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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 struggle between its greatness and its littleness, its lowering passions, and its elevating spirituality: at present we can only refer to two or three characteristics of Scandinavian mythology, and show their influences on the ancient Scandinavians.

The inhabitant of the North, a warrior by habit, almost by necessity, was, by the guidance of his religious belief, trained to hope for something of repose and peace, beyond and above the conflict and the joy of victory: his first glory might be the Warrior-hall (Valhal), but a higher object was pointed out to him, when Valhal should sink into the dust, and all the gods of battle (the Aser), have expiated by their death the misuse of power, and arise glorified in the house of peace, in the golden-roofed Guhle. Thus was bravery to be released from its impurities, to be emancipated from that thralldom to which even the noble are subjected from the wicked. The first stage of the spirit's happiness was victory; the second, Valhal, where the spirit is still but half emancipated; the third, Guhle, with its eternal, uninterrupted tranquillity and power.

Again, Loke, who may be considered as a personification of the reasoning power, is placed upon the confines of the world of Aser and Jotuns, as if his services were at the disposal of either. Although of Jotun birth, he is the foster-brother of Odin from the beginning, and seems to be in alliance with the Aser, until, by compassing the death of Balder, he betrays his deep and dark design to destroy the divine life, and stands the convicted representative of a reasoning sophistry, and in prominent contrast to a spiritualized and virtuous intellect.

The third and last singularity which we will point out, is the manner of Balder's death. It is recorded in the Myth, that when the gods, through distressing dreams, had become filled with fear for the life of Balder, his mother Frigga extorted an oath from all the Vætter (spirits of nature with which it was imagined the things of the world were animated), that they would do no injury to Balder, which made the Aser so confident, that they daily, for diversion's sake, shot at Balder, whom no weapon could wound. Frigga, in the mean time, had neglected to take the oath from a creeping-plant, called misletoe, because it was so tender a twig; and Loke having discovered this, took the twig, and forcing it into the hands of one of the Aser, the blind Hodur, said, do you also have a fling at Balder; where-upon Hodur shot, and gave Balder his death-wound. This may be deemed an emphatic symbol of the destiny which has often stricken even the noblest of the self-created divinities of humanity, overwhelmed by the paltriest weapons. So truth itself may suffer for a time from scorn and mockery—the intellectual misletoe.

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, 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 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 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 rifacimento 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.