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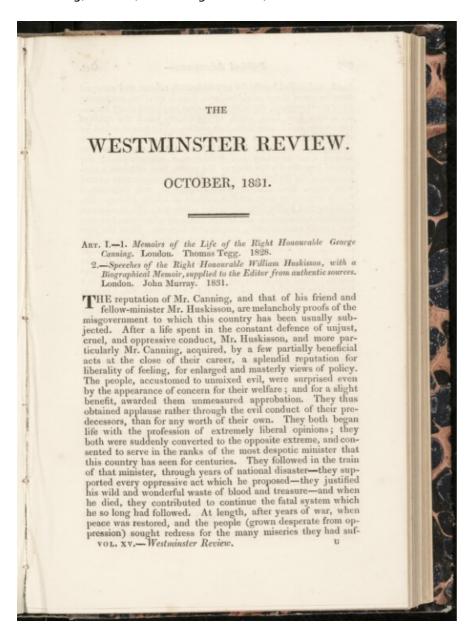
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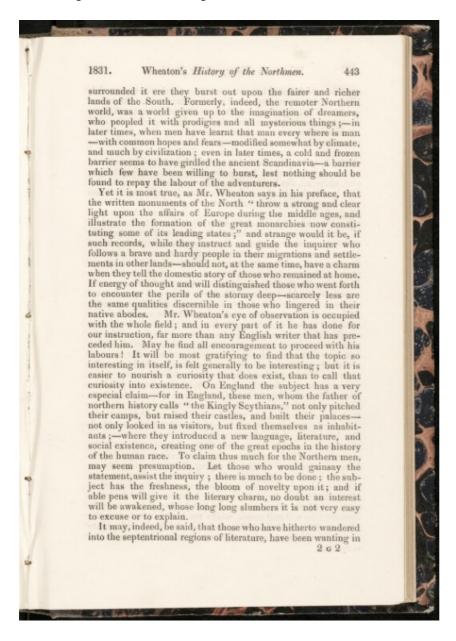
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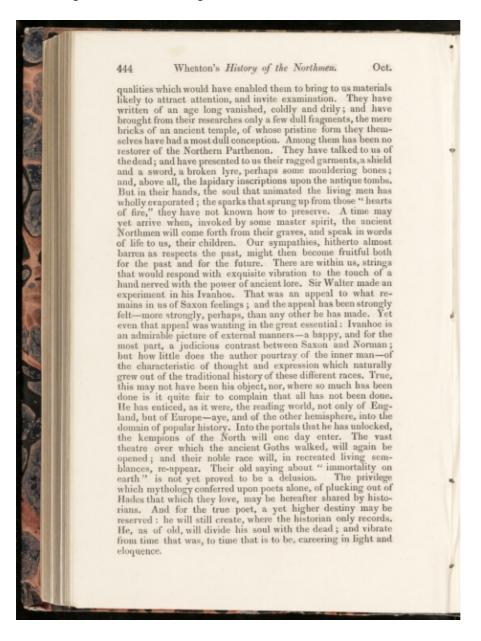
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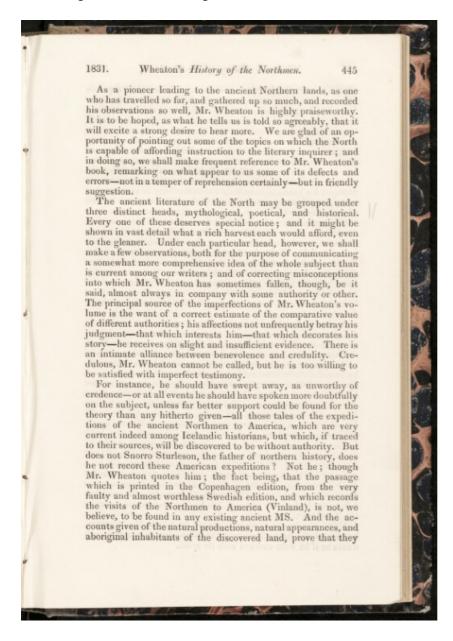


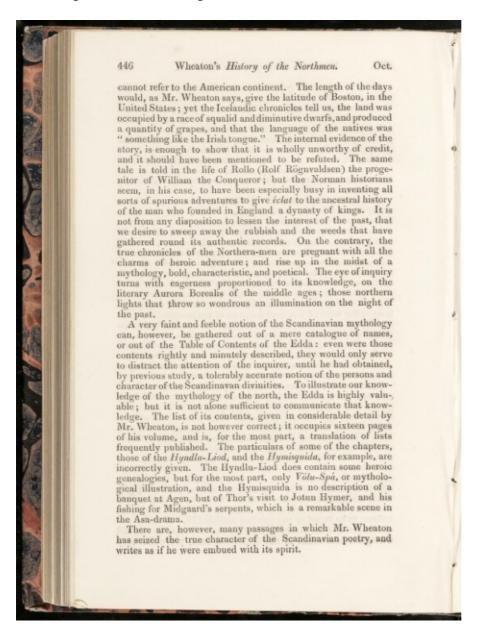
442 Wheaton's History of the Northmen. we are far from tracing even a remote resemblance between the labours of the two ladies. Miss Austin's novels are histories of the human heart, and in the more occasional parts, wonderfully exact analyses of character and disposition: whereas, in Mrs. Gore's books, we can see little more than a series of brilliant sketches, bordering occasionally on the caricature. ART. X.—History of the Northmen, or Danes and Normans, from the Earliest Times to the Conquest of England by William of Nor-mandy. By Heary Wheaton. John Murray. 8vo. pp. 367. 1831. It has been said that Americans have no ancestry; and yet here is an American, with enough of Gothic blood and Gothic affection to induce him to enter into a field of research, which Englishmen have too much neglected. "Smit with the love of" Scandinavian story, and availing himself of his residence in a Scandinavian story, and availing himself of his residence in a Scandinavian court, where its best sources were accessible to him, Mr. Wheaton has produced a volume which will give much information to others, and bring considerable renown to himself. We welcome the book as a most acceptable offering to literature, and the writer as worthy of "golden opinions." His style is correct and flowing—his knowledge extensive, if not always profound—of his industry, every page gives evidence; and the tone and temper of the volume are generous and benevolent throughout—dwelling with complacency on every thing that betokens goodness, gentleness, or genius; though, perhaps, he is sometimes a little dazzled and misled, while surrounded by those mists which hang over the events of a distant time—events which come down to us with many striking associations—a grand and imposing mythology—the records of historians rocked in the icy cradle of the ancient north—the songs of Skalds, which have in them the rudeness of an heroic, and the wildness of a romantic age; and above all, influenced by that undefined but sympathizing feeling, that the history is the history of our forefathers—the progenitors of our own blood—the history of our great branch, and that the most adventurous, of our renowned Gothic race.

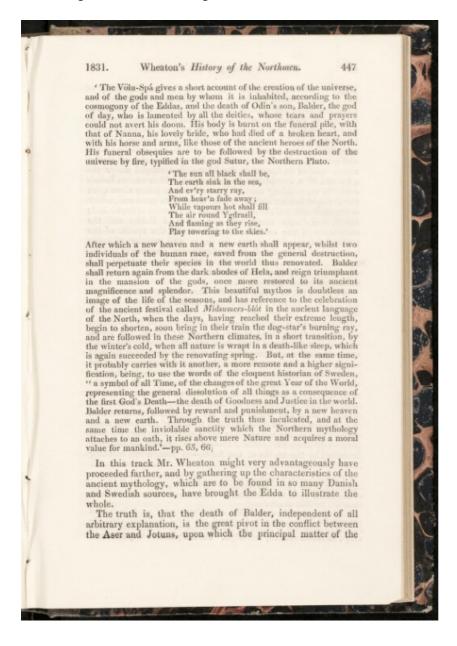
The ancients asserted—and it was scarcely a fable, that Chronos had buried his treasures in the regions of the North. And strange it is, that they should have been so little sought for there. Strange it is, though we know full well whence came the Goths, the Angles and the Normans, that we should have done so little to track them back to their ancient abodes. Their fatherland is wrapped for us in a darkness nearly as thick as







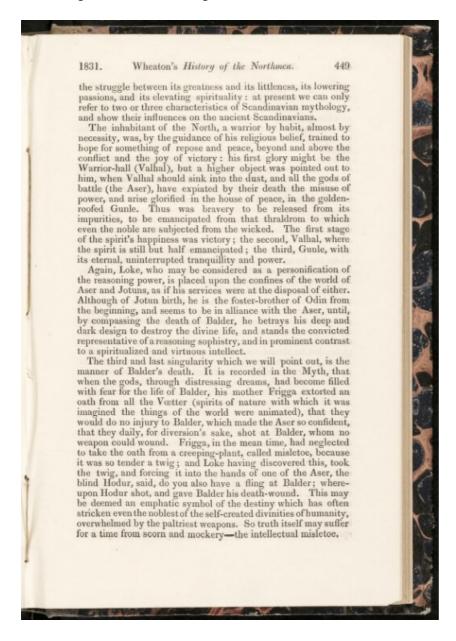




448 Wheaton's History of the Northmen. Northern mythology turns. For the distinctive peculiarity of the mythic fiction of the North consists in this, that it is a representation of the conflict which at all times is carried on in our mortal history, between the spiritual and intellectual energies (the Aser), and the un-spiritual or mere animal powers, (the Jotuns, or Thyrser), between high-minded wisdom (Balder) and that unholy sagacity (Loke), which is but heartless craft and cunning. Now this conflict, which by the death of Balder seems decided in favour of the Jotuns, is arranged under the guidance of a Providence (the Noonies), which causes Loke's captivity (resembling that of Prometheus) to follow close upon the death of Balder, and never loses sight of its great end, which is the purification of the noble, and the destruction of thewicked; hence, the drama closes with the return of Balder and the hence, the drama closes with the return of Balder and the renovation of the earth.* Such a work, the result of the poetical imagination of the North, is well worthy of being brought out of the dim distance of antiquity, opening as it does, a new gold mine, both for the poet and his auditors, and affording a lively symbol of human existence, under the great influences which act upon it.

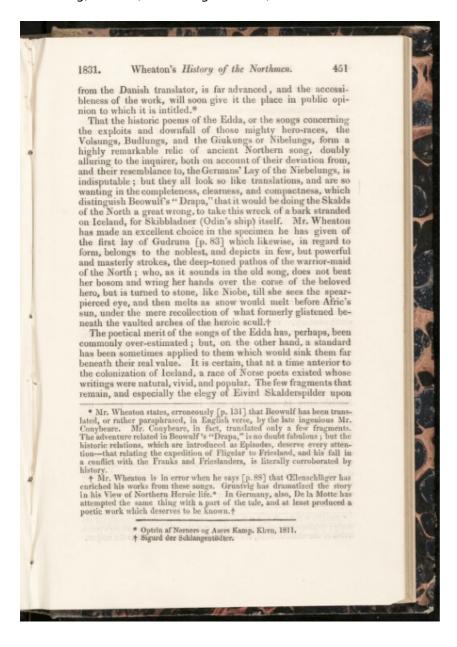
We mean not to assert, that the idea of the great conflict is We mean not to assert, that the idea of the great conflict is the exclusive property of the North; on the contrary, it is to be traced in all the remoter popular mythologies,† as it necessarily must, since it arises from the observation of the profound observer, in every clime and in every age; but in the North alone it has developed itself in a universal historic character, and seems to have taken possession of the whole field of thought and action, and to have stamped the general idiosyncrasy of the ancient Scandinavian race. That which was the father, became the son; and as earth on its varied surface brings forth upon the same spot a succession of similar fruits and flowers, so among same spot a succession of similar fruits and flowers, so among men, the children resemble the sires that beget them; the mind creates a mind like itself; ideas are pregnant with their own natural offspring, and "the stream of tendency" rolls on for many ages its continuous waves. On some other occasion, we may perhaps develope the beautiful apotheosis of human life, which is described by the myths of the North—of human life, evincing * Consult Norden's Mythologie eller Udsigt over Edda-Leeren af N. F. S. Grundtvig, Khvn 1808. Mythology of the North, or view of the doctrine of the Edda, by N. F. S. Grundtvig. Copenhagen, 1808. Of this work there is a Swedish translation. there is a Swedish translation.

† To give every thing an Indian origin is now very much in fashion amongst the learned upon the Continent, which has occasioned some Icelanders to endeavour to obtain for the Volu-Spá, and various other Eddaic songs, an Asiatic authority and origin. The fancy seems a very idle one,

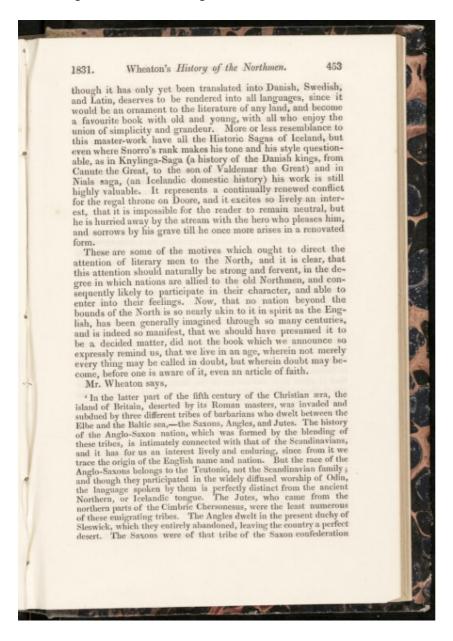


450 Wheaton's History of the Northmen. Passing on to the poetry of the North, it is obvious, that where the mythology has a universal historic character, the poetry will principally be national-historic, and twine itself, not as a chaplet of roses around the beauties of nature, but as a laurel-wreath round the brow of the hero, and if it approaches beauty with its myrtle garland, it will be when beauty becomes linked to valour. It would here be out of place to discuss the peculiar distinctions, It would here be out of place to discuss the peculiar distinctions, or to weigh one against another, the separate merits of natural and historic poetry. We are here on the domains of taste, where the praise should be according to the pleasure; but if it cannot be denied that heroic achievements, and passionate and faithful love, are naturally calculated to produce poetical inspirations, the Skalds of the North deserve to be listened to by those who desire to be acquainted with, not merely one, but all the regions of the wonderful creation which poetry has called into existence; and who would not wish to be every where at home in a world, where the human mind excited by the deepest emotions, strives in all directions to elicit whatever it is able—if not to satisfy, at least to calm or sweeten or dignify them? in all directions to elicit whatever it is able—if not to satisfy, at least to calm or sweeten or dignify them?

In this part of the field, Mr. Wheaton has not quite done all we could have wished. It is, indeed, a theme not easily to be handled; and we are not sure that poets themselves have said much about poetry that is worthy to be heard and remembered. Mr. Wheaton's account of the Skalds in general, and of the historical songs of the Edda, are however very interesting, if not quite complete; but he should not have passed so slightly over Beowulf's Drapa, one of the very brightest monuments of ancient Northern poetry, a mirror in which so much light is reflected from the days of old. He has referred to it, and is certainly not unacquainted with it. In Denmark, it is well known through Grundtvig's admirable translation—in England, it has hitherto excited attention wholly disproportioned to its high merits. We are surprised that Mr. Wheaton should deem the Rigs-mal worthy of comparison with Beowulf's poem; and yet more so, that on the prised that Mr. Wheaton should deem the Rigs-mal worthy of comparison with Beowulf's poem; and yet more so, that on the authority of Thorkelin, whom he does not name, and if he did the authority would not be of much value, he deems Beowulf's great work to be "probably a translation or rifaccimento of some older lay, originally written in the ancient language of Denmark." [p. 130]. We are a little tender, be it owned, of Beowulf's reputation, and unwilling that the original merit of one of the most remarkable, if not the most remarkable, literary production of our Anglo-Saxon progenitors, should, without good evidence, be snatched away. Of Beowulf other occasions will be found to speak. A version into English, and accompanied with a preface

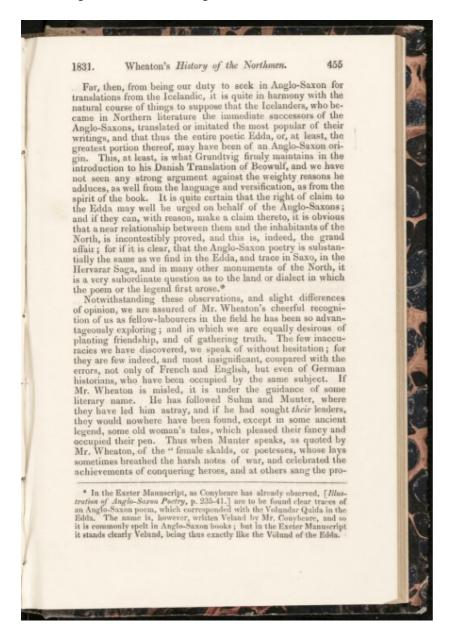


Wheaton's History of the Northmen. Hakon, the foster-son of Athelstane, are indisputable evidence of this. Of the Edda songs, the descriptions of battle are the most remarkable passages. There is, however, a source, which has not been referred to by Mr. Wheaton, whence very valuable relics of ancient Northern poetry may be derived. Though what is there recorded is only in the shape of translation, there can be no doubt of its authenticity, and as little of its poetical recommendations. We refer to those Latin imitations of the ancient Northern songs which are to be found in the writings of Saxo-Grammaticus. These, collected by him in the twelfth century, and immediately referred to those who might have impugned their genuineness had there been any grounds for doubt, we cannot but deem of the highest value; and of literary debts, long owing and still unpaid, we think the debt to Saxo among the strongest. In his living pages will be found a moving picture of the past, which, though sometimes verging into too fanciful a world, does notwithstanding present a striking portraiture of things that were. Here may be traced the original of that master-piece of Shakspeare, his Hamlet; and here might also be followed to their sources, what Œhlenschlâger and many inferior minds have made the topics of their songs.* Mr. Wheaton supposes that Hamlet (Saxo's Amlet) assisted the Saxons against the Franks in the sixth century. Where Mr. Wheaton discovered any authority for this theory, we know not, unless in that wilderness of Suhm, There is, however, a source, which has not been referred to by (Saxo's Amlet) assisted the Saxons against the Franks in the sixth century. Where Mr. Wheaton discovered any authority for this theory, we know not, unless in that wilderness of Suhm, which the author calls a "Critical History of Denmark," and of which it has been somewhat bitterly, but not altogether undeservedly said, that every thing is to be found there, but truth. Proceeding now to the history of the North, let the reader allow his interest to be excited, and he will find how much the events of the middle ages in general, and of the British isles in particular, will receive of light from the sources to which we are now directing his attention; he will see, that in the North there was formed an historic style in the mother-tongue, so pure, so simple, and so lively, that it might serve as a pattern even now. He will discover that one kingdom at least in the North, has an eventful history thus written, with the pencil of a Walter Scott, and will feel that it has some claim upon the attention of civilized man. Now it is really the fact, that Snorro Sturleson's "Heimskringla," or history of Norway, written in the thirteenth century, is, beyond any other, a book such as here described, which, al-* Ewald's "Balder" and "Rolf Krage" are among the first results of the study; Œhlenschlâger's "Steerkodder" followed; and Grundtvig's translation of the whole of Saxo, is a very important contribution to the subject,



454 Wheaton's History of the Northmen. who inhabited Nordalbingia, or the territory between the Elbe and the Eyder.'-pp. 10, 11. the Eyder.—pp. 10, 11.

The authority referred to here, is that of professor Rask, who quotes as his authority the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Yet it may well be doubted if there be any the slightest ground for these refined and closely drawn distinctions. The proof has not yet been produced that, either in Denmark or in England, a people speaking Icelandic ever existed; and as little is it proved that the Anglo-Saxon language, as we find it in books, is a mixed language sprung up in England, produced by the amalgamation of the Vikings, whom history calls Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, and by local circumstances with which we are unacquainted. It would, indeed, be much too rash to decide from this book. and by local circumstances with which we are unacquainted. It would, indeed, be much too rash to decide from this booklanguage on the German origin of the Anglo-Saxons, even if it had much more of a German character than it really possesses. Without inquiring into grammatical niceties, the argument which, by means of the language, is brought against the Northernity of the Anglo-Saxons, may be combated by these three facts; that modern English, which has still most in common with ancient English, is far more nearly allied to Norse than it is to German; that Danes and Icelanders have found it much less difficult then that Danes and Icelanders have found it much less difficult than Germans to make themselves acquainted with Anglo-Saxon; and lastly, that the ancient Icelanders reckoned the language as well of England as of Denmark, but never that of Germany, under what they called Danish. If, in the meanwhile, other positive proof of the preponderance of the northern spirit amongst the Anglo-Saxons is required, than that which springs forth visibly from their whole history and literature, the "Drapa" of Beowulf might well serve for such; since we there not only find Hengist as a fief-holder of the Danish king, but discover the clearest northern tradition, and are continually occupied with Denmark and Gothland, without hearing one particle about that Danes and Icelanders have found it much less difficult than Denmark and Gothland, without hearing one particle about Germany. To meet this irresistible fact, by declaring, like Thorkelin, that Beowulf's "Drapa" is a translation from the Icelandic, is certainly easy enough, but if it be merely remembered that the Icelandic literature first commences at the termination of the descently content of the desc that the Icelandic literature first commences at the termination of the eleventh century, just when the Anglo-Saxon, through the Norman invasion, ceases, there will be little disposition to select so desperate an outlet, instead of following the track of history, and coming to this reasonable conclusion; that in the North of England, which in particular continued to maintain a close alliance with the North, and which was the principal seat of Anglo-Saxon poetry, the Northern legends were preserved, from the middle of the sixth century, to the beginning of the eighth, when Beowulf's "Drapa" must have been written.



456 Wheaton's History of the Northmen. phetic mysteries of religion," he merely pours forth fancies, without the least historic foundation, unless we call it a foundation that Snorro cites a pair of unmeaning lines of a single skaldic maid, and that the Völuspa of the ancient skald is placed in the mouth of a spee-woman. Such again is the relation of Suhm [p. 51] of a skald, who was raised to the vacant Juttish throne, on the decease of Frode III, in the fourth century of the Christian æra; for however exact all this may sound, it is quite certain that it refers to nothing but the old Hiarne skald, who, according to a popular legend in Saxo, was immediately after the birth of Christ, made king over the whole of Denmark, as a reward for his elegy on the celebrated and beloved Frode Fredegod. Somewhat similar is the relation [p. 174] respecting Thorkild Adelfar, who, about the year 730, embraced the Christian belief, "and whose conversion was probably attended out the least historic foundation, unless we call it a foundation mark, as a reward for his elegy on the celebrated and beloved. Frode Fredegod. Somewhat similar is the relation [p. 174] respecting Thorkild Adelfar, who, about the year 730, embraced the Christian belief, "and whose conversion was probably attended with the less difficulty, as he already belonged to a heathen sect which adhered to the gods or demons, enemies of the Aser;" for this Thorkild is neither more nor less than the hero of a beautiful fiction in Saxo, derived probably from an Anglo-Saxon skald, who cared so little about chronology, that he made Thorkild an Icelander long before Iceland had any inhabitants, so that all the historian can say about the matter is, that he is well paired with Holger the Dane (the hero of Norman Romance), whose conversion is also confidently related [p. 175].

There are some other errors which should be corrected. Nissa (where the conflict took place between Svend Estrithson and Harald Haardraade) is placed on the Norwegian coast [p. 346], instead of on the Danish (now Swedish), off Halland; the battle between the Jomsvikinger and Hakon Jarl [p. 295], is represented to have taken place in the Bay of Bergen (Bergens Vaug), instead of Hiorung Vaug, by Sul-oe. If our memory do not deceive us, the words also about the position of the skalds during the battle which are attributed [p. 31] to Oluf Trygvason, confound him with Saint Oluf, whose words they were, and used at the battle on Siklestad, where he, as is rightly observed [p. 53] "assigned to his skalds a conspicuous post, where they might be able distinctly to see and hear, and afterwards relate the events of the day." So again when Mr. Wheaton says of Saint Oluf, that his zeal against the pagan religion induced him to include the songs of the skalds among the other inventions of the demon, and that Sighvat Skald said of him, "he was unwilling to listen to any lay." The story which is here not correctly represented, is to be found in Snorro, to the following effect: That when Sighvat Skald came first to king Oluf, and wishe

