

But the *Voluspá* closes with the consoling assurance of the ultimate restoration of all things;

At last emerges from the ocean
An earth in every part flourishing.
The catenacts flow down :
The eagle flies aloft,
And takes the fish in the mountains.

The Asæ meet in Ida Valle,
And talk of the world's great calamities :
And of the ancient *ruine* of Finbultyr.

These things done, the wonderful deo
Are found gilt in the grass,
Which those of the former days possessed.
There are fields without sowing :
All adverse things are become prosperous.
Baldur will come again.

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A hall stands brighter than the sun,
Covered with gold in Glapte.
There virtuous people shall dwell :
And for ages shall enjoy every good.

The second or *Resenian Edda* is a systematic compendium of the former. It is the work of Snorrio Sturluson, the most famous of the many Icelandic historians, chiefly known by his great work, the *Heiðskringla*, which records the annals of the ancient Scandinavian kings. His writings are concise and energetic in style, and evince a familiar acquaintance with foreign literature. For these islanders had many opportunities of acquiring information: merchant-ships from distant lands visited them every summer, and frequently remained with them throughout the winter. And their skalds, it is not to be forgotten, were nobles and warriors, and were received by the sovereigns whom they visited, with every mark of honor and distinction. The names of nearly two hundred are on record, who distinguished themselves in the three centuries that followed the first discovery of the island.

Thus it pleased Divine Providence that while the rest of Europe lay in mediæval darkness, a pure and noble literature should illumine this barren and solitary island. Here was the lone sanctuary, whilst all around was superstition and bloodshed. Christianity breathed here a purer atmosphere. The subjection of Iceland to the Papal see was never complete: in so remote a region the thunders of the Vatican were disregarded. The mild and peaceful precepts of the revealed religion assumed a ready sway over a thoughtful and humanized community, already pre-disposed for their reception. Before the arrival of the first missionary, it is related that the layman or chief-magistrate of the island, feeling

the hand of death upon him, requested his friends to carry him into the open air, that he might look upon the sun, and so die blessing the great God who made it. Even in their ancient Theogony, they describe all things, gods and men, as depending on the will of one supreme Deity, the "All-fader;"—to which awful being none might impute the attributes or failings of humanity. Their early ceremonies were not, indeed, unstained by cruelty and superstition, but these were of brief continuance. Angrim Jonas, in commenting on these matters, observes: "These things have been related, not in vain, or to disgrace my nation; but that we, the descendants of these men, may be excited to consider seriously how much we owe to the divine goodness which has freed us from this more than Cimmerian darkness, illuminating our minds with a ray of divine light." Such was the pure faith of the Icelanders. But their golden age was rapidly drawing to a close. The sun of their prosperity was to set in clouds, and every kind of calamity was to herald and betoken their fall. Along with their vigour and elasticity of spirit, their literary existence ceased, when the island became subject to the absolute rule of Norway. This lamentable event occurred in the middle of the thirteenth century; and was attended and followed by all imaginable evils, as if, with the independence of Iceland, its tutelary deities had departed. Earthquakes shook the soil: volcanoes emitted their awful fires; the sky was darkened with clouds of dust and sand. The horrors of their own fabled *Nifelheim* seemed transferred to the earth: meteoric fireballs usurped the place of stars, and the wind moaned through the darkness like the wailings of a condemned spirit. Some of the hills, it is said, were uprooted from their base: and boiling fountains burst out where rocks had stood before. *Hecla* and the terrible *Keikianes* were in full activity: the air was shaken with repeated thunderstorms: and ice from the coasts of Greenland was accumulated in mountains round the shore. Last and worst of these horrors came the pestilence. That desolating plague, the "black death," which had already covered so many lands with mourning, was now summoned hither, and swept off nearly two thirds of the inhabitants. With affecting fidelity the relations of the plague-stricken remained with them to the last. Hence the ravage was tenfold. The people died by thousands beside their own ruined and prostrate cottages. Along the beautiful inland valleys, along the much loved homesteads of their fathers, all was voiceless and dead—all save the irrepressible plaints of bereaved and agonized humanity.