

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

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* The *Völu-Spá* gives a short account of the creation of the universe, and of the gods and men by whom it is inhabited, according to the cosmogony of the *Eldas*, and the death of Odin's son, Balder, the god of day, who is lamented by all the deities, whose tears and prayers could not avert his doom. His body is burnt on the funeral pile, with that of Nanna, his lovely bride, who had died of a broken heart, and with his horse and arms, like those of the ancient heroes of the North. His funeral obsequies are to be followed by the destruction of the universe by fire, typified in the god *Satur*, the Northern *Pluto*.

'The sun all black shall be,
The earth sink in the sea,
And ev'ry starry ray,
From heav'n fade away;
While vapours hot shall fill
The air round *Ygdrasil*,
And flaming as they rise,
Play towering to the skies.'

After which a new heaven and a new earth shall appear, whilst two individuals of the human race, saved from the general destruction, shall perpetuate their species in the world thus renovated. Balder shall return again from the dark abodes of *Hela*, and reign triumphant in the mansion of the gods, once more restored to its ancient magnificence and splendor. This beautiful mythos is doubtless an image of the life of the seasons, and has reference to the celebration of the ancient festival called *Midsumers-blót* in the ancient language of the North, when the days, having reached their extreme length, begin to shorten, soon bring in their train the dog-star's burning ray, and are followed in these Northern climates, in a short transition, by the winter's cold, when all nature is wrapt in a death-like sleep, which is again succeeded by the renovating spring. But, at the same time, it probably carries with it another, a more remote and a higher signification, being, to use the words of the eloquent historian of Sweden, "a symbol of all Time, of the changes of the great Year of the World, representing the general dissolution of all things as a consequence of the first God's Death—the death of Goodness and Justice in the world. Balder returns, followed by reward and punishment, by a new heaven and a new earth. Through the truth thus inculcated, and at the same time the inviolable sanctity which the Northern mythology attaches to an oath, it rises above mere Nature and acquires a moral value for mankind."—pp. 65, 66;

In this track Mr. Wheaton might very advantageously have proceeded farther, and by gathering up the characteristics of the ancient mythology, which are to be found in so many Danish and Swedish sources, have brought the *Edda* to illustrate the whole.

The truth is, that the death of Balder, independent of all arbitrary explanation, is the great pivot in the conflict between the *Aser* and *Jotuns*, upon which the principal matter of the

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 Thyrses), 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 Noones), 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 the wicked; 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 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 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 develop 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*, Kbhvn 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.

† 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-SPA*, and various other Eddaic songs, an Asiatic authority and origin. The fancy seems a very idle one.