a mere corpse, while Greek is the only one of the three that is still living, and modern Greek — for that is what we must begin with — is the key to the old Greek liter- ature with its rich, beautiful and original store of my- thology, poetry, history, oratory, and philosophy. As Icelandic in the extreme north of Europe is the living

key to the middle ages and to the celebrated Old Norse Eddas and Sagas, so modern Greek in the far south is the living language, that introduces us to the spirit of Homer, Herodotus, Demosthenes, and Plato ; and thus the norns or fates, who preside over the destinies of men and nations, have in a most won- derful manner knit, or rather woven, us together with the Greeks, and the more we investigate the develop- ment and progress of nations and civilization, the more vividly the truth will flash upon our minds, that the Greek and the Icelandic are two silver-haired veterans, who hold in their hands two golden keys, — the one to unlock the treasures of ancient times, the other those of the middle ages ; the one the treasures of the south and the other those of the north of Europe. But we must free ourselves from the bondage of Rome!

When we get away from Eome, where slaves were employed as teachers, and pay more attention to the antiquities of Greece, where it was the highest honor

that the greatest, noblest and most eloquent men could attain to, to be listened to by youths eager to learn and to be taught, then the present slavery both of the teacher and of the student will cease, but scarcely before then.

The case of Shakespeare is an eminent example to us of what the G-oth is able to accomplish, when he breaks the Koman chains. His works are not an imitation of Seneca or iEschylus, nor are they the fruit of a careful study of the Ars Poetica or Gradus ad Parnassum. No, he knew but little Latin and less Greek, but what made him the undisputed Hercules in English literature was the heroic spirit of Gothdom which flowed in his veins, and which drove him away from the Latin school before his emotional nature had been flogged and tortured out of him. Shakespeare, and not Eoman literature and scholasticism, is the lever that has raised English litera- ture and given it the first rank among all the Teutons. It is not, we repeat, the deluge of Latin words that flood it, that has given this preeminence to English, but it is the genuine Gothic strength that everywhere has tried to break down the Koman walls. The slaves of Latin will find it difficult enough to explain how Shakespeare, who was not for an age, but for all time, — he whose Latin was small and whose Greek was less, — how he, the star of poets, the sweet swan of Avon, was made as well as born. Ay, he was made. He was also one of those who, to cast a living line had to sweat, and strike the second heat upon the Muses' anvil. It is true that Shakespeare did not arrive at a full appreciation of the Gothic spirit, for he did not have an opportunity to acquaint himself thor- oughly with the Gothic myths; but then they ever haunted him like the ghost of Hamlet, accusing their

murderer, without rinding any avenger. We therefore count Shakespeare on our side of this great question.

May the time speedily come, nay, the time must come, when Greek and Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse and Gothic and German will shake hands over the bloody chasm of Eoman vandalism!

We fancy we see more than one who reads this chap- ter, and does not remember that he is a son of Thor, stretch out his hand for Mjolner, that huge and mighty hammer of Thor, to swing it at us for what we have said and have not said about Eome, Eoman mythology, and the Latin language and literature; but, alas I for him, and fortunately for us, the Eoman school-master took Thor's hammer away from him and whipped the strength wherewith to wield it out of him. We only repeat that we know nothing of Eoman mythology, but the Greek and Norse are twin sisters, and with the assistance of the Mosaic-Christian religion they have a

grand mission in the Gothic-Greek development of the world.

Note.— Fearing lest some of our readers may consider these emphatic assertions wild, unfounded, and not sustained by the highest authority, we take the liberty of making the following quotations from H. A. Taine, who is himself a disciple of Guizot, the historian of civilization. On page 17 of Taine's English Literatvre, Vol. I (Van Laun's translation), we read: If man, reduced to narrow conceptions and deprived of all speculative refinement, is at the same time altogether absorbed and straightened by practical occupations, you will find, as in Rome, rudimentary deities, mere hollow names, serving t« designate the trivial details of agriculture, generation, household concerns, eti- quettes,—in fact, of marriage, of the farm,— producing a mythology, a philoso- phy, a poetry, either worth nothing or borrowed.

On page 20 of that same work Taine says : Among the ancients, the Latin literature is worth nothing at the outset, then borrowed and imitative.

Thus it will be seen that we are not alone in our opposition to Romanism, and witb Taine we might even be willing to be wrong for the present.

CONSIDEKABLE has been said on this subject in the preceding pages, and the interpretation which will be adhered to in this volume has been clearly indi- cated. We propose now to give a general synopsis of the more prominent methods of interpreting Norse my- thology.

In one thing all undoubtedly agree, namely, that all mythologies embody religious faith. As we, even to this day, each in his own way, seek to find God by philosophical speculation (natural theology), by our emo- tions, by good deeds, or by all these at one time; and as we, when we have found him, rest upon his breast, although we do not fully agree as to our conception of him, each one of us having his own God as each has his own rainbow ; thus our forefathers sought God every- where— in the rocks, in the babbling stream, in the heavy ear of grain, in the star-strewn sky of night, and in the splendor of the sun. It was revelations of divinity that they looked for. The fundamental element in their mythology was a religious one, and this fact must never be lost sight of. To interpret a myth, then, is not only to give its source, but also its aim and object, together with the thoughts and feelings that it awakens in the human breast.

Some writers (William and Mary Howitt and others) maintain that the Norse mythology is a degradation of,

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or aberration from, the true religion, which was revealed to man in the earliest period of the history of the human race and is found pure and undefiled in the Bible; that it presents sparkling waters from the original fount- ain of tradition. They point with seriousness to it as something that bears us on toward the primal period of one tongue and one religion. In reference to the Elder Edda, they say that it descended through vast ages, growing, like all traditions, continually darker, and accumulating lower matter and more divergent and more pagan doctrines, as the walls of old castles become covered with mosses and lichens, till it finally assumed the form in which it was collected from the mouths of the people, and put in a permanent written form. These interpreters claim that through all mythologies there run certain great lines,

which converge toward one common center and point to an original source of a religious faith, which has grown dimmer and more disfigured, the further it has gone. The geographical center, they say, from which all these systems of heathen belief have proceeded is the same — Central Asia ; they point to the eastern origin of the Norseman ; they assert, with full confidence, that the religious creed of the Norse- man is the faith of Persia, India, Greece, and every other country, transferred to the snow-capped mountains of Norway and jokuls of Iceland, having only been modified there, so as to give it an air of originality without de- stroying its primeval features. They argue that Loke of the Norsemen, Pluto of the Greeks, Ahriman of the Persians, Siva of the Hindoos, etc., are all originally the devil of the Bible, who has changed his name and more or less his personal form and characteristics. The biblical Trinity is degenerated into the threefold trinity of Odin, Vile, and Ve; Odin, Hcener, and Loder; and 6

Odin, Thor, and Balder. They find in the Norse cos- mogony, in a somewhat mutilated and interpolated con- dition, the Scripture theory of the creation, preservation, destruction and regeneration of the world. Ygdrasil is the tree of life in the garden of Eden ; Ask and Embla, the first human pair, are Adam and Eve; the blood of the slain giant Ymer, in which the whole race of frost-giants was drowned, (excepting one pair, who were saved, and from whom a new giant race descended,) is the flood of Noah, the deluge ; the citadel called Mid- gard is the tower of Babel; in the death of Balder, by Hoder, who was instigated by Loke, they find the cruci- fixion of Christ by Judas, instigated by the devil, etc. ; displaying a vast amount of erudition, profoundness and ingenuity, that might have been applied to some good purpose. We refrain from giving more of the results of their learned and erudite investigations, from fear of seducing ourselves or our readers into the adoption of their absurdities.

Other scholars (Snorre Sturleson, Saxo Grammaticus, Suhm, Rask, and others,) give us what is called an his- torical interpretation, asserting that Odin, Thor, Balder, and the other deities that figure in the Norse mythology, are veritable ancestors of the Norsemen, — men and women who have lived in the remote past; and as dis- tance lends enchantment to the view, so the ordinary kings and priests of pre-historic times have been magnified into gods. Odin and the other divinities are in Snorre Sturleson's Heimskringla represented as having come to Norseland from the great Svithiod, a country lying be- tween the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. According to the historical interpretation the mythical worlds are real countries that can be pointed out on the map. This was the prevailing view taken during the last two centuries,

and even that sagacious scholar of the earlier part of this century, Professor Kasmus Rask, adheres almost exclu- sively to the historical interpretation.

It is curious to read these old authors and observe how sincerely they have looked upon Odin as an extra- ordinary and enterprising person who formerly ruled in the North and inaugurated great changes in the govern- ment, customs and religion of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. They speak of the great authority which he enjoyed, and how he even had divine honors paid to him. They ingeniously connect Odin with the Roman Com- monwealth, with Mithridates and Pompey (see p. 232). This historical sketch of Odin will be given in connec- tion with the Odinic myth ; suffice it here to say that the king of Pontus and all his barbarian allies were obliged to yield to the genius of Pompey. And here it is said that Odin was one of the number defeated by Pompey. He was obliged to withdraw himself by flight from the vengeance of the

Romans ! Odin came to Norway by way of Holstein and Jutland. On his way through Denmark he founded the city Odinse, and placed his son Skjold upon the Danish throne. How profound! What eru- dition! How much like the enthusiastic work of the Swede Rudbeck, who makes out the Atlantis of Plato to be Sweden, and shows that Japhet, son of Noah, came there and settled with his family ! What profound learn- ing (geldhrtheit) these men must have possessed ! We are amazed and confounded at the vast amount of mental force that has been brought into activity, at the untiring zeal and the marvelous ingenuity, with which these theo- ries have been set up; but we cannot witness all this without a feeling of deep regret that so much erudition and ingenuity, so much mental strength, was so fruit- lessly thrown away. They were generally profound Latin

scholars, and wrote the most of their books in Latin ; but those ponderous tomes make their authors fools in folios in the light of modern historical knowledge. They studied by that kind of lamp that illuminates a small spot on the table, but leaves the whole room dark. A more careful and enlightened study of our early literature has of course given the death-blow to so prosaic an interpretation of the Norse mythology as the purely historical one is.

Then we are met by the so-called ethical interpretation of mythology, seeking its origin in man's peculiar nature, especially in a moral point of view. The advocates of this theory claim that mythology is a mere fiction created to satisfy man's spiritual, moral, and emotional nature. The gods according to this interpretation represent man's virtues and vices, emotions, faculties of mind and muscle, etc., personified. Odin, they say, is wisdom; Balder is goodness; Thor is strength; Heimdal is grace, etc. Again: Thor is the impersonation of strength and cour- age ; the giants represent impotent sloth and arrogance ; the conflicts between Thor and the giants are a struggle going on in the human breast. And again : the mischief- maker Loke instigated the blind Hoder to kill the good Balder; Nanna, Balder's wife, took her husband's death so much to heart, that she died of grief; Hoder is after- wards slain by Odin's son Vale ; all nature weeps for Bal- der, but still he is not released from Hel (hell). That is, physical strength with its blind earthly desires (Hoder), guided by sin (Loke), unconsciously kills innocence, (Balder). Love (Nanna) dies broken-hearted; reflection (Vale) is aroused and subdues physical strength (Hoder) ; but innocence (Balder) has vanished from the world to remain in Hel's regions until the earth is regenerated, after Kagnarok. The ethical interpretation makes the gods the faculties of the spirit, and the giants the facul-

ties of the body, in man ; and between the two, sonl and body, there is a constant struggle for supremacy. This interpretation is very good, because it is very poetic, but it has more to do with the application of the myths than with their primary source.

Finally, an interpretation, that has frequently been alluded to in the preceding pages of this introduction, is the physical, or interpretation from nature, — impersona- tion of the visible workings of nature. The divinities are the forces and phenomena of nature personified ; and evidence of the correctness of this view can be abundantly presented by defining etymologically the names of the several divinities, their attributes, dwellings and achieve- ments, and by showing how faithfully the works of the gods correspond with the events and scenes of the outward world. There is no doubt that this is the true interpretation of all mythologies ; and that it is, so to speak, the key to the Norse mythology, it is hoped will be sufficiently

demonstrated in the second part of this book in connection with the myths them- selves ; but the ethical, or perhaps better the spiritual, interpretation must by all means be added. The spir- itual or ethical and the physical interpretation must be combined. In other words, we can scarcely make the interpretation too anthropomorphic. The phenomena and forces of nature have been personified by our fore- fathers into deities, but the myths have been elabo- rated to suit and correspond with the moral, intel- lectual and emotional nature, — the inner life of man. The deities have been conceived in a human form, with human attributes and affections. The ancient Norsemen have made their mythology reflect human nature, and have clothed the gods with their own faculties of mind and body in respect to good and

evil, virtue and vice, right and wrong. As Kudolf Keyser beautifully expresses himself:

The gods are the ordaining powers of nature clothed in personality. They direct the world, which they created; but beside them stand the mighty goddesses of fate and time, the great norns, who sustain the world-structure, the all-embracing tree of the world (Ygdrasil). The life of the world is a strug- gle between the good and light gods on the one side, and the offspring of chaotic matter, the giants, nature's disturbing forces, on the other. This struggle extends also into man's being: the spirit proceeds from the gods, the body belongs to the world of the giants ; they struggle with each other for the supremacy. If the spirit conquers by virtue and bravery, man goes to heaven after death, to fight in concert with the gods against the evil powers; but if the body conquers and links the spirit to itself by weakness and low desires, then man sinks after death to the world of the giants in the lower regions, and joins him- self with the evil powers in the warfare against the gods.

Nature is the mother at whose breast we all are nourished. In ancient times she was the object of childlike contemplation, nay, adoration. Nature and men were in close communion with each other, much closer than we now are. They had a more delicate perception of, and more sympathy for, suffering nature ; and it were well if some of the purity of this thought could be breathed down to us, their prosaic descend- ants, who have abandoned the offerings to give place to avarice (die Habsucht nahm zu, als die Opfer auf- horten. — Grimm).

It was a beautiful custom, which is still preserved in some parts of Norway, to fasten a bundle of grain to a long pole, which on Christmas eve was erected somewhere in the yard, or on the top of the house or barn, for the wild birds to feed upon early on Christ- mas-day morning, — (our heathen ancestors also had the Christmas or Yule-tide festival). In our degenerate

times we think of chickens and geese and turkeys, but who thinks of the innocent and suffering little birds ? Nay, our ancestors lay nearer to nature's breast. Have we had our hearts hardened by the iron yoke of civilized government ? We certainly need to ask ourselves that question.

The contemplation of the heavens produced the myth about Odin, and the thunder-storm suggested Thor, as in the Greek mythology Argos with his hundred eyes represents the starry heavens, and the wandering Io, whom Hera had set him to watch, is the wandering moon. But stopping here would be too prosaic; it would be leaving out the better half; it would be giving the empty shell and throw- ing away the kernel; it would be giving the skull of the slain warrior without any ale in it; it would be doing great injustice to our

forefathers and rob- bing ourselves of more than half of the intellectual pleasure that a proper study of their myths afford. The old Frisians contemplated the world as a huge ship, by name Mannigfual (a counterpart of our ash- tree Ygdrasil) ; the mountains were its masts ; the captain must go from one place to another of the ship, giving his orders, on horseback; the sailors go aloft as young men to make sail, and when they come down again their hair and beard are white. Ay, we are all sailors on board this great ship, and we all have enough to do, each in his own way, to climb its rope ladders and make and reef its sails, and ere we are aware of it our hairs are gray; but take the anthropomorphic element out of this myth, and what is there left of it?

Our ancestors were not prosaic. They were poetic in the truest sense of that word. Our life is divided

between the child, the vigorous man, and old age, — the imaginative and prophetic child, the emotional and active man, and the reflecting elder. So a nation, which like the ancient Greek and Norse, for instance, has had a natural growth and development, has first its childhood of imagination and prophecy, producing poetry (Homer and the Eddas); then its manhood of emotion and activity, producing history (Herodotus and the Sagas) ; and then its old age of mature reflec- tion, producing philosophy (Socrates). Dividing the three periods in Greek history more definitely, we will find that imagination and poetry predominated during the whole time before Solon; emotion, activity and history during the time between Solon and Alexander the Great; and then reflection and philosophy, such as they were, from Alexander to the collapse of the Greek states.

Even among the Komans, the most prosaic of all peoples, that nation of subduers, enslavers and robbers, traces of this growth from poetic childhood through historic manhood to philosophic old age can be found, which proves moreover that this is a law of human development that cannot be eradicated, although it may be perverted. That of the Eomans is a most distorted growth, showing that as the twig is bent the tree is inclined. Ut sementem feceris, ita metes — as you sow, so will you reap, — to quote the Eomans' own words against them. The Komans had their poetic and pro- phetic age during the reign of the seven kings; their emotional and historical age during the most prosperous and glorious epoch of the republic; and finally, their age of reflection and philosophy began with the time of the elder Cato. Kome took a distorted, misan- thropic course from the beginning, so that her pro-

foundest and most poetic myth is that of the warlike Mars and the rapacious wolf, the father and nurse of the fratricide Eomulus. This myth is prophetic, and in it the whole history of Eome is reflected as in a mirror. The Eomans themselves claim that their Sibylline books (prophecy) belong to the time of their kings. When, during the transition period from the emotional to the philosophic age, Eome was to haye dramatic writers, she produced in comedy the clumsy Plaufcus, whom the Eomans employed in turning a hand-mill ; and in tragedy the flat Ennius, whose works were lost; so that her only really poetical tragedy is the fate of her dramatic poets. Her other poetical works, of which the world has boasted so much, came later, after the death of Cicero, their most famous orator, during the life of the crowned Augustus ; they came like an Iliad after Homer, and the most of them was a poor imitation of Greek literature, just as this book is a poor imitation of Scandinavian literature. Ex ipso fonte dulcius Mbuntur aqum — go to the fountain itself if you want to drink the pure and sparkling water. The Eoman literature is eminently worthy

of the consideration of the historical philosopher, but it ought not to be canonized and used to torture the life out of students with.

The Hebrews have their imaginative, poetic and prophetic age from Genesis to Moses; their emotional and historical age from Moses to Solomon, and then begins their age of reflection and philosophy.

Taking a grand, colossal, general view of the history of the world, we would say that the ancients belong chiefly to the poetic age, the middle ages to the emotional age, "and modern times to the reflecting age, of the human race. Thus the life of the individual is, in

miniature, the life of a people or of the whole human family.

This was a digression, and we confess that it is not the first one we have made ; but in the world of thought, as in the world of music, monotony is tedious; and the reader having perhaps refreshed his mind by the interlude, we will proceed to discuss further the union of the ethical with the physical interpretation of mythology. Physical interpretation alone is the shell without the kernel. Nature gives us only the source of the myth; but we want its value in the minds and hearts of a people in their childhood. The touching gracefulness of JSTanna, and of Idun reclining on Brage's breast, was not suggested by nature alone, but the pictures of these reflect corresponding natures in our ancestors. To explain a myth simply by the phenomenon in external nature (be it remembered, how- ever, that man also constitutes a part of nature) that suggested it to the ancients, would be reducing my- thology to a natural science; and it is sad to witness how the beautiful and poetical Eddas, in the hands of some, have dwindled down into the dry chemistry, chronology, electro-magnetism, mathematics, astronomy, or, if you please, the almanacs, of our forefathers, instead of being presented as the grand, prophetic drama which foreshadowed the heroic and enterprising destiny of the Teutonic nations. The twelve dwellings of the gods, they say, represent the twelve signs of the zodiac; Balder they make the constellation of the lion; Odin's twelve names, they say, are the twelve months of the year; his fifty-two names, which he himself enumerates in Grimnismaal, are the fifty-two weeks in the year; the thirteen valkyries are the thir- teen new moons in the year. How profound! How

perfectly everything adapts itself to the theory! This invaluable discovery was made on the seventh of December, 1827. It ought to be a legal holiday! The one ox, three measures of mead and eight salmon which Thor, according to the Elder Edda, consumed, when he had come to Jotunheim to fetch his hammer, they claim also represent the year's twelve months, for 1+3+8=12. Furthermore, the three gods, Haar, Jafnhaar, and Thride, are the three fundamental elements, sulphur, mercury, and salt ; Odin, Vile, and Ve, are the three laws of the universe, gravity, motion, and affinity. Thor is electricity; his belt is an electric condenser, his gloves an electric conductor. Hrungner, with whom he contends, is petrifaction; the Mokkerkalfe, whom Thjalfe slew, is the magnetic needle. G-unlad is oxygen, Kvaser is sugar, etc. But this will do. Are not these golden keys, with which to unlock the secret chambers of the Eddas!

All the deities do not represent phenomena and forces of nature, and this fact gives if possible still more im- portance to the anthropomorphic interpretation. Some myths are mere creations of the imagination, to

give symmetry and poetical finish to the system, or we might say to the drama — to complete the delineations of the characters that appear on the stage of action. Hermod, for instance, is no phenomenon in physical nature: he is the servant of Odin in the character of the latter as the god of war. Odin is the god of the heavens, but it is not in this capacity he sends out the valkyries to pick up the fallen heroes on the field of battle.

In rejecting the historical interpretation, we do by no means mean to deny the influence of the mythology upon the social, religious, political and literary life of the Norsemen. But this is not an explanation of the

mythology itself, but of its influence upon the minds of the people. If we mean it in a prophetic sense, the Norse mythology has also an historical interpretation. In it was mirrored the grand future of the Norse spirit ; by it the Norsemen were taught to make those daring expeditions to every part of the civilized world, making conquests and planting colonies ; to cross the briny deep and open the way to Iceland, Greenland and America ; to take possession of Normandy in France, subdue Eng- land and make inroads into Spain and Italy; to pass between the pillars of Hercules, devastate the classic fields of Greece, and carve their mysterious runes on the marble lion in Athens; to lay the foundations of the Eussian Empire, penetrate the walls of Constanti- nople and swing their two-edged battle-axes in its streets ; to sail up the rivers Ehine, the Scheldt, the Seine, and the Loire, conquering Cologne and Aachen and besieging Paris ; to lead the van of the chivalry of Europe in rescu- ing the holy sepulchre and rule over Antioch and Tiberias under Harald; to sever the fetters forged by the Roman emperors, break the crosiers in the hands of the Eoman popes and infuse a nobler and freer spirit into the nations of the earth ; and by their mythology they were taught to give to the world that germ of liberty that struck root in the earliest literature of France, budded in the Magna Charta of England, and developed its full-blown flowers in the American Declaration of Inde- pendence.

The principal object of the second part of this vol- ume is to give a faithful, accurate and complete presentation of the myths; but interpretations and reflections will be freely indulged in. The basis of the interpretation will be the physical and ethical combined, the two taken as a unit. The reflections will consist in

pointing out occasionally the fulfilment of the prophe- cies historically, or rather the application of the myths to historical philosophy. When only the physical source of the myth is given, its anthropomorphic element must be supplied in the mind of the reader. When Thor is given as the impersonation of thunder, and Heimdal as the rainbow, clothed with personality, then the reader must consider what sensations would be awakened in his own breast by these phenomena if he had been taught to regard them as persons. And when he has given them stature, gait, clothing, bearing, expression of the eye and countenance, and personal character correspond- ing with their lofty positions in the management of the affairs of the world, then he can form some idea of these deities as contemplated by the ancient Norsemen.

THE NORSE MYTHOLOGY FURNISHES ABUNDANT AND EX- CELLENT MATERIAL FOR THE USE OF POETS, SCULP- TORS AND PAINTERS.

IN a previous chapter it was claimed that the time must come when Norse mythology will be copiously reflected in our elegant literature and in our fine arts; and we insist that we who are Groths, and branches

of the noble ash Ygdrasil, ought to develop some fibre, leaves, buds and flowers with nourishment drawn from the roots of our own tree of existence, and not be con- stantly borrowing from our neighbors. If our poets would but study Norse mythology, they would find in it ample material for the most sublime poetry. The Norse mythology is itself a finished poem, and has been most beautifully presented in the Elder Edda, but it furnishes at the same time a variety of themes that can be combined and elaborated into new poems with all the advantages of modern art, modern civilization and enlightenment. With the spirit of Christianity, a touch of beauty and grandeur can be unconsciously thrown over the loftiness of stature, the growth of muscle, the bold masses of intellectual masonry, the tempestuous strength of passions, those gods and heroes of impetu- ous natures and gigantic proportions, those overwhelm- ing tragedies of primitive vigor, which are to be found in the Eddas. If our American poet would but pay

a visit to Urd's fountain, to Time's morning in our Gothic history, and tarry there until the dawn tinges the horizon with crimson and scarlet and the sun breaks through the clouds and sends its inspiring rays into his soul^ — then his poetry and compositions would reflect those auroral rays with intensified effulgence; it would shine upon and enlighten and gladden a whole nation. We need poets who can tell us, in words that burn, about our Gothic ancestors, in order that we may be better able to comprehend ourselves. It has heretofore been explained how the history of nations divides itself into three periods — the imaginative, the emotional, and reflective; poetry, history, and philosophy; and how these have their miniature counterparts in the life of any single person — childhood, manhood, and old age ; and now we are prepared to present this claim, that the poetic, imaginative and prophetic period of our race should be compressed into the soul of the child. The poetic period of his own race should be melted and moulded into poetry, touched by a spark of Christian refinement and love, and then poured, so to speak, into the soul of the child. The child's mind should feed upon the mythological stories and the primitive folk- lore of his race. It should be nourished with milk from its own mother's breast. Does any one doubt this ? Let him ask the Scandinavian poets: ask what kindled the imaginative fancy of Welhaven ; ask what inspired the force and simplicity of phrase in Oelenschlseger's poetry; ask what produced the unadorned loveliness with which Bjornstjerne Bjornson expresses himself, and the mountain torrent that rushes onward with impetu- ous speed in Wergeland ; ask what produced the refine- ment of phrase of Tegner, and the wild melodious abandon of Ibsen ; — and they will tell him that in the

deep defiles of that sea-girt and rock-bound land called Norseland, where the snow-crowned mountains tower like castle-walls, they found in a leafy summer bower a Saga- book full of magic words and beautiful pictures, and, like Alexander of old, they made this wonderful book their pillow. They may tell you that the Scandinavian schools, like the American, are pretty thoroughly Latin- ized, but that they stole out of the school-room, studied this Saga-book, and from it they drew their inspiration. The writer once asked the famous Norse violinist, Ole Bull, what had inspired his musical talent and given his music that weird, original, inexplicable expression and style. He said, that from childhood he had taken a pro- found delight in the picturesque and harmonious combi- nation of grandeur, majesty, and gracefulness of the flower-clad valleys, the silver-crested mountains, the sing- ing brooks, babbling streams, thundering rivers, sylvan shores and smiling lakes of his native land. He had eagerly devoured all the folk-lore, all the stories about trolls, elves and sprites that came within his reach ; he had especially reveled in all the mythological

tales about Odin, Thor, Balder, Ymer, the Midgard-serpent, Ragnarok, etc.; and these things, he said, have made my music. Truthfully has our own poet Longfellow, who has him- self taken more than one draft from Mimer's fountain, and communed more than once with Brage — said of Ole Bull:

Whose language is not speech, but song;

Of elves and sprites their dances whirled;

The Stromkarl sang, the cataract hurled

Its headlong waters from the height,

The scream of sea-birds in their flight,

The rumor of the forest trees, The plunge of the implacable seas, The tumult of the wind at night, Voices of eld, like trumpets blowing Old ballads and wild melodies Through mist and darkness pouring forth Like Elivagar's rivers flowing Out of the glaciers of the North.

These are the things that make poets, and musicians are poets. Then continues the same author:

And when he played, the atmosphere Was filled with music, and the ear Caught echo of that harp of gold Whose music had so weird a sound, The hunted stag forgot to bound, The leaping rivulet backward rolled, The bird came down from bush and tree, The dead came from beneath the sea, The maiden to the harper's knee.

Only these few lines make it clear that Longfellow has not only communed with Brage, but has also refreshed himself at the Castalian fountain ; that he has not only penetrated the mysteries of the Greek mythology, but has also visited the deities of the North.

If you do not believe that the Norse mythology fur- nishes suitable themes for poetry, then do not echo the voice of the multitude and cry the idea down because it seems new. Men frequently act like ants. When a red ant appears among the black ones, they all attack it, for they have once for all made up their minds that all ants must necessarily be black ; they have themselves been black all their lives, and all their ancestors were black, so far as they know anything about them. Thus it has become a fixed opinion with many, that mythology necessarily means Greek or Roman. We said to one of our friends:

We are writing a book on Norse mythology. Says our learned friend: Are not those old stories about Jupiter and Mars pretty well written up by this time? We said we thought they were, too much so; but we are writing about Odin and Thor. Then our learned friend shook his head in surprise and said that he never heard of those gentlemen before. If our reader's case is the same as that of our learned friend, then let him examine the subject for himself. Let him read the Norse mythol- ogy through carefully. Let him then tell us what themes suggestive of sublime poetry he found in the upper, the middle and the lower worlds of the Odinic mythology; how he was impressed with the regions of the gods, of the giants, and of the dwarfs; what he thought of the various exploits of the gods; how he was impressed with the great and wise Odin, the good and shining Balder, the mighty Thor, the subtle and malicious Loke, the queenly Frigg, the genial

Frey, the lovely Idun reclining on the eloquent Brage's breast, and the gentle Nanna. Let him read and see whether or not he will be delighted with all the mag- nificent scenery of Gladsheim, Valhal, Midgard, Niflheim, Muspelheim, and Ginungagap; with the norns Urd, Verdande, and Skuld; with the glorious ash Ygdrasil; with the fountain of Mimer (let him take a deep drink, while he is there) ; with the heavenly bridge Bifrost (the rainbow), upon which the gods daily descend to the Urdar- fountain ; and with the wild tempest-traversed regions of Ran (the goddess of the sea, wife of iEger). The cele- brated poet Oelenschlseger found in all these things inex- haustible scope for poetic embellishments, and he availed himself of it in his work, entitled Gods of the North, with the zeal and power of a genuine poet. He revived the memories of the past. He bade the gods come forward out of the mists of the centuries, and he accomplished in

less than fifty years what Latin versions of the Eddas had not been able to accomplish in three centuries. Two of Oelenschlseger's poems are given translated in Poets and Poetry of Europe, and Mr. Longfellow has given us per- mission to present them here. We will now avail our- selves of his kindness and not discuss this portion of the subject of this chapter any further, knowing that the reader will find the poems Thofs Fishing and The Dtuarfs far more pleasing and convincing than any additional arguments we might be able to produce. Here they are:

On the dark bottom of the great salt lake

With naught his sullen sleep to break.

Huge whales disported amorous o'er his neck ;

Little their sports the worm did reck,

Nor his dark, vengeful thoughts would check.

To move his iron fins he has no power, Nor yet to harm the trembling shore, With scaly rings he is covered o'er.

His head he seeks 'mid coral rocks to hide, Nor e'er hath man his eye espied, Nor could its deadly glare abide.

His eye-lids half in drowsy stupor close, But short and troubled his repose, As his quick heavy breathing shows.

Muscles and crabs, and all the shelly race, In spacious banks still crowd for place A grisly beard, around his face.

When Midgard's worm his fetters strives to break, Riseth the sea, the mountains quake ; The fiends in Naastrand merry make

Rejoicing flames from Hecla's caldron flash, Huge molten stones with deafening crash Fly out, — its scathed sides fire-streams wash.

The affrighted sons of Ask do feel the shock, As the worm doth lie and rock, And sullen waiteth Ragnarok.

To his foul craving maw naught e'er came ill;

Nath' more his hungry pain can still.

Upward by chance he turns his sleepy eye, And, over him suspended nigh, The gory head he doth espy.

The serpent taken with his own deceit, Suspecting naught the daring cheat, Ravenous gulps down the bait.

His leathern jaws the barbed steel compress, His ponderous head must leave the abyss ; Dire was Jormungander's hiss.

In giant coils he writhes his length about, Poisonous streams he speweth out, But his struggles help him naught.

The mighty Thor knoweth no peer in fight, The loathsome worm, his strength despite, Now o'ermatched must yield the fight.

His grisly head Thor heaveth o'er the tide,

The scared waves haste i' th' sands to hide.

As when accursed Naastrand yawns and burns, His impious throat 'gainst heaven he turns And with his tail the ocean spurns.

The parched sky droops, darkness enwraps the sun Now the matchless strength is shown Of the god whom warriors own.

Around his loins he draws his girdle tight, His eye with triumph flashes bright, The frail boat splits aneath his weight ;

The frail boat splits, — but on the ocean's ground Thor again hath footing found ; Within his arms the worm is bound.

Hymer, who in the strife no part had took, But like a trembling aspen shook, Rouseth him to avert the stroke.

In the last night, the vala hath decreed

Thus, in sunk voice, the craven giant spoke, Whilst from his belt a knife he took, Forged by dwarfs aneath the rock.

Upon the magic belt straight 'gan to file; Thor in bitter scorn to smile ; Mjolner swang in air the while.

In the worm's front full two-score leagues it fell; From Gimle to the realms of hell Echoed Jormungander's yell.

The ocean yawned ; Thor's lightnings rent the sky ; Through the storm, the great sun's eye Looked out on the fight from high.

Bifrost i' th' east shone forth in brightest green ; On its top, in snow-white sheen, Heimdal at his post was seen.

On the charmed belt the dagger hath no power; The star of Jotunheim 'gan to lour ; But now, in Asgard's evil hour,

When all his efforts foiled tall Hymer saw, Wading to the serpent's maw, On the kedge he 'gan to saw.

The Sun, dismayed, hastened in clouds to hide, Heimdal turned his head aside ; Thor was humbled in his pride.

The knife prevails, far down beneath the main, The serpent, spent with toil and pain, To the bottom sank again.

The giant fled, his head 'mid rocks to save,

To madness stung, to think his conquest vain, His ire no longer could contain, Dared the worm to rise again.

His radiant form to its full height he drew, And Mjolner through the billows blue Swifter than the fire-bolt flew.

Hoped, yet, the worm had fallen beneath the stroke; But the wily child of Loke Waits her turn at Ragnarok.

His hammer lost, back wends the giant-bane, Wasted his strength, his prowess vain; And Mjolner must with Ran remain.

Loke sat and thought, till his dark eyes gleam

With joy at the deed he'd done ; When Sif looked into the crystal stream,

For never again her soft amber hair

Shall she braid with her hands of snow;

From the hateful image she turned in despair, And hot tears began to flow.

In a cavern's mouth, like a crafty fox, Loke sat 'neath the tall pine's shade,

When sudden a thundering was heard in the rocks, And fearfully trembled the glade.

Then lie knew that the noise good boded him naught, He knew that 't was Thor who was coming ;

He changed himself straight to a salmon-trout, And leaped in a fright in the Glommen.*

But Thor changed, too, to a huge sea-gull,

And the salmon-trout seized in his beak; He cried : Thor, traitor, I know thee well,

And dear shalt thou pay thy freak !

Thy caitiff's bones to a meal I'll pound,

As a mill-stone crusheth the grain. When Loke that naught booted his magic found,

He took straight his own form again.

And what if thou scatter'st my limbs in air?

He spake, will it mend thy case? Will it gain back for Sif a single hair?

Thou'lt still a bald spouse embrace.

But if now thou'lt pardon my heedless joke, —

For malice sure meant I none, — I swear to thee here, by root, billow and rock,

By Mimer's well, and by Odin's eye,

And by Mjolner, greatest of all, That straight to the secret caves I'll hie,

And thence for Sif new tresses I'll bring

Of gold ere the daylight's gone, So that she will liken a field in spring,

With its yellow-flowered garment on.

Him answered Thor: Why, thou brazen knave,

To my face to mock me dost dare? Thou know'st well that Mjolner is now 'neath the wave

With Ran, and wilt still by it swear?

* A river in Norway. tA atone raised over a grave.

O a better hammer for thee I'll obtain ;

And he shook like an aspen-tree, For whose stroke shield, buckler and greave shall be vain,

And the giants with terror shall flee!

Not so ! cried Thor, and his eyes flashed fire ;

Thy base treason calls loud for blood, And hither I'm come with my sworn brother Frey,

I'll take hold of thy arms and thy coal-black hair,

And Frey of thy heels behind, And thy lustful body to atoms we'll tear,

O spare me, Frey, thou great-souled king! And, weeping, he kissed his feet;

0 mercy, and thee I'll a courser bring,

No match in the wide world shall meet.

Without whip or spur round the earth you shall ride;

He'll ne'er weary by day nor by night; He shall carry you safe o'er the raging tide,

And his golden hair furnish you light.

Loke promised as well with his glozing tongue

That the asas at length let him go, And he sank in the earth, the dark rocks among,

He crept on his belly, as supple as eel,

The cracks in the hard granite through, Till he came where the dwarfs stood hammering steel,

1 trow 't was a goodly sight to see

The dwarfs, with their aprons on, A-hammering and smelting so busily

Pure gold from the rough brown stone.

Rock crystals from sand and hard flint they made,

Which, tinged with the rosebud's dye, They cast into rubies and carbuncles red,

They took them fresh violets all dripping with dew, Dwarf-women had plucked them, the morn, —

And stained with their juice the clear sapphires blue, King Dan in his crown since hath worn.

Then for emeralds they searched out the brightest green

Which the young spring meadow wears, And dropped round pearls, without flaw or stain,

And all around the cavern might plainly be shown

Where giants had once been at play ; For the ground was with heaps of huge muscle-shells strewn, And strange fish were marked in the clay.

Here an ichthyosaurus stood out from the wall,

There monsters ne'er told of in story, Whilst hard by the Nix in the waterfall

Sang wildly the days of their glory.

Here bones of the mammoth and mastodon,

And serpents with wings and with claws; The elephant's tusks from the burning zone

Are small to the teeth in their jaws.

When Loke to the dwarfs had his errand made known,

In a trice for the work they were ready ; Quoth Dvalin : O Lopter, it now shall be shown

That dwarfs in their friendship are steady.

We both trace our line from the selfsame stock ;

What you ask shall be furnished with speed, For it ne'er shall be said that the sons of the rock

Turned their backs on a kinsman in need.

They took them >he skin of a large wild-boar,

The largest that they could find, And the bellows they blew till the furnace 'gan roar,

And the fire flamed on high for the wind.

And they struck with their sledge-hammers stroke on stroke, That the sparks from the skin flew on high,

But never a word good or bad spake Loke, Though foul malice lurked in his eye.

The thunderer far distant, with sorrow he thought

On all he'd engaged to obtain, And, as summer-breeze fickle, now anxiously sought

Whilst the bellows plied Brok, and Sindre the hammer,

And Thor, that the sparks flew on high, And the sides of the vaulted cave rang with the clamor,

And he sat him all swelling with venom and spite,

On Brok, the wrist just below; But the dwarf's skin was thick, and he recked not the bite,

Nor once ceased the bellows to blow.

And now, strange to say, from the roaring fire

Came the golden-haired Gullinburste, To serve as a charger the sun-god Frey,

Sure, of all wild-boars this the first.

They took them pure gold from their secret store,

The piece 't was but small in size, But ere 't had been long in the furnace roar,

A broad red ring all of wroughten gold,

As a snake with its tail in its head, And a garland of gems did the rim enfold,

'T was solid and heavy, and wrought with care, Thrice it passed through the white flames' glow;

A ring to produce, fit for Odin to wear, No labor they spared, I trow.

They worked it and turned it with wondrous skill,

Till they gave it the virtue rare, That each thrice third night from its rim there fell

'T was the same with which Odin sanctified

God Balder's and Nanna's faith; On his gentle bosom was Draupner laid,

When their eyes were closed in death.

Next they laid on the anvil a steel-bar cold,

They needed nor fire nor file ; But their sledge-hammers, following, like thunder rolled,

When Loke now marked how the steel gat power,

And how warily out 't was beat ('T was to make a new hammer for Ake-Thor),

In a trice, of a hornet the semblance he took,

Whilst in cadence fell blow on blow, In the leading dwarf's forehead his barbed sting he stuck,

That the blood in a stream down did flow.

Then the dwarf raised his hand to his brow for the smart,

Ere the iron well out was beat, And they found that the haft by an inch was too short,

But to alter it then 't was too late.

Now a small elf came running with gold on his head,

Which he gave a dwarf woman to spin, Who the metal like flax on her spinning wheel laid,

So she span and span, and the gold thread ran

Into hair, though Loke thought it a pity ; She span and sang to the sledge-hammer's clang

This strange, wild spinning-wheel ditty :

Henceforward her hair shall the tall Sif wear, Hanging loose down her white neck behind;

By no envious braid shall it captive be made, But in native grace float in the wind.

No swain shall it view in the clear heaven's blue,

But his heart in its toils shall be lost; No goddess, not e'en beauty's faultless queen,

Such long glossy ringlets shall boast.

Though they now seem dead, let them touch but her head,

Each hair shall the life-moisture fill ; Nor shall malice nor spell henceforward prevail

Sif's tresses to work aught of ill.

His object attained, Loke no longer remained

'Neath the earth, but straight hied him to Thor,

Who owned than the hair ne'er, sure, aught more fair His eyes had e'er looked on before.

The boar Frey bestrode, and away proudly rode, And Thor took the ringlets and hammer ;

To Valhal they hied, where the asas reside, 'Mid of tilting and wassal the clamor.

At a full solemn ting, Thor gave Odin the ring,

And Loke his foul treachery pardoned ; But the pardon was vain, for his crimes soon again

Must do penance the arch-sinner hardened.

For the benefit of those who can read Danish, we will give in the original the last ten stanzas of the latter poem of Oehlenschlseger, beginning with the spin- ning of Sif's hair:

Og gave det til Dvaerginden ; Hun satte, som Hor, det paa sin Rok,

Og spandt og spandt, mens Guldtraaden randt

Til Haar for den deilige Dise; Hun snurred og sang, ved Kildernes Klang,

Gudinden i Vaar skal baere sit Haar

Hel frit for Vinden herefter, Ei flette det mer, at yndig sig ter

Dets Glands med straalende Krsefter.

Hver Svend, som det saa, fra Himmelens Blaa,

Hans Hjerte skal Haarene fange. Selv Lokker vist ei paa veneste Frey

Skjont Guldet er dodt, saasnart det har modt

Gudindens Tinding, den hoie, Det levende blier og efter sig gier,

Beholder siu Glands, i Vindenes Dands,

Og lader sig aldrig udrykke; Som Middagens Skin, det svober sig ind

Saa sang hun og gik med ydmyge Blik

For Thor, og rakte ham Haaret ; Paa Lokken han saa og maatte tilstaa :

Fra Bjerget valt nu Frey paa sin Gait Og Thor med Haaret og Hammer,

Til Valhal de for, hvor Haerfader bor I Lysets salige Flammer.

Da satte paa Sif lig Tang paa et Rif,

Sig fast Guldhaaret paa stande, Og monne sig slaa i Lokker saa smaa,

Paa straalende Thing fik Odin sin Ring,

Man tilgav Loke sin Brode. Men snart dog igjen Bjergtroldenes Ven

There remains now to discuss briefly whether the Norse mythology furnishes subjects for painting and sculpture. If the reader has become convinced that there is material in it worthy of the greatest poet, then it is not necessary to say much about painting and sculp- ture, for we know that most things that can be said in verse can be made visible on the canvas, or be chiseled in marble. We shall therefore be brief on this particular point, but after the presentation of a few subjects for the painter or sculptor, we shall have something to say about nude art.

Can the brush or the chisel ask for more suggestive subjects thao Odin, Balder, Thor, Frey, Idun, Nanna, Loke, etc.? or groups like the norns at the Urdar-

fountain ? or Urd (the past) and Verdande (the present), who stretch from east to west a web, which is torn to pieces by Skuld (the future); the valkyries ir the heat of the battle picking up the slain ; or when they carry the fallen Hakon Adelsten to Valhal? Cannot a beautiful picture be made of iEger and Kan and their daughters, the waves? of the gods holding their feast with iEger and sending out Thor to fetch a caldron for them from Jotunheim? or of Thor clapping the pot on his head like a huge hat and walking off with it ? What more touching scene can be perceived than the death of Balder? Only in that short poem Hamarsheimt (fetching the hammer) there are no less than three beautiful subjects: (1) Thor wakes up and misses his hammer ; he feels around him for it ; he is surprised and hesitates; he wrinkles his brows and his head trembles. Loke looks down upon him from above ; the rogue is in his eye ; he would like to break out in a roar of laughter, but dare not. (2) All the gods are engaged in dressing Thor in Freyja's clothes; he is a tall straight youth with golden hair and a fine brown beard ; lightning flashes from his eyes ; while Fulla puts on him Freyja's jewels there is a. ter- rible conflict going on in his breast with this humil- iation of his dignity, which he cannot overcome. Loke stands half-ready near by as maid-servant; he dresses Thor's hair and is himself half-covered by the bridal- veil which Thor is to wear. All take an intense interest in the work, for they are so anxious to have the stratagem succeed. (3) The giants have laid the hammer in the lap of the bride ; Thor seizes it, and as he pushes aside the veil he literally grows into his majestic divinity, for whenever he wields his mighty Mjolner his strength is redoubled. The disappointed

desire of Thrym, the astounded giants, the amused Loke; all furnish an endless variety of excellent ma- terial for the brush of the painter. The plastic art can find no more exquisite group than Loke bound upon three stones, and his loving wife, Sigyn, leaning over him with a dish, wherein she catches the drops of

venom that would otherwise fall into his face and in- tensify his agonies. A volume of themes might be pre- sented, but it is not necessary. Suffice it then to say that for poetry, painting and the plastic arts, there is in the Norse mythology a fountain of delight whose waters but few have tasted, but which no man can drain dry.

"We promised to say something about nude art. It is this : We Goths are, and have forever been, a chaste race. We abhor the loathsome nudity of Greek art. We do not want nude figures, at least not unless they embody some very sublime thought. The people of southern Europe differ widely from us Northerners in this respect ; and this difference reaches far back into our respective mythologies, adding additional proof to the fact that the myths foreshadow the social life of a nation or race of people. The Greek gods were generally con- ceived as nude, and hence Greek art would naturally be nude also. Whether the licentiousness and lascivious- ness of the Greek communities were the primary causes of the unsesthetical features of their mythology or their Bacchanalian revels sprang from the mythology, it is difficult to determine. We undoubtedly come nearest the truth when we say that the same primeval causes produced both the social life and mythology of the Greeks; that there thenceforward was an active recip- rocating influence between the religion on the one side and the popular life on the other, an influence that

we may liken unto that which operates between the soul and the body ; and thus it may be said that the mythology and the popular life combined produced their nude art. To say that the popular character of the Greeks, taken individually or collectively, was stimu- lated into life by their mythology; that the virtues and the vices of the people originated in it alone; would certainly be an incorrect and one-sided view of the subject. The Greeks brought with them, from their original home into Greece, the germs of that faith which afterwards became developed in a certain direction under the influence of the popular life and the action of external circumstances upon that life, but which in turn reacted upon the popular life with a power which increased in proportion as the system of mythology acquired by development a more decided character. The same is true of the Norsemen and of the Goths in general. When it is found, for instance, that the mythological representation of Odin as father of the slain (Val-father), and that Valhal (the hall of the slain), the valkyries and einherjes, contain a strong incentive to warlike deeds, then it must not be imagined that this martial spirit, that displayed itself so powerfully among the Goths generally, and among the Norsemen particu- larly, was the offspring of the mythology of our ances- tors; but we may rather conceive that the Norsemen were from the beginning a race of remarkable physical power, that accidental external causes, such as severe climate, mountainous country, conflicts with neighbor- ing peoples, etc., brought this inherent physical force into activity and thus awakened the warlike spirit; and then it may be said that this martial spirit stamped itself upon their religious ideas, upon their mythology, and finally that the mythology, when it had received

this characteristic impress from the people, again reacted to preserve and even further inflame that martial spirit. And there is no inconsistency between this view of the subject and that which was presented in the third chapter.

It was said at the outset that we Goths are a chaste race, and abhor the loathsome nudity of Greek art. We were a chaste people before our fathers came under the influence of Christianity. The Elder Edda, which is

the grand depository of the Norse mythology, may be searched through and through, and there will not be found a single nude myth, not an impersonation of any kind that can be considered an outrage upon virtue or a violation of the laws of propriety; and this feat- ure of the Odinic religion deserves to be urged as an important reason why our painters and sculptors should look at home for something wherewith to employ their talent, before they go abroad; look in our own ancient Gothic history, before going to ancient Greece.

But the artist who is going to chisel out an Odin, a Thor, a Balder, a Nanna, or a Loke, must not be a mere imitator. He must possess a creative mind. He must not go to work at a piece of Norse art with his imagination full of Greek myths, much less must he attempt to apply Greek principles to a piece of Gothic art. He will find the Norse chisel a somewhat more ponderous weapon to swing; and you cannot turn as rapidly with a railroad car as you can with a French fiacre or American gig. To try to chisel out the gods of our forefathers after South European patterns would be like attempting to write English with the mind full of Latin syntax. Hence we repeat, that we do not want an imitator, but an original genius. Greek mythology has been presented so many times, and so well, 6

that the imitation, the repetition, is comparatively easy. He who would bring out Gothic art (and but little of it has hitherto been brought out) must himself be a poet, and what a mine of wealth there is open to him ! Would that genuine art fever would attack our artists and that some of the treasures that lie hid in the granite quarries of the Norse mythology might speedily be exhumed!

In his work, entitled Science of Beauty, Dr. John Bascom has taken decided grounds against nude figures in art. We would recommend the eighth chapter of that work to the careful consideration of the reader. We are not able for want of space to give his opinion in full, but make the following brief extract:

There is one direction in which art has indulged itself in a most marked violation of propriety, and that too on the side of vice. I refer to the frequent nudity of its figures. This is a point upon which artists have been pretty unanimous, and dis- posed to treat the opinions of others with Jiauteur and disdain, as arising at best from a virtue more itching and sensitive than wise, from instincts more physical than asstheticaI. This practice has been more abused in painting than in sculpture, both as less needed, and hence less justifiable, and as ever tending to become more loose and lustful in the double symbols of color and form, than when confined to the pure, stern use of the latter in stone or metal. Despite alleged necessities, — despite the high-toned claims and undisguised contempt of artists, — our convictions are strongly against the practice, as alike injurious to taste and morals. Indeed, if injurious to morals, it cannot be otherwise than injurious to taste, since art has no more dangerous enemy than a lascivious perverted fancy.

Nay, in the radiant dawn of our Gothic history our poets and artists may, if they would but look for them, find chaste themes to which they may consecrate the whole ardor of their souls for the sesthetical elevation and ennoblement of our race. As a people we are

growing too prosaic and, therefore, too ungodly; we nourish the tender minds of our children too early and too extensively on dry reasoning, mathematics and phil- osophy, instead of strengthening, stimulating and beauti- fying their souls with some of the poetic thoughts, some of the mythology and folk-lore of our forefathers. These mythological stories, these fairy tales and all this folk- lore, illuminated by the genial

rays of the Christian religion shining upon them, should be made available in our families and schools, by our poets, painters and sculptors, and then our children would in turn get their aesthetical natures developed so as to be able to beautify their own life and that of their posterity with still finer productions in poetry, painting, and sculpture. /

THE SOUKCES OF NOKSE MYTHOLOGY AND INFLUENCE OF THE ASA-FAITH.

IN order to thoroughly comprehend the Odinic mythol- ogy it is necessary to make a careful study of the history, literature, languages and dialects of the Teu- tonic races and of their popular life in all its various manifestations.

The chief depositories of the Norse mythology are the Elder or Saemund's Edda (poetry) and the Younger or Snorre's Edda (prose). In Icelandic Edda means great-grandmother, and some think this appellation re- fers to the ancient origin of the myths ifc contains. Others connect it with the Indian Veda and the Norse vide (Swedish veta, to know).

This work was evidently collected from the mouths of the people in the same manner as Homer's Iliad, and there is a similar uncertainty in regard to who put it in writing. It has generally been supposed that the songs of the Elder Edda were collected by Saamund the Wise (born 1056, died 1133), but Sophus Bugge and N. M. Petersen, both eminent Icelandic scholars, have made it seem quite probable that it was not put in writing before the year 1240. This is not the place for a discus- sion of this difficult question, and the reader is referred to Sophus Bugge's Introduction to Smmundar Edda and

to Petersen's History of Northern Literature, if he wishes to investigate this subject. There are thirty-nine poems in the Elder Edda, and we have here to look at their contents. Like the most of the Icelandic poetry, these poems do not distinguish themselves, as does the poetry of Greece and Eome, by a metrical system based on quan- tity, but have an arrangement of their own in common with the poetry of the other old Gothic nations, the Anglo- Saxons, etc. This system consists chiefly in the num- ber of long syllables and in alliteration. The songs are divided into strophes commonly containing eight verses or lines. These strophes are usually divided into two halves, and each of these halves again into two parts, which form a fourth part of the whole strophe, and contain two verses belonging together and united by alliteration.

The alliteration (letter rhyme) is the most essential element in Icelandic versification. It is found in all kinds of verse and in every age, the Icelanders still using it; and its nature is this, that in the two lines belonging together, three words occur beginning with the same letter, two of which must be in the first line and the third in the beginning of the second. The third and last of these is called the chief letter (hofuftstafr, head-stave), because it is regarded as ruling over the two others which depend on it and have the name sub-letters (shidlar, supporters). All rhyme-let- ters must be found in accented syllables, and no more words in the two lines should begin with the same letter — at least no chief word, which takes the accent on the first syllable. This principle is illustrated by the following first half of the seventh strophe of Vo- luspii, the oldest song in the Elder Edda:

Tefldu i fiini, Teitir varu; Far Jjeim ^ettugis Fant or gulli.

Gl&d they played, Nor was there to the -yaliant gods

The rhyme-letters here are those in italics.

The poems of the Elder Edda are in no special connection one with the other, and they may be di- vided into three classes: purely mythological, mytho- logical-didactic, and mythological-historical poems.

The Elder Edda presents the Norse cosmogony, the doctrines of the Odinic mythology, and the lives and doings of the gods. It contains also a cycle of poems on the demi-gods and mythic heroes and heroines of the same period. It gives us as complete a view of the mythological world of the North as Homer and Hesiod do of that of Greece. But (to use in part the language of the Howitts) it presents this to us not as Homer does, worked up into one great poem, but as the rhapsodists of Greece presented to Homer's hands the materials for that great poem in the various hymns and ballads of the fall of Troy, which they sung all over Greece. No Homer ever arose in Norseland to mould all these sublime lyrics of the Elder Edda into one lordly epic. The story of Sigurd and Brynhild, which occupies the latter por- tion of the Elder Edda, was, in later times in Germany moulded into the great and beautiful Niebelungen-Lied ; although it was much altered by the German poet or

by German tradition. The poems of the Elder Edda show us what the myths of Greece would have been without a Homer. They remain huge, wild and frag- mentary; full of strange gaps rent into their very vitals by the strokes of rude centuries; yet like the ruin of the Colosseum or the temples of Paestum, standing aloft amid the daylight of the present time, magnificent testi- monials of the stupendous genius of the race which reared them. There is nothing besides the Bible, which sits in a divine tranquillity of unapproachable nobility like a king of kings amongst all other books, and the poem of Homer itself, which can compare in all the elements of greatness with the Edda. There is a loftiness of stature, and a firmness of muscle about it which no poets of the same race have ever since reached. The only production since, that can be compared with the Elder Edda in profoundness of thought, is that of Shakespeare, the Hercules or Thor in English literature, that heroic mind of divine line- age which passed through the hell-gates of the Roman school-system unscathed. The obscurity which still hangs over some parts of the Elder Edda, like the deep shadows crouching amid the ruins of the past, is the result of neglect, and will in due time be removed; but amid this stand forth the boldest masses of intel- lectual masonry. We are astonished at the wisdom which is shaped into maxims, and at the tempestuous strength of passions to which all modern emotions seem puny and constrained. Amid the bright sun-light of a far-off time, surrounded by the densest shadows of forgotten ages, we come at once into the midst of gods and heroes, goddesses and fair women, giants and dwarfs, moving about in a world of wonderful construction, unlike any other world or creation which God has

founded or man has imagined, but still beautiful be- yond conception.

The Elder Edda opens with Voluspa (the vala's prophecy), and this song may be regarded as one of the oldest, if not the oldest, poetic monument of the North. In it the mysterious vala, or prophetess, seated somewhere unseen in the marvelous heaven, sings an awful song of the birth of gods and men ; of the great Ygdrasil, or Tree of Existence, whose roots and branches extend through all regions of space, and

concludes her thrilling hymn with the terrible Eagnarok, or Twilight of the gods, when Odin and the other gods perish in the flames that devour all creation, and the new heavens and new earth rise beautifully green to receive the reign of Balder and of milder natures.

The second song in the Elder Edda is Havamal (the high-song of Odin). Odin himself is represented as its author. It contains a pretty complete code of Odinic morality and precepts of wisdom. The moral and social axioms that are brought together in Havamal will sur- prise the reader, who has been accustomed to regard the Norsemen as a rude and half wild race, hunting in the savage forests of the North, or scouring the coasts of Europe in quest of plunder. They contain a profound knowledge, not merely of human nature, but of human nature in its various social and domestic relations. They are more like the proverbs of Solomon than anything in human literature.

The third poem in the Elder Edda is Vafthrudnismal (that is, Vafthrudner's speech or song). Vafthrudner is derived from vaf, a web or weaving, and thru®, strong ; hence Vafthrudner is the poiv erf ul tveaver, the one power- ful in riddles, and it is the name of a giant, who in the first part of the poem propounds a series of intricate

questions or riddles. Odin tells his wife Frigg that he desires to visit the all-wise giant Vafthrudner, to find out from him the secrets of the past and measure strength with him. Frigg advises him not to undertake this journey, saying that she considers Vafthrudner the strongest of all giants. Odin reminds her of his many perilous adventures and experiences, arguing that these are sufficient to secure him in his curiosity to see Vaf- thrudner's halls. Frigg wishes him a prosperous jour- ney and safe return, and also the necessary presence of mind at his meeting with the giant. Odin then pro- ceeds on his journey and enters the halls of Vafthrudner in the guise of a mortal wayfarer, by name Gangraad. He greets the lord of the house, and says he is come to learn whether he was a wise or omniscient giant. Such an address vexes Vafthrudner, coming as it did from a stranger, and he soon informs Gangraad that if he is not wiser than himself he shall not leave the hall alive. But the giant, finding, after he had asked the stranger a few questions, that he really had a worthy antagonist in his presence, invites him to take a seat, and challenges him to enter into a disputation, that they might measure their intellectual strength, on the condition that the van- quished party — the one unable to answer a question put to him by the other — should forfeit his head. Odin accepts this dangerous challenge. They accordingly dis- cuss, by question and answer, the principal topics of Norse mythology. • The pretended Gangraad asks the giant many questions, which the latter answers correctly ; but when the former at length asks his adversary what Odin whispered in the ear of his son Balder before he had been placed on the funeral pile — a question by which the astonished giant becomes aware that his an- tagonist is Odin himself, who was alone capable of

answering it, — the giant acknowledges himself van- quished, and sees with terror that he cannot avoid the death which he in his cruel pride had intended to inflict upon an innocent wanderer.

The fourth song is Grimnismal (the song of Grim- ner). It begins with a preface in prose, in which it is related that Odin, under the name of Grimner, visited his foster-son Geirrod, and the latter, deceived by a false representation by Frigg, takes him for a sorcerer, makes him sit between two fires and pine there without nour- ishment for eight days, until Agnar, the king's son, reaches him a drinking-horn. Hereupon

Grimner sings the song which bears his name. Lamenting his con- finement and blessing Agnar, he goes on to picture the twelve abodes of the gods and the splendors of Valhal, which he describes at length, and then speaks of the mythological world-tree Ygdrasil, of the valkyries, of the giant Ymer, of the ship Skidbladner, and adds various other cosmological explanations.

The fifth song is Skirnismal, or For Skirnis (the journey of Skirner). This gives in the form of a dia- logue the story of Frey and Gerd, of his love to her, and his wooing her through the agency of his faithful servant Skirner, after whom the song is named.

The sixth is the Lay of Harbard. It is a dialogue between Thor and the ferryman Harbard, who refuses to carry him over the stream. This furnishes an occa- sion for each of them to recount his exploits. They contrast their deeds and exploits. The contest is con- tinued without interruption until near the end of the poem, where Thor finally offers a compromise, again re- questing to be taken over the river. Harbard, who is in fact Odin, again refuses in decided terms. Then Thor asks him to show him another way. This request

Harbard seems in a manner to comply with, but refers Thor to Fjorgyn, his mother. Thor asks how far it is, but Harbard makes enigmatical answers. Thor ends the conversation with threats and Harbard with evil wishes.

The seventh poem is the Song of Hymer. The gods of Asgard are invited to a banquet with the sea-god iEger. Thor goes to the giant Hymer for a large ket- tle, in which to brew ale for the occasion. When Thor has arrived at the home of Hymer he persuades the giant to take him along on a fishing expedition, in which Thor fishes up the Midgard-serpent, which he would have killed had it not been for Hymer, who cut off the fish-line. Thor succeeds in carrying off the kettle, but has to slay Hymer and other giants who pursue him.

The eighth is Lokasenna (or Loke's quarrel.) This poem has a preface in prose. This is also a banquet at ^Eger's. It takes place immediately after Balder's death. Loke was present. He slew one of iEger's servants and had to flee to the woods, but soon returns, enters JEgev's hall, and immediately begins to abuse the gods in the most shameful manner: first Brage, then Idun, G-efjun, Odin, Frigg, Freyja, Njord, and the others, until Thor finally appears and drives him away. There is a prose conclusion to this poem, describing Loke's punishment. A profound tragedy characterizes this poem. Although Loke is abusive, he still speaks the truth, and he ex- poses all the faults of the gods, which foreshadow their final fall. Peace disappeared with the death of Balder, and the gods, conscious that Kagnarok is inevitable, are overpowered by distraction and sorrow.

The ninth poem is the Song of Thrym. This gives an account of the loss of Thor's hammer, and tells how

Loke helped him to get it back from the giant Thrym.

The tenth is the Song of Alvis (the all-wise). Alvis comes for Thor's daughter as his bride. Thor cunningly detains him all night by asking him questions concern- ing the various worlds he has visited. Alvis answers and teaches him the names by which the most impor- tant things in nature are called in the respective lan- guages of different worlds : of men, of the gods, of the vans, of the giants, of the elves, of the dwarfs, and

finally of the realms of the dead and of the supreme god. The dwarf, being one of those mythical objects which cannot endure the light of day, was detained till dawn without accomplishing his object.

The eleventh poem is Vegtam's Lay. Odin assumes the name Vegtam. In order to arrive at certainty concerning the portentous future of the gods, he descends to Niflheim, goes into the abodes of Hel, and calls the vala up from her grave-mound, asking her about the fate of Balder. She listens to him indignantly, answers his questions unwillingly, but at last discovers that Veg- tam is the king of the gods, and angrily tells him to ride home.

We will omit a synopsis of the remainder, and merely give their titles, as they do not enter so com- pletely into the system of mythology as the first eleven : (12) Rigsmaal (Song of Rig), (13) The Lay of Hyndla, (14) The Song of Volund, (15) The Song of Helge Hjor- vardson, (16) Song of Helge Hundingsbane I, (17) Song of Helge Hundingsbane II, (18) Song of Sigurd Fafnis- bane I, (19) Song of Sigurd Fafnisbane II, (20) Song of Fafner, (21) Song of Sigdrifa, (22) Song of Sigurd, (23) Song of Gudrun I, (24) Song of Gudrun III, (25) Brynhild's Ride to Hel, (26) Song of Gudrun II, (27) Song of Gudrun III, (28) The Weeping of Odrun, (29)

The Song of Atle, (30) The Speech of Atle, (31) The Challenge of Gudrun, (32) The Song of Hamder, (33) The Song of Grotte, (34) Extracts from the Younger Edda, (35) Extracts from the Volsunga Saga, (36) Song of Svipdag I, (37) Song of Svipdag II, (38) The Lay of the Sun, (39) Odin's Raven-Cry.

The antiquity of these poems cannot be fixed, but they certainly carry us back to the remotest period of the settlement of Norway by the Goths.

It may be added here that many of the poems of the Elder Edda, as well as much of the Old Norse poetry generally, are very difficult to understand, on account of the bold metaphorical language in which they are written. The poet did not call an object by its usual name, but borrowed a figure by which to present it, either from the mythology or from some other source. Thus he would call the sky the skull of the giant Ymer ; the rainbow he called the bridge of the gods; gold was the tears of Freyja ; poetry, the present or drink of Odin. The earth was called indifferently the toife of Odin, the flesh of Ymer, the daughter of night, the vessel that floats on the ages, or the foundation of the air; herbs and plants were called the hair or the fleece of the earth. A battle was called a hath of Mood, the hail of Odin, the shock of luckier s ; the sea was termed the field of pirates, the girdle of the earth ; ice, the greatest of all bridges; a ship, the horse of the waves; the tongue, the sword of words, etc.

written by Snorre Sturleson, the author of the famous Heimskringla (born 1178, died 1241), is mostly prose, and may be regarded as a sort of commentary upon the Elder Edda. The prose Edda consists of two parts:

Gylfaginning (the deluding of Gylfe), and the Bragarse- Sur or Skaldskaparmal (the conversations of Brage, the god of poetry, or the treatise on poetry). Gylfaginning tells how the Swedish king Gylfe makes a journey to Asgard, the abode of the gods, where Odin instructs him in the old faith, and gradually relates to

him the myths of the Norsemen. The manner in which the whole is told reminds us of A Thousand and One Nights, or of poems from a later time, as for instance Boccaccio's Decameron. It is a prose synopsis of the whole Asa faith, with here and there a quotation from the Elder Edda by way of elucidation. It shows a great deal of ingenuity and talent on the part of its author, and is the most perspicuous and clear presentation of the mythology that we possess.

But all the material for the correct presentation of the Norse mythology is not found in the Eddas: or rather we do not perfectly understand the Eddas, if we confine our studies to them alone. For a full comprehension of the myths, it is necessary to study carefully all the semi-mythological Icelandic Sagas, which constitute a respectable library by themselves; and in connection with these we must read the Anglo- Saxon Beowulf's Drapa, and the German Nieoelungen- Liech In the next place, we must examine carefully all the folk-lore of the Gothic race, and we must, in short, study the manifestations of the Gothic mind and spirit everywhere: in the development of the State and of the Church, in their poetry and history, in their various languages and numerous dialects, in their literature, in their customs and manners, and in their popular belief. If we neglect all these we shall never understand the Eddas; if we neglect the Eddas we shall never understand the other sources of

mythology. They mutually explain each other, and the Gothic race must sooner or later begin to study its own history.

That the Odinic mythology exercised a mighty in- fluence in forming the national character of the Norse- men, becomes evident when we compare the doctrines of their faith with the popular life as portrayed in the Sagas. Still we must bear in mind that this national spirit was not created by this faith. The harsh cli- mate of the North modified not only the Norse my- thology, but also moulded indefinitely the national character, and then the two, the mythology and the national character, acted and reacted upon each other. Thus bred up to fight with nature in a constant battle for existence, and witnessing the same struggle in the life of his gods, the Norseman became fearless, honest and truthful, ready to smite and ready to for- give, shrinking not from pain himself and careless about inflicting it on others. Beholding in external nature and in his mythology the struggle of conflict- ing forces, he naturally looked on life as a field for warfare. The ice-bound fjords and desolate fells, the mournful wail of the waving pine-branches, the stern strife of frost and fire, the annual death of the short- lived summer, made the Norseman sombre, if not gloomy, in his thoughts, and inured him to the rugged independence of the country. The sternness of the land in which he lived was reflected in his character; the latter was in turn reflected in the tales which he told of his gods and heroes, and thus the Norseman and his mythology mutually influenced each other.

The influence of the Asa faith, says Prof. Keyser, upon the popular spirit of the Norsemen, must be re- garded from quite another point of view than that

of Christianity at a later period. The Asa faith was, so to speak, inborn with the Norsemen, as it had de- veloped itself from certain germs and assumed form with the popular life almost unconsciously to the latter. Christianity, on the other hand, was given to the people as a religious system complete in itself,

intended for all the nations of the earth; one which by its own divine power opened for itself a way to conviction, and through that conviction operated on the popular spirit in a direction previously pointed out by the funda- mental principles of the religion itself. As the system of the Asa faith arose without any conscious object of affecting the morals, therefore it did not embrace any actual code of morals in the higher sense of this term. The Asa doctrine does not pronounce by positive ex- pression what is virtue and what is vice ; it presupposes a consciousness thereof in its votaries. It only repre- sents virtue as reaping its own rewards and vice its own punishment, if not here upon the earth, then with certainty beyond the grave. Thus Keyser.

The Norse system of mythology embodied the doc- trine of an imperishable soul in man; it had Valhal and Gimle set apart for and awaiting the brave and virtuous, and Helheim and Naastrand for the wicked.

The moral and social maxims of the Norsemen are represented as being uttered by Odin himself in the Havamal (high song of Odin), the second song of the Elder Edda, and by the valkyrie Sigdrifa in the Sigrdri- fumal (the lay of Sigdrifa), the twenty-first poem of the same work. Bead these poems and maxims, and judge whether they will warrant the position repeatedly taken in this work, that the electric spark that has made England and America great and free came not from the aboriginal Britons, not from the Roman

enslavers, but must be sought in the prophetic, imagina- tive and poetic childhood of the Gothic race. Read these poems and judge whether the eminent English writer, Samuel Laing, is right when he says :

All that men hope for of good government and future im- provement in their physical and moral condition, — all that civilized men enjoy at this day of civil, religious and political liberty, — the British constitution, representative legislation, the trial by jury, security of property, freedom of mind and person, the influence of public opinion over the conduct of public affairs, the Reformation, the liberty of the press, the spirit of the age, — all that is or has been of value to man in modern times as a member of society, either in Europe or in the New World, may be traced to the spark left burning upon our shores by these northern barbarians.

Read these poems and find truth in the words of Baron Montesquieu, the admirable author of TJie Spirit of Laivs (L'Esprit des Lois), when he says: The great prerogative of Scandinavia, and what ought to recom- mend its inhabitants beyond every people upon earth, is, that they afforded the great resource to the liberty of Europe, that is, to almost all the liberty that is among men ; and when he calls the North the forge of those instruments which broke the fetters manufact- ured in the South.

In the old Gothic religion were embodied principles and elements which had a tendency to make its votaries brave, independent, honest, earnest, just, charitable, pru- dent, temperate, liberty -loving, etc.; principles and morals that in due course of time and under favorable circum- stances evolved the Republic of Iceland, the Magna Charta of England, and the Declaration of Independence.

The rules of life as indicated by the High Song of Odin and in Sigrdrifumal, in which the valkyrie gives

counsel to Sigurd Fafnisbane, are briefly summed up by Professor Keyser as follows :

1. The recognition of the depravity of human nature, which calls for a struggle against our natural desires and forbearance toward the weakness of others.

2. Courage and faith both to bear the hard decrees of the norns and to fight against enemies.

3. The struggle for independence in life with regard to knowledge as well as to fortune ; an independence which should, therefore, be earned by a love of learning and industry.

4. A strict adherence to oaths and promises.

5. Candor and fidelity as well as foresight in love, devotion to the tried friend, but dissimulation toward the false and war to the death against the implacable enemy.

7. Hospitality, liberality, and charity to the poor.

8. A prudent foresight in word and deed.

9. Temperance, not only in the gratification of the senses, but also in the exercise of power.

11. Modesty and politeness in intercourse.

12. A desire to win the good will of our fellow men, espe- cially to surround ourselves with a steadfast circle of devoted kinsmen and faithful friends.

13. A careful treatment of the bodies of the dead.

Listen now to Odin himself, as he gives precepts of wisdom to mankind in

1. All door-ways Before going forward, Should be looked to; For difficult it is to know Where foes may sit Within a dwelling

Where shall he sit? In much haste is he, Who on his ways has To try his luck.

4. Water to him is needful, Who for refection comes,

A towel and hospitable invitation, A good reception ; If he can get it, Discourse and answer.

6. Of his understanding No one should be proud,

Who to refection comes Keeps a cautious silence ; With his ears listens, And with his eyes observes: So explores every prudent man. * Beowulf, 1839.

Who for himself obtains Fame and kind words : Less sure is that Which a man must have In another's breast,

Who in himself possesses Fame and wit while living; For bad counsels Have oft been received From another's breast.

Such is the recourse of the indigent.

No man can take from table Than too much beer-bibbing, For the more he drinks The less control he has Of his own mind.

13. Oblivion's heron 'tis called That over potations hovers ; He steals the minds of men. With this bird's pinions

I was over-drunk, At that cunning Fjalar's. It's the best drunkenness When every one after it Regains his reason.

15. Taciturn and prudent, And in war daring

Should a king's children be; Joyous and liberal Everyone should be Until his hour of death.

16. A cowardly man Thinks he will ever live If warfare he avoids ; But old age will

18. He alone knows, Who wanders wide

If he be not moderate, Eats to his mortal sorrow. Oftentimes his belly- Draws laughter on a silly man Who among the prudent comes.

22. A miserable man, And ill-conditioned, Sneers at everything: One thing he knows not, Which he ought to know, That he is not free from faults.

Is all night awake, Pondering over everything; He then grows tired, And when morning comes All is lament as before.

If placed in unexpected difficulty;

Will still know nothing, Talk he ever so much.

28. He thinks himself wise Who can ask questions And converse also; Conceal his ignorance No one can,

29. He utters too many Futile words

A garrulous tongue, If it be not checked,

No man shall have another, Although he come a stranger to his house. Many a one thinks himself wise, If he is not questioned, And can sit in a dry habit.

The guest who jeers a guest, If he takes to flight. Knows it not certainly He who prates at meat, Whether he babbles among foes.

Well-disposed, Yet at table will torment each other. That strife will ever be ; Guest will guest irritate.

Unless to a friend's house he goes;

34. Long is and indirect the way To a bad friend's,

Though by the road he dwell ; But to a good friend's The paths lie direct, Though he be far away.

35. A guest should depart, Not always stay

36. One's own house is best, Small though it be;

At home is every one his own master. Though he but two goats possess, And a straw-thatched cot, Even that is better than begging.

37. One's own house is best, Small though it be;

At home is every one his own master.

For it is hard to know- When on his way

39. 1 have never found a man so bountiful Or so hospitable

40. Of the property Which he has gained,

No man should suffer need ; For the hated oft is spared What for the dear was destined : Much goes worse than is expected.

41. With arms and vestments Friends should each other gladden,

Those which are in themselves most sightly. Givers and requiters Are longest friends, If all else goes well.

A man should be a friend, And gifts with gifts requite; Laughter with laughter Men should receive, But leasing with lying.

A man should be a friend, To him and to his friend ;

44. Know if thou hast a friend Whom thou fully trustest,

And from whom thou would'st good derive; Thou should'st blend thy mind with his,

45. If thou hast another Whom thou little trustest,

Yet would'st good from him derive, Thou should'st speak him fair, But think craftily, And leasing pay with lying.

46. But of him yet further Whom thou little trustest,

And thou suspectest his affection, Before him thou should'st laugh, And contrary to thy thoughts speak; Requital should the gift resemble.

I was journeying alone And lost my way; Rich I thought myself When I met another: Man is the joy of man.

48. Liberal and brave Men live best,

The niggardly is uneasy even at gifts.

49. My garments in a field I gave away

To two wooden men : Heroes they seemed to be When they got cloaks : * Exposed to insult is a naked man.

That on a hill-top stands ; Protects it neither hark nor leaves: Such is the man Whom no one favors : Why should he live long?

Praise is often for a trifle bought

53. Little are the sand grains, Little the wits,

54. Moderately wise Should each one be, But never over-wise; For a wise man's heart Is seldom glad,

55. Moderately wise Should each one be, But never over- wise : Of those men

The lives are fairest Who know much well.

56. Moderately wise Should each one be, But never over- wise : His destiny let know No man beforehand;

57. Brand burns from brand Until it is burnt out,

He who has few workers, And go his work to see to; Greatly is he retarded Who sleeps the morn away i Wealth half depends on energy.

60. Of dry planks And roof shingles

Although his garments be not too good;

62. Inquire and impart Should every man of sense, Who will be accounted sage. Let one only know,

When to the sea he comes, The eagle over old ocean ; So is a man

Who among many comes, And has few advocates.

64. His power should Every sagacious man Use with discretion, For he will find,

When among the bold he comes, That no one alone is doughtiest.

65. Circumspect and reserved Every man should be,

And wary in trusting friends; Of the words

That a man says to another He often pays the penalty.

The disliked seldom hits the moment.

67. Here and there I should Have been invited

If I a meal had needed ; Or two hams had hung At that true friend's Where of one I had eaten.

69. No man lacks everything, Although his health be bad : One in his sons is happy, One in his kin,

One in abundant wealth, One in his good works.

70. It is better to live, Even to live miserably ;

71. The halt can ride on horseback, The one-handed drive cattle ; The deaf, fight and be useful : To be blind is better

72. A son is better Even if born late,

Unless raised by a kinsman to a kinsman.

The tongue is the bane of the head : Under every cloak I expect a hand.

*T?hat is, dead on the funeral pile.

He who is sure of traveling entertainment;

75. He knows not, Who knows nothing,

Let him not be thought blameworthy.

We ourselves also die ; But the fair fame Never dies Of him who has earned it.

We ourselves also die; But I know one thing That never dies, — Judgment on each one dead.

78. Full storehouses I saw At Dives' sons' :

Now bear they the beggar's staff. Such are riches, As is the twinkling of an eye : Of friends they are most fickle.

If of runes thou questionest him, Those to the high ones known, Which the great powers invented, And the great talker* painted, That he had best hold silence.

81. At eve the day is to be praised, A woman after she is burnt,f

A sword after it is proved, A maid after she is married, Ice after it has been crossed, Beer after it is drunk.

82. In the wind one should hew wood, In a breeze row out to sea,

83. By the fire one should drink beer, On the ice slide;

Buy a horse that is lean, A sword that is rusty; Feed a horse at home, But a dog at the farm.

And guile in their breasts been laid.

85. In a creaking bow, A burning flame, A yawning wolf,

A grunting swine, A rootless tree, A waxing wave, A boiling kettle,

A falling billow, A one night's ice, A coiled serpent, A woman's bed-talk Or a broken sword, A bear's play Or a royal cliild,

A self-willed thrall, A flattering prophetess, A corpse newly slain, A serene sky, A laughing lord, A barking dog And a harlot's grief,

88. An early -sown field, Let no one trust,

Nor prematurely in a son: Weather rules the field, And wit the son, Each of which is doubtful.

89. A brother's murderer, Though on the high-road met, A half-burnt house,

An over-swift horse (A horse is useless If a leg be broken) : No man is so confiding As to trust any of these.

90. Such is the love of women, Who falsehood meditate,

As if one drove not rough-shod On slippery ice,

Or as if the halt were set to catch

91. Openly I now speak, Because I both sexes know.

Unstable are men's minds toward women; 'Tis then we speak most fair, When we most falsely think: That deceives even the cautious.

92. Fair shall speak, And money offer,

93. At love should no one Ever wonder

94. Let no one wonder at Another's folly,

It is the lot of many. All-powerful desire Makes of the sons of men Fools even of the wise.

95. The mind only knows What lies near the heart;

That alone is conscious of our affections

Than not to be content with himself.

* Such lines as this show the Norse origin of the Edtia.

96. That I experienced When in the reeds I sat Awaiting my delight. Body and soul to me Was that discreet maiden: Nevertheless I possess her not.

99. I returned, Thinking to love At her wise desire ; I thought

100. When next I came, The bold warriors were All awake,

With lights burning, And bearing torches :

101. But at the approach of morn, When again I came,

The household all was sleeping,* The good damsel's dog Alone I found Tied to the bed.

102. Many a fair maiden, When rightly known, Toward men is fickle: That I experienced When that discreet maiden I decoyed into danger : Contumely of every kind That wily girl

103. At home let a man be cheerful, And toward a guest liberal ;

He must often talk on what is good.

104. The old giant I sought ; Now I am come back : Little got I there by silence; In many words

I spoke to my advantage In Suttung's halls.*

105. Gunlad gave me, On her golden seat,

A bad recompense I afterwards made her

106. Rate's mouth I caused To make a space,

And to gnaw the rock ; Over and under me

* For the story of Suttung and Gunlad, see second part, pp. 246-253.

Were the giant's ways: Thus I my head did peril.

107. Of a well assumed form I made good use :

Few things fail the wise, For Odraerer is now come up To men's earthly dwellings.

108. 'Tis to me doubtful, That I could have come From the giant's courts, Had not Gunlad aided me, — That good damsel

109. On the day following Came the frost-giants

To learn something of the High One In the High One's hall; After Bolverk they inquired, Whether he with the gods were come, Or Suttung had destroyed him.

111. Time 't is to discourse From the speaker's chair. By the well of Urd I silent sat, I saw and meditated, I listened to men's words.

* In the North a holy oath was taken on a ring kept in the temple for

112. Of runes I heard discourse, And of things divine,

Nor of risting* them were they silent, Nor of sage counsels, At the High One's hall. In the High One's hall I thus heard say :

113. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice ;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it.

114. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice ;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it. In an enchantress' embrace Thou mayest not sleep, So that in her arms she clasp thee.

115. She will be the cause That thou carest not

116. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice ;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it. Another's wife Entice thou never To secret converse.

117. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice ;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it.

* Carving : runes are risted = runes are carved.

118. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice ;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it.

120. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice ;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it.

If thou knowest thou hast a friend,

121. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice ;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it.

And salutary speech learn, while thou livest.

122. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it. With thy friend Be thou never First to quarrel. Care paws the heart,

If thou to no one canst Thy whole mind disclose.

123. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice ;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it. Words thou never Shouldst exchange With a witless fool.

124. For from an ill-conditioned man Thou wilt never get

A return for good; But a good man will Bring thee favor By his praise.

125. There is a mingling of affection, Where one can tell

Another all his mind. Everything is better Than being with the deceitful. He is not another's friend Who ever says as he says.

126. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice ;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it.

127. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice ;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it.

128. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice ;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it. Wherever of injury thou knowest, Regard that injury as thy own; And give to thy foes no peace.

129. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it.

130. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice ;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it.

131. If thou wilt induce a good woman To pleasant converse,

No one turns from good, if it can be got.

• 132. I enjoin thee to be wary, But not over- wary ; At drinking be thou most wary, And with another's wife ; And thirdly. That thieves delude thee not.

133. With insult or derision Treat thou never A guest or wayfarer; They often little know,

* In a battle we must not look up, but forward.

t To become panic-stricken, which the Norsemen called to become swine.

Nor so bad as to be good for nothing.

135. At a hoary speaker Laugh thou never,

Often is good that which the aged utter;

And who go loitering among the vile.

136. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice;

Thou wilt profit, if thou takest it.

137. Strong is the bar That must be raised To admit all *

138. I counsel thee, Lodfafner, To take advice ;

Thou will profit, if thou takest it. Wherever thou beer drinkest,

* The meaning is, it is difficult to show hospitality to everybody. A door would have to be strong to stand so much opening and shutting.

The hitter for bite-injuries is good,

This is all of the famous Havamal of the Elder Edda except the so-called Kimic Chapter, which will be given in the second part in connection with the myth of Odin. Hear now what the valkyrie has to say to Sigurd Eafnisbane in

SIGRDRfFUMAL {the Lay of Sigdrifa).

Sigurd rode up the Hindarfiall, and directed his course southward toward Frankland. In the fell he saw a great light, as if a fire were burning, which blazed up to the sky. On approaching it, there stood a skialdborg, and over it a banner. Sigurd went into the skialdborg, and saw a warrior lying within it asleep, completely armed. He first took the helmet off the warrior's head, and saw that it was a woman. Her corselet was as fast as if it had grown to her body. With his sword, Gram, he ripped the corselet from the upper opening downwards, and then through both sleeves. He then took the corselet off from her, when she awoke, sat up, and, on seeing Sigurd, said:

Why from my sleep have I started? Who has cast from me The fallow bands?

SIGURD : Signmnd's son (Recently did the raven Feed on carrion)* And Sigurd's sword.

Sigurd sat down and asked her name. She then took a horn filled with mead, and gave him the minnis-cup (cup of memory).

4. Hail to the gods ! Hail to the goddesses !

She was named Sigdrifa, and was a valkyrie. She said that two kings had made war on each other, one of whom was named Hialmgunnar; he was old and a great warrior, and Odin had promised him victory. The other was Agnar, a brother of And, whom no divinity would patronize. Sigdrifa overcame Hialmgunnar in battle; in revenge for which Odin pricked her with a