

which they feared might happen, the blood of animals was not deemed sufficient, but they began to shed that of men, and this barbarous custom was not entirely abolished till towards the end of the ninth century, when they received the glorious light of the Gospel. Then they chose among the captives in time of war and among the slaves in time of peace, nine persons to be sacrificed, the bodies of which unfortunate victims were afterwards suspended in a sacred grove near the temple, of which grove every tree and every leaf was considered the most sacred thing in the world. And in a great national calamity, if the people believed that they had some pretext to impute the cause to their king, they even sacrificed him as the highest prize with which they could buy the divine favor. In this manner the first king of Vermland, a province of Sweden, was burnt in honor of Odin in order to put an end to a great famine. The kings in their turn did not spare the blood of their subjects, and many of them shed even that of their children. Thus a king of Sweden devoted to Odin the blood of his nine sons, to prevail upon Odin to prolong his life. The ceremony always concluded with feasting, by which they drank immoderately, and the kings and chiefs drank first healths in honor of the gods; every one drank afterwards, making some vow or prayer to the god whom they named, and hence came that custom amongst the first Christians in Scandinavia and Northern Germany of drinking to the health of our Saviour, the apostles and the saints, a custom which the Church was obliged, although reluctantly, for a long time to tolerate.

It was a general belief amongst the ancient Scandinavians that they easily might learn the will, inclinations and desires of their gods and their goddesses through the instrumentality of *oracles* and *divinations* like the people of olden Greece, and it was generally believed that the three virgins before mentioned, who watered the celebrated ash tree and dispensed the days and ages of men, delivered out these oracles in the respective temples. Saxo Grammaticus, the famous Danish historian of the twelfth century, tells us that it was customary amongst the Danes to consult the oracles