

**THE HEROES OF ASGARD.
TALES
FROM SCANDINAVIAN
MYTHOLOGY**

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The Heroes of Asgard. Tales from Scandinavian Mythology by A. Keary & E. Keary

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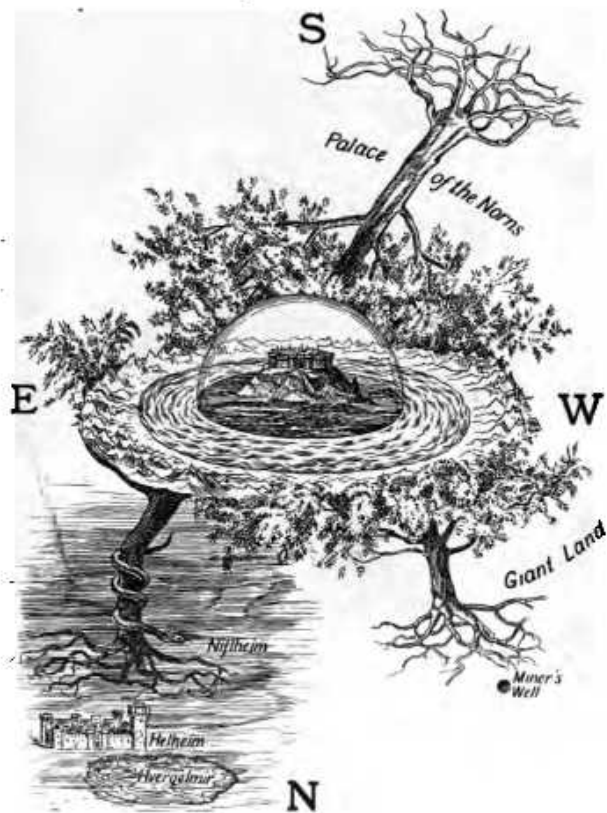
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A. KEARY & E. KEARY

**THE HEROES OF ASGARD.
TALES
FROM SCANDINAVIAN
MYTHOLOGY**



SKETCH SHOWING WORLD ASH AND ITS THREE ROOTS,
ASGARD CITY AND BIÞRUST.

The Heroes of Asgard

Tales from Scandinavian Mythology

By
A. and E. Keary

*Adapted for the Use of Schools, with New Introduction
Glossaries, etc., by*

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Late Lecturer in English Language and Literature at
University College, Bristol

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION,	vii
ODIN :	
CHAP. I.	1
II.	5
III.	7
HOW THOR WENT TO JÖTUNHEIM:	
CHAP. I.	12
II.	18
III.	25
FREY'S WOOING :	
CHAP. I.	35
II.	37
III.	41
THE WANDERINGS OF FREYJA :	
CHAP. I.	44
II.	48
IDŪNA'S APPLES :	
CHAP. I.	54
II.	58
III.	61
IV.	66
V.	70

100000

BALDUR'S DEATH .		PAGE
CHAP. I		75
II		81
III		86
IV		89
THE BINDING OF FENRIR :		
CHAP. I		94
II		99
III		102
GLOSSARY OF HARDER WORDS,		105
NOTES,		109
GLOSSARY OF PROPER NAMES,		111
QUESTIONS,		117
SUBJECTS FOR ESSAYS,		118
HELPS TO FURTHER STUDY,		119

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION.

BY M. R. EARLE.

THERE is a collection of enchanting old stories in verse, written in the old Icelandic language, called the "Edda." These stories are so old that they are often very long-winded and complicated. So from time to time grown-up people have tried to pick out some of the most exciting and tell them in simple English for children to read and enjoy.

Your fathers and mothers had a book of such stories in their childhood called after the original book "Tales from the Edda." They never tired of reading it, for it was full of the thrilling adventures of dauntless heroes and of their fights with giants and monsters.

The "Heroes of Asgard" is another book about the same heroes and the same adventures chosen out of the Edda for you, to show you what a delightful collection of stories it is. When you are grown up, perhaps you will learn Icelandic, or Old Norse as it is sometimes called, so that you may read the other stories for yourselves in the original Edda. Anyhow you can read a complete translation and learn more of Odin and Thor and the other heroes of Asgard if you like.

One reason why the Edda stories are so long and hard to understand is that they were not at once written down in books as stories are now-a-days. For the Northmen

had no knowledge of books or writing when these sagas and songs were first sung up and down the countryside in their old homes of Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

Men who wished to learn the old tales listened eagerly to the bards, or scalds as the Northmen called them, when they sang of the old heroes and gods in the halls of the great nobles and earls. And we may fancy how delighted the children would be, when their fathers told them these enchanting stories over again by the fireside in the long dark days of the northern winter.

But of course no one could remember word for word all the minstrels sang, and when they forgot any part of a story, men would invent some new romance to take its place. So the old songs were handed down by word of mouth from father to son, for hundreds of years growing and changing every time they were retold.

The songs grew too in another way—a way that I think you will quite be able to imagine. For you know that no two persons can ever tell the same tale exactly alike. So it was with the bards of the Northmen; first one scald and then another would make little changes in the songs they sang, and even invent new stories about the old heroes to enliven their tales and make them more exciting.

Thus it came about that countless additions and variations crept into the stories, so that no one knew how to distinguish the old tale from the legends that had grown out of it, and of course such long-winded stories grew harder and harder to remember. But at last poets arose amongst the Northmen who unravelled these tangled tales, and shaped the rather confused and artless songs into beautiful words and musical verse which men could keep in mind more easily.

It was in this way that the old tangles of stories were gradually woven into orderly poems—the lays of the Edda as we have them now. But although the old gleemen's

tales were composed into single and shapely poems, no one wrote them down or collected them into a book, till centuries later when the Northmen had made a new home for themselves far away in Iceland.

It was most likely between about 800 and 1000 A.D. that the scalds gradually composed the old rambling stories of their gods and heroes into single lays. And it is interesting to remember that it was just during these two centuries that the Northmen, or Danes as we more often call them, most incessantly harried the coasts of England, invading the country and setting up new homes for themselves in this land, as their brethren were doing in Iceland.

But it was not till much later that the single lays were all written down in Iceland. The earliest manuscript now existing dates from about 1240 A.D., though it is probably founded on an earlier collection which is lost. This book is that storehouse of stories which we call the "Elder Edda." So we have three stages in the history of the "Elder Edda" to remember: the whole collection of lays as we have it now is the youngest stage; the single lays make a middle stage, and the old tangled gleeman's tales, out of which the single lays were made, are the oldest stage.

This old book of poems is called the "Elder Edda" because it has a namesake the "Younger Edda," although this book too is really very old. The "Younger Edda" is written in prose by a learned Icelfander called "Snorri." He tells a great many of the stories in the "Elder Edda" over again in his own way, and he also tries to explain some of the hardest parts of the old lays about the gods and the creation of the world.

I spoke just now of the Northmen who settled in England. We may well be proud to remember that we have the adventurous blood of the Vikings in our veins. For these Danes never left England again, but settled down,