

Forfatter: Grundtvig, N. F. S.

Titel: Udrag fra History of the Northmen, or Danes and Normans, from the Earliest Times to the Conquest of England by William of Normandy

Citation: Grundtvig, N. F. S.: "Grundtvigs værker", i Grundtvig, N. F. S.: *Grundtvigs værker*, Faculty of Arts, Aarhus University, s. 445. Onlineudgave fra Grundtvigs Værker: https://tekster.kb.dk/catalog/gv-1831_494-txt-shoot-idm143/facsimile.pdf (tilgået 02. maj 2024)

Anvendt udgave: Grundtvigs værker

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As a pioneer leading to the ancient Northern lands, as one who has travelled so far, and gathered up so much, and recorded his observations so well, Mr. Wheaton is highly praiseworthy. It is to be hoped, as what he tells us is told so agreeably, that it will excite a strong desire to hear more. We are glad of an opportunity of pointing out some of the topics on which the North is capable of affording instruction to the literary inquirer; and in doing so, we shall make frequent reference to Mr. Wheaton's book, remarking on what appear to us some of its defects and errors—not in a temper of reprehension certainly—but in friendly suggestion.

The ancient literature of the North may be grouped under three distinct heads, mythological, poetical, and historical. Every one of these deserves special notice; and it might be shown in vast detail what a rich harvest each would afford, even to the gleaner. Under each particular head, however, we shall make a few observations, both for the purpose of communicating a somewhat more comprehensive idea of the whole subject than is current among our writers; and of correcting misconceptions into which Mr. Wheaton has sometimes fallen, though, be it said, almost always in company with some authority or other. The principal source of the imperfections of Mr. Wheaton's volume is the want of a correct estimate of the comparative value of different authorities; his affections not unfrequently betray his judgment—that which interests him—that which decorates his story—he receives on slight and insufficient evidence. There is an intimate alliance between benevolence and credulity. Credulous, Mr. Wheaton cannot be called, but he is too willing to be satisfied with imperfect testimony.

For instance, he should have swept away, as unworthy of credence—or at all events he should have spoken more doubtfully on the subject, unless far better support could be found for the theory than any hitherto given—all those tales of the expeditions of the ancient Northmen to America, which are very current indeed among Icelandic historians, but which, if traced to their sources, will be discovered to be without authority. But does not Snorro Sturleson, the father of northern history, does he not record these American expeditions? Not he; though Mr. Wheaton quotes him; the fact being, that the passage which is printed in the Copenhagen edition, from the very faulty and almost worthless Swedish edition, and which records the visits of the Northmen to America (*Vinland*), is not, we believe, to be found in any existing ancient MS. And the accounts given of the natural productions, natural appearances, and aboriginal inhabitants of the discovered land, prove that they