

began to develop itself at a very early age. But in truth the child is father of the man, and not less true is it, I believe, that the nation is father of the child. This leads us in our answer to the question of whence he comes, to consider the nation he springs from; but to be scientifically logical we must take yet another step backward and ask ourselves, from whence springs this nation? what are its sources? and more particularly as to its early literature, if any there be. And it is here, I think, that perhaps we will get some insight into the heredity, if I may so use the term, of those clear, terse, idiomatic and pre-eminently Norse sentences with which he draws so vividly those pure, strong, and pre-eminently Norse characters.

Briefly then, perhaps no country on the map of Europe to-day, with the possible exception of unhappy Ireland, has had a more turbulent domestic history or been more constantly the theatre of struggles for supremacy by rival factions than has Norway. As we look upon the making of this nation, as we obtain from the Sagas glimpses of the huge moulds in which its life has from time to time been cast, we find ourselves involuntarily exclaiming, "truly there were giants in the earth in those days." They were a people whose men were warriors, strong and unsubdued. They looked fearlessly upon the rugged nature around them and were undaunted by the waters of any sea. They built a navy, which was unconquered wherever the winds carried its ships. In the long days of the summer they waged war upon all men, and in the nights of the winter they sat around their fires, while the Edda singers told the prowess of their arms. Their gods were heroes and their heroes were gods. None but the heroes attained the Norse heaven; it is so written in the Edda:

Five hundred doors and forty more  
Methinks are in Valhalla;  
Eight hundred heroes through each door

Shall issue forth.  
All men of worth shall there abide.  
The Ash Igdrasil is the first of trees.

When a hero died, the funeral pyre was placed on a ship and lighted. It was then pushed out to sea, and the venturesome soul set adrift on its lonely voyage to Valhalla. They feared nothing, "not even death itself; they sported with it. We read so in the Sagas. Earl Erik had gone out to battle, and brought back many captives, whom he condemned to death. As the executioner was striking off their heads one said, "I will stick this fish bone that I have in my hand into the earth if it be so that I know anything after my head is cut off." Another, Sigurd, who was remarkable for his long and beautiful hair, called out, "I fear not death, but let no slave touch my hair nor let blood defile it." So one of the Norse men-at-arms stepped forward to hold up his hair while he was being beheaded. But Sigurd contrived by a sudden twist to bring the man's hands in the way of the axe so that they and not his head were cut off. The Saga goes on to tell us that this trick so delighted Earl Erik that he ordered Sigurd's release, and also that of all the rest who remained alive, and took them into his service. There is nothing little, contracted, or spiteful about such natures as these. They fought with valor in war, and in peace cherished no enmities. Imbued by nature with a strong spirit of unrest, they were ever setting their sails upon unknown seas, to discover what land might be upon the other side. It is from these fair-haired, blue-eyed Norsemen of the old Sagas, silent and deep-natured but modified by the dark and brown-eyed Lapp with his vivid imagination and tendency to natural mysticism, and also by the daring and energetic Finn, that Bjornson draws the very life-blood of his genius. It is as inheritor of the rough-hewn grandeur of the old Edda and Saga literature that he builds such strength and beauty into his work.