

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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Far, then, from being our duty to seek in Anglo-Saxon for translations from the Icelandic, it is quite in harmony with the natural course of things to suppose that the Icelanders, who became in Northern literature the immediate successors of the Anglo-Saxons, translated or imitated the most popular of their writings, and that thus the entire poetic Edda, or, at least, the greatest portion thereof, may have been of an Anglo-Saxon origin. This, at least, is what Grundtvig firmly maintains in the introduction to his Danish Translation of *Beowulf*, and we have not seen any strong argument against the weighty reasons he adduces, as well from the language and versification, as from the spirit of the book. It is quite certain that the right of claim to the Edda may well be urged on behalf of the Anglo-Saxons; and if they can, with reason, make a claim thereto, it is obvious that a near relationship between them and the inhabitants of the North, is incontestably proved, and this is, indeed, the grand affair; for if it is clear, that the Anglo-Saxon poetry is substantially the same as we find in the Edda, and trace in Saxo, in the *Hervarar Saga*, and in many other monuments of the North, it is a very subordinate question as to the land or dialect in which the poem or the legend first arose.\*

Notwithstanding these observations, and slight differences of opinion, we are assured of Mr. Wheaton's cheerful recognition of us as fellow-labourers in the field he has been so advantageously exploring; and in which we are equally desirous of planting friendship, and of gathering truth. The few inaccuracies we have discovered, we speak of without hesitation; for they are few indeed, and most insignificant, compared with the errors, not only of French and English, but even of German historians, who have been occupied by the same subject. If Mr. Wheaton is misled, it is under the guidance of some literary name. He has followed Suhm and Munter, where they have led him astray, and if he had sought *their* leaders, they would nowhere have been found, except in some ancient legend, some old woman's tales, which pleased their fancy and occupied their pen. Thus when Munter speaks, as quoted by Mr. Wheaton, of the "female skalds, or poetesses, whose lays sometimes breathed the harsh notes of war, and celebrated the achievements of conquering heroes, and at others sang the pro-

\* In the Exeter Manuscript, as Conybeare has already observed, [*Illustration of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, p. 235-41.] are to be found clear traces of an Anglo-Saxon poem, which corresponded with the *Volundar Quida* in the Edda. The name is, however, written *Veland* by Mr. Conybeare, and so it is commonly spelt in Anglo-Saxon books; but in the Exeter Manuscript it stands clearly *Velund*, being thus exactly like the *Volund* of the Edda.

phetic mysteries of religion," he merely pours forth fancies, without the least historic foundation, unless we call it a foundation that Snorri 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 spæ-woman. Such again is the relation of Suhm [p. 51] of a skald, who was raised to the vacant Jutish 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 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 Icelfander 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 Snorri, to the following effect: That when Sighvat Skald came first to king Oluf, and wished