

of those three virgins concerning the destiny of children recently born. But oracles were not the only efforts made by the ancient Scandinavians to penetrate into futurity. They had *diviners*, both male and female, honored with the name of prophets and prophetesses, and they did the same as Moses says, Deuter., chap. 18th, of some pagan nations, "They hearkened unto observers of times and unto diviners." Some of them were said to have familiar spirits, whom they consulted under the form of idols; others dragged the ghosts of the departed from their tombs. Poetry was often used for the like absurd purpose, and the Skalds or bards boasted of power to disturb the repose of the dead, and to drag them out of their graves by certain songs which they knew how to compose. The belief in this power ascribed to these skalds or bards was so engrafted in the community, that even after the introduction of Christianity the priests were considered to have inherited this power from the skalds, wherewith they, amongst the superstitious people, made a most lucrative business. Nay, even a long time after the introduction of the Lutheran Reformation, the ministers of the Gospel were believed to understand the *black art*, as this power was called, and although this imposture was, as an abomination unto the Lord, severely forbidden by the government, the ministers often clandestinely made use thereof, thereby to increase their income.

But the same superstition and ignorance which made the ancient Northern nations believe in the power of the priests to disturb the repose of the dead, and to drag them out of their graves by certain formulas and songs, persuaded them also that some letters or *runic characters*, consisting of sixteen marks, and beginning with the letter "F," the origin of which is ascribed to Odin, included in them certain mysterious and magical properties. Impostors easily made a credulous people believe that these letters, combined after a certain system, were able to work miracles and to predict future events. There were letters or runes to procure victory, to relieve women in the perils of child-birth, to soften the severity of a cruel master, and to secure fidelity to the