

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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from the Danish translator, is far advanced, and the accessibility of the work, will soon give it the place in public opinion to which it is intitled.*

That the historic poems of the Edda, or the songs concerning the exploits and downfall of those mighty hero-races, the Volsungs, Budlungs, and the Giukungs or Nibelungs, form a highly remarkable relic of ancient Northern song, doubly alluring to the inquirer, both on account of their deviation from, and their resemblance to, the Germans' Lay of the Niebelungs, is indisputable; but they all look so like translations, and are so wanting in the completeness, clearness, and compactness, which distinguish Beowulf's "Drapa," that it would be doing the Skalds of the North a great wrong, to take this wreck of a bark stranded on Iceland, for Skibbladner (Odin's ship) itself. Mr. Wheaton has made an excellent choice in the specimen he has given of the first lay of Gudruna [p. 83] which likewise, in regard to form, belongs to the noblest, and depicts in few, but powerful and masterly strokes, the deep-toned pathos of the warrior-maid of the North; who, as it sounds in the old song, does not beat her bosom and wring her hands over the corse of the beloved hero, but is turned to stone, like Niobe, till she sees the spear-pierced eye, and then melts as snow would melt before Afric's sun, under the mere recollection of what formerly glistened beneath the vaulted arches of the heroic skull.†

The poetical merit of the songs of the Edda has, perhaps, been commonly over-estimated; but, on the other hand, a standard has been sometimes applied to them which would sink them far beneath their real value. It is certain, that at a time anterior to the colonization of Iceland, a race of Norse poets existed whose writings were natural, vivid, and popular. The few fragments that remain, and especially the elegy of Eivird Skalderspilder upon

* Mr. Wheaton states, erroneously [p. 131] that Beowulf has been translated, or rather paraphrased, in English verse, by the late ingenious Mr. Conybeare. Mr. Conybeare, in fact, translated only a few fragments. The adventure related in Beowulf's "Drapa," is no doubt fabulous; but the historic relations, which are introduced as Episodes, deserve every attention—that relating the expedition of Fligelar to Friesland, and his fall in a conflict with the Franks and Frieslanders, is literally corroborated by history.

† Mr. Wheaton is in error when he says [p. 83] that Celenschläger has enriched his works from these songs. Grundtvig has dramatized the story in his *View of Northern Heroic Life*.* In Germany, also, De la Motte has attempted the same thing with a part of the tale, and at least produced a poetic work which deserves to be known.†

* *Optin af Norners og Aesers Kamp*. Klvn, 1811.

† *Sigurd der Schlangentöchter*.