

## THE ROCKWOOD REVIEW

### LEGENDS OF THE OLD NORSEMEN.

Every nation has its mythology; for the human mind from the earliest days has always been of a reasoning nature, and in the early history of a race the strongest thinkers would be called upon to explain the phenomena of nature. For instance an echo was the voice of a god in the mountains, peals of thunder were caused by a powerful deity riding about the heavens in his chariot, and so with all the wondrous workings of nature. Frost and Heat, Winter and Summer, all must be explained as best could be interpreted to the questioning human mind, just as to-day the thinkers of the world are seeking after truth.

And in the mythology of the sturdy Norseman, the thoughts are full of strength and poetic beauty. Those who have studied the mythology of the Greeks and Romans ascribe to them gracefulness and wealth of illustration, while the attributes of simplicity and sincerity distinguish the Northmen. But we must compare the geographical situations of the two countries, the Greeks and Romans had their homes in the sunny South where the winters are mild and where vines and flowers luxuriate, where man's wants are few and easily supplied without hard toil, where there is time for play and rest, hence there is time for the development of the artistic. What a contrast to the stern barren country of the North, with its rugged rocks, its snow-capped mountains, its deep rock-girt fiords, its fierce winter with chill northern blasts, and life a constant struggle with hardship of every kind!

There is to be sure the beautiful sunshine of the long summer days, when night is but a short twilight, still there is that long reign of gloomy darkness when the sun

scarcely shows himself, and the twinkling of the stars and the flickering of the Aurora Borealis give the most brilliant light they have.

The mythology of the Greeks has heretofore been more extensively studied than the Norse, and has supplied many a theme for the sculptor, painter, and poet; Jupiter and Mars are much more familiar names to the English speaking races than Odin and Thor, and yet the Anglo-Saxons have more claim to kinship with the Norse, for we have a common ancestry; a trace of it shows in the English days of the week, Sunday, Moonday, Tuesday, (Tys being the god of war), ODIN's day, THOR's day, FREY's day, (Freyja, goddess of love); Saturday we owe to the Roman god Saturnus. Norsemen call it LAUGAR-DAY, Lor's day—that is washing day, and there is an old saying that "there is always enough sunshine on Saturday to dry the priest's shirt." So the Norsemen probably prepared for Sunday by doing the washing on this day.

In Iceland that land of frost and fire, in that island where only the rim of the country is a settled district, where a living can be gleaned only from the sea, there in the lava-built houses of the poor fisher-folk were preserved the old eddas of the Norseland. Iceland was settled by refugees from Norway, men who for love of freedom left home and country to escape the despotic rule of Harald Fairhair, and in their adopted land they would repeat the old pagan songs or poems. These were sung or chanted just as was the Iliad of Homer in Greece. It is supposed they were not put into writing until 1240, but handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. It was Saemund, an early Christian priest, who first put these old stories into writing, and these from the elder Edda.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]