

# NORTHERN MESSENGER

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## THE NORSEMEN.

The recent celebration of the fourth centenary of the discovery of America lends additional interest to the memory of the bold Norse navigators who, nearly four hundred years before the birth of Columbus not only discovered America, but actually settled in Iceland and Greenland.

As early as 876, voyages were made by the Norsemen from their own rugged coast to the shores of our continent. Their visits, however, were so transient, that for many years the benefit of the discovery was lost both to themselves and the civilized world. Nevertheless, they left their impress upon civilization, and it is probable that Columbus himself must have heard of those old northern tales, told from father to son, of how Eric the Red, journeying westward many days, had planted a colony in that land beyond the sea; of how Leif, his son, inheriting his father's venturesome spirit, continued to voyage until he came to an island which he named Helluland (Flatstone Land), supposed to be Newfoundland; next, to Markland (Wood Land), supposed to be Nova Scotia; then to Vinland (Vineland), supposed to be the coast of New England, the mild country where grapes were growing, and where the hillsides were covered with flowers. It seems certain that some of the ancient Sagas were translated into French, and thence found their way into Italy, the land of culture and progress at that time. It would not be safe to say that Columbus did not pore over some of those ancient translations, whether he got his original idea from them or not. What we can be sure of, is that a "History of the Westward Voyages of Eric

Sanderson" was published in Italy prior to the fifteenth century. Leaving to Columbus the merit of an original conception, we may still believe that he was encouraged in his task by a sight of some of these works.

Probably no race has contributed more

to the picturesqueness and romance of history than those magnificent old warriors of the north, the Vikings. Their undaunted bravery, their superb physical development, their love of conquest, and their brilliant daring made them both respected and feared, even by the Romans, who permitted

them, for the most part, to dwell in peace in their rugged strongholds and settle undisturbed in the lands of Gaul and Britain, which were theirs by sheer force of arms.

From its earliest history, the life of this northern race was distinguished by a degree of civilization far in advance of the other nations of Europe, excepting always the Byzantine empire, which retained a meretricious refinement until the fall of Constantinople before the Turks. The Norsemen were neither savages nor barbarians, in the common acceptance of the term; their laws, customs, training, their methods of warfare by land and sea, the trappings and equipments of their ships and armies, showed remarkable intelligence and considerable technical knowledge in the arts of government and warcraft. Their early literature, the Eddas and the Sagas, is full of wild and thrilling tales of fierce battles, stormy voyages and glowing descriptions of the splendor of their dress and riding equipments, the richness of their armor, and the magnificence of their vessels. Gold was everywhere in abundance with these people; yet its use, although lavish, was marked by both taste and discretion.

But the profuse ornamentation of their war implements never detracted from their usefulness. It is only in recent years that even a fair degree of knowledge of the lives and habits of these Norsemen has been unfolded to us. We pause in astonishment before the evidences of their taste and skill, as revealed in the fine collections in the museums of Copenhagen, Stockholm, Christiania, Bergen, Lund, and Goteborg. Their weapons and coats of mail give ample proof that they ex-



A VIKING SHIP.