

**THE SAXON AND THE
NORSEMAN; OR, A PLEA FOR THE
STUDY OF ICELANDIC
CONJOINTLY WITH ANGLO-
SAXON, PP. 1-66**

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FREDERICK METCALFE

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THE SAXON AND THE NORSEMAN;
OR,
A PLEA FOR THE STUDY
OF
ICÉLANDIC CONJOINTLY WITH ANGLO-SAXON.

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'I was astonished to find that our forefathers had such a noble language. . . . I do not study Icelandic in order to learn statesmanship, or the science of war, but in order to think like a man, in order to educate my soul to meet danger with contempt, and rather leave the world than budge a jot from principles of the truth of which I have once become thoroughly convinced.'—RASK.

'Icelandic, from its close relationship to Anglo-Saxon, furnishes more abundant analogies for illustrating obscure English etymological and syntactical forms than any other of the cognate languages.'—MARSH, *Lectures on English Language*, Second Edition, p. 72.

SYLLABUS.

ANGLO-SAXON lore forgotten in the days of Queen Elizabeth. It is rescued from utter extinction by four representative men : Archbishop Parker, Sir H. Spelman, Junius, and Hickes. The labours of each. The extant remains of Anglo-Saxon literature in their several departments. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle most valuable for its accuracy, but devoid generally of literary interest. The version of the Four Gospels. The homilies of Ælfric. Alfred's translations of Gregory's *Pastoral Care* and of Orosius' *History of the World*. The narratives of Ohthere and Wulfstan, the Northern navigators. The Laws a most reliable source of information concerning the manners, customs, and notions of the people. The position of the slaves. The charters, wills, and other deeds, throw further light on these topics. The Anglo-Saxon bards and their productions : these must be considered inferior to the poems of the Old Northern Scalds. Ælfric's colloquy gives interesting information about the material side of Anglo-Saxon home-life. So does the fragment, *The Various Lots of Men*. Anglo-Saxon authors generally deficient in dramatic force, and individuality. The character of the Northmen and the Anglo-Saxons contrasted. After a fight of six generations the two nations, the invaders and invaded, sit down side by side in amity ! The sudden catastrophe of the Norman Conquest unsettled everything. Old English disappears for a couple of centuries, and at last emerges as modern English. Anglo-Saxon, philologically and grammatically considered, seems with interest to an Englishman.

The extant remains of IOELANDIC literature enumerated and illustrated. Its great value to an Englishman. Without the Old Edda the Pagan mythology of our ancestors would have been unintelligible to us. One of the Eddaic Poems, *Völuspá*, discourses of the beginning and end of things, as conceived by the Scandinavians. In it their cosmogony and theogony are given as a systematic whole. The mythological notices which abound in *Beowulf* are by this means explained. A comparison of *Beowulf* with the *Grettir Saga* identifies *Grettir* with *Beowulf*. This is further established by a single word. Hence the value of words in connecting ancient legends. Snorri's *Heimskringla* (*Chronicle of the Kings*); his graphic power. The Family Sagas paint the Northern men and women to the life. The Scandinavian Laws. Our 'jury' and 'hustings' come from Iceland. The position of the slaves. The *Diplomatorium Islandicum* and *Norwegicum* full of interest ; here we see how the Popes lorded it over Scandinavia. Icelandic geographical works. Trials of wit and humour. Scandinavian sayings and saws. Several English and Scotch ballads find their prototypes in the North. Icelandic philology illustrates English. Scandinavian Runes, Old and New. Anglo-Saxon tongue admirable, the Icelandic still more so. The study of both languages should go hand in hand if we would fully understand our own tongue.

THE SAXON AND THE NORSEMAN.

IN the days of Queen Elizabeth, about as little was known of Anglo-Saxon lore as of the papyrus rolls at Pompeii. What our forefathers had written was clean forgotten and out of mind. It was a happy inspiration which prompted Archbishop Matthew Parker (born 1504, died 1575) to rescue from present oblivion and near impending destruction, the monuments of our old English language and literature, which still survived in various corners of England. Armed with an order from the Privy Council, his hue and cry was pretty successful; 6,700 volumes, being, according to Strype, the nett produce of the search. Never was a law of treasure ~~tax~~ passed to better purpose. To this the College of St. Benet's, Cambridge, owes her priceless collection of 482 manuscripts, the bequest of the Archbishop; of which Fuller says that 'it contains more materials relating to the history of this kingdom, both civil and ecclesiastical, than can be found anywhere else. Of Parker's industry as an editor, there can be only one opinion¹. He will always be remembered for the publication of the first Anglo-Saxon (or, as it is the fashion of these days to call it, 'Old English') book printed in this country: *Ælfrie's Homily*: which is chiefly valuable for the light it throws on the doctrine of the Eucharist as held by the Church of England. To him also we owe the *Anglo-Saxon Gospels* edited by Foxe, with Gildas, and our other earliest historians. Parker's merits as an editor have found but scant favour from the

¹ Hook, *Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury*, new series, vol. iv. p. 492.

keen criticism of modern investigators. In spite of his protestation¹, that 'he had, according to his invariable practice, not added or diminished, as one would find by comparing his work with the manuscript,' interpolations and errors have been clearly brought home to him, or to his copyists².

When the master mind of Parker was removed by his death, another dark time seems to have gathered round these studies, and Camden saw reason to fear that 'devouring time would soon swallow up the study of Anglo-Saxon antiquities.' After an interval of some years, however, that learned knight of Norfolk, Sir Henry Spelman (born 1561, died 1641), stepped upon the scene, destined hereafter to be called by Whelock '*heros literaturæ A. Saxonicae.*' How he found matters he has himself left on record: '*Paulatim ita exhalavit animam nobile illud majorum nostrorum et pervetustum idioma, ut in universo, quod sciam, orbe nec unus reperitur, qui hoc scite perfecteque calleat, pauci quidem qui vel literas noverint.*' With no grammar or dictionary to help him, he set about the study of Anglo-Saxon, and, subsequently, encouraged by Usher, Lord Keeper Williams, Selden, R. Cotton, and others, he projected his Glossary. In collecting materials for this, he entered into correspondence with the learned men of Germany and northern Europe. Among these, not the least notable was Ole Worm, the learned Professor of Medicine at Copenhagen. There

¹ Preface to Asser's Alfred, 1574.

² It is from Parker, or from Josceline his Secretary, that we trace the myth of one Matthew of Westminster being the author of the *Flores Historiarum*, when in fact no such person ever existed. Matthew Paris, the monk of St. Alban's, was author both of the greater History and of this abbreviation, the *Flores*. This last was continued by another hand down to 1265, and then removed from St. Alban's to Westminster, where the manuscript was continued by other writers; and from the latter portions of it being the work of a monk at Westminster, the entire work was attributed to one Matthew of that ilk; a mistake which though detected by Palgrave and satisfactorily proved by Madden, from the original copy of the work which he discovered in the Chetham Library at Manchester, is perpetuated in Bohn's edition, and will no doubt die very hard, if at all.

are several of Spelman's letters in that delightful volume, *O. Wurmii Epistolae*¹. In one, dating from the Barbican, May, 1629, Spelman asks, 'De runis plura cupio: unde nomen, quaenam regio, et quis populus?'

Wurm deciphers a Runic inscription sent him by Spelman, but bumbles about the etymology of 'Rune.' His suggestions, 'Run' = ductus aquarum, and 'Run' = mark of the plough, find no favour with the knight, who in the Anglo-Saxon 'geryne'² = 'res occulta vel mysterium,' with which he compares 'to ronne one in the ear,' had soon ferretted out the true linguistic affinity for 'rune'³. He moreover shows that Ulfilas was not the inventor of Runes, but of the Gothic Alphabet, thus anticipating the dictum of Hickes in his *Thesaurus*. As soon as his Glossary, part I, appears in 1626, he sends two copies to Copenhagen, one for his friend Ole, and one for the King. From this time Wurm never ceases to urge, entreat, conjure, Spelman to bring out his second part, and complete the work. 'People kept borrowing the first part and were devouring it one after another.' And he concludes by sending Spelman a copy of his *Literatura Runica*. At length, in June, 1637, Spelman replies that he has been near dead: the bell went for him: the king was told that he was dead: he has been shaken in all his faculties, especially his memory. And what was the fate of that wonderful work the Glossary in the England of that day? It was offered by the author to a publisher for the nominal price of five pounds, but refused; and it remained unsold till two booksellers (1637) took it off his hands. Within a short time of his death, Spelman showed his further interest in Anglo-Saxon by founding a lecture on the language at Cambridge, which

¹ Copenhagen, 1751.

² 'Heofena ricea geryna,' The mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven; Anglo-Saxon, Matt. xiii. 11. Cf. the address in Old High German to the Heathens of the eighth century: 'Föhiu uort sint: usan mihilu garüni dar inne sint pivangen' = Few words but great mysteries are enclosed in it.

³ This letter only appears in the Glossary.