

Mythology of the Far North.

S NORTH STUHLERON (A. D. 1134-1231) begins the preface to the "Younger Edda" thus: "The Almighty God created in the beginning heaven and earth and all those things which belong to them, and last two humans, man and woman, whom he called Adam and Eve, whose progeny so increased that they scattered over all the world." He then gives a brief history of the human race to Odin, the Allfather, and those who came with him from Asia to the north, and while their first permanent settlement in Sigtuna, Sweden, not far from Stockholm, and from there spread over all Europe. In Sigtuna Odin established a government similar to that of the past of Asia, which he and his people came. He gave laws and established the customs of his own country. He had a supreme council, or tribunal, composed of 12 judges. Their duty was to watch over the public weal, to administer justice to the people, to preside over the courts of law, to preserve the religious secrets, or sacred mysteries. Snorri says that in most parts of northern Europe the people for ages spoke and wrote the language that Odin spoke and wrote, and that his followers and their descendants, although naturally brave, were peaceable, well skilled in art, handicraft, agriculture and such. Notwithstanding that he generally refers to those people as Asa and Asa men, yet he occasionally refers to them as Arimas, which makes me think that those and the people generally referred to as Aryans are all the same people. And as the original writers, who follow the so-called lost tribes farthest, leave them in the neighborhood of the Caspian sea, marching on toward the north, seeking for a country where they could enjoy perfect freedom, both politically and religiously, I am convinced that the people that Snorri writes about, and he says came from Asia, are all the same people.

THE YOUNGER EDDA.

The Younger Edda is a work of nearly 100 pages, small quarto, so I cannot give it in full, but only touch upon the most important parts. The Edda begins by stating that Allfather is the oldest and highest of all the gods. In Asgard, the holy city in Asia, he had 12 names. The first one, Allfather, the second is Herrin, or the lord; the third, Gantur, the creator; fourth, Herfather, or lord of hosts; fifth, Sigfather, or the father of victory; sixth, Rikfather, or the father of the universe; seventh, Yggfather, or the father of the gods; eighth, Hroptatyr, or the lord of the prophets; ninth, Svifdrik, or the omniscient; tenth, Hrafn, or the lord of the universe; eleventh, Yggur, or the protector; twelfth, Farnatyr, or the lord of the peaceful.

The foundations of these 12 names are taken from the works of several northern antiquaries of both Icelandic and Danish nationality, such as Rasmus Christian Rask, Sveinbjorn Egilsson, Gudbrand Vigfusson, and last and not least, Prof. Rasmus B. Anderson, Madison, Wis.

THE FATHER OF ALL.

The Allfather, or the father of all, says the Edda, lives forever and ever, governs all his kingdoms and rules all things whether great or small. He made the heaven and the earth, and all which belongs to them. And he made man and gave him a spirit that shall live forever and never be destroyed, although the body be burned to ashes or turned to dust. And all the people who live righteous lives shall live with him in Ginnir or Vingolf, the homes of the virtuous and elect, while those who are wicked shall go to Niflhel, the regions of death. Before he made the heaven and the earth he was in the world of mid.

THE FUTURE WORLD.

The world to come is to be divided into three main divisions. The heavenly, or upper one, was that in which dwells the Allfather, together with 12 gods, whom he has chosen to be his assistants in deciding the destiny of the world and to render the final judgment upon mankind. The god were married and they and their wives, the goddesses (sydjar) were constantly watching over the children of men, admonishing, warning, and protecting them while in mortality. The palace of the goddess Idun was to guard over the life-giving and life-protecting elements of the universe. The goddess Freya, from whom the first day in the week, Friday, has its name, has a very important mission. She was to keep records of all marriages, watch over all the married people, keep records of their deeds and deaths, and re-unite in the heavenly mansions in the world to come all who were faithful to their marriages (dominant according to the Edda) and elect, while those who were wicked shall go to Niflhel, the regions of death. Before he made the heaven and the earth he was in the world of mid.

THREE MAIN DIVISIONS.

As before stated the universe of the future was to be divided into three

main divisions or degrees, and each of these three was to be subdivided into three, thus making what is termed the nine worlds. And as the highest world will be occupied by those who have been virtuous, just, and married, so the two lower divisions of the heavenly world were to be occupied separately by those of the two sexes, who have been just and virtuous, but unmarried. Thus it will be seen that those only who have been married and pure were by our ancestors thought worthy of life throughout all eternity, to share the heavenly pleasures of the Allfather and his peers, or rather only those of that class are to become the Great Creator's peers in the highest heavens, while the ninth, or lowest world is to be occupied by those who have committed perjury, shed innocent blood or led virtuous women astray, and there throughout the endless future to suffer the most horrid torments. It is nowhere stated what classes of people are to occupy respectively the five intermediate abodes but there is reason to believe that it will be by those who are not fit for the heavenly glories, nor worthy of the incomprehensible torments of Niflhel, which some of the late antiquaries translate to mean "deeper than hell."

GREAT PERSONAL LIBERTY.

One of the remarkable features of the religion of our ancestors, the followers of the Allfather Odin, was what appears to have been a vast amount of personal liberty, and consequent individual responsibility. Every votary was supposed to know what was right or wrong, and hence to know his duties in life. Every one was supposed to reap his or her just and due reward, if not in this life then assuredly in the next. And as a consequence of this, all of the gods, it was taught, had once been in mortality. And thus we see that each understood this principle of evolution. As man now is, God once was, and as God now is, man may become.

THE END OF THE WORLD.

According to our northern ancestors, at the end of the world there will be a great and bloody struggle. Selfishness will reign supreme. The nearest kindred even will destroy one another for the sake of gain. The last conflict between the gods of light and those of darkness, those of goodness and those of evil, will be tremendous. The earth, with all that belongs thereto, even the gods themselves, will be changed, but the Prophets Vana see the earth come forth again in renewed beauty and splendor, full of abundance in vegetation and other necessities of life. All mankind will come forth, clothed in immortality. The gods will come forth, and on the plains of vivacity (Ida Siletum) counsel together, previous to rendering the final judgment. There, in the grass, they will find the golden plates which the gods had in the beginning and wherein the records of the deeds of both the gods and the other inhabitants of the earth were evidently recorded.

Prof. R. B. Anderson, Madison, Wis., writing regarding Odin, the Allfather, says: "Odin commanded the Asas, whose country was situated between the Pontus Euxinus and the Caspian sea. Their principal city was Asgard. Odin having united under his banner the youth of the neighboring nations, marched towards the west and north of Europe. Many sovereign families of the north are said to be descended from these princes. Thus Heriast and Horsa, the Saxon chiefs who conquered Britain in the fifth century, claimed Odin in their principle of evolution. So did also the other Anglo-Saxon princes, as well as the greater part of the princes of lower Germany and the north."

DESCRIPTION OF ODIN.

"Odin is in the Icelandic Sagas depicted as the most persuasive of men. Nothing could resist the force of his words. He sometimes delivered his harangues with verses, which he composed extemporaneously, and he was not only a great poet, but it was he who taught the art of poetry to the Norsemen. He was the inventor of writing, and the rune characters so long used in the north. This marking down of the unseen thought that is in man with written characters is the most wonderful invention ever made. It is almost as miraculous as speech itself. He knew how to sing airs so tender and melodious, that the very plains and mountains would almost open and expand with delight; the ghosts, attracted by the sweetness of his songs, would leave their internal caverns, and stand motionless around him. But while his eloquence, together with his august and venerable deportment, procured him love and respect in a calm and peaceable assembly, he was no less dreadful and furious in battle. Such was the historical Odin of the north, such was, in other words, the great example that the people of the north had to imitate in war and in peace."

FREED FROM TYRANNY.

Was it not in the neighborhood of the Caspian sea that the ten tribes

are really lost sight of by the known oriental writers? Snorri et al. think traces them to there. Then let us briefly but impartially and without prejudice consider that as in Icelanded originally from tyranny, seeking a country where they could live in freedom. The Icelanders did the same, they fled from monarchical tyranny, seeking states and titles lacking them, and sought homes in a wild and barren country. The American pioneer pilgrims did that very thing, and under the same circumstances, although it was not a country that they sought their homes in. All those people, even though fleeing from tyranny, leaving their homes and titles behind them, were when they had to fight, brave and cunning warriors, which certainly shows that those who seek peace, are as a rule brave heroic warriors, while tyrannical agitators and oppressors are generally the very opposites. "When they persecute you in one city, flee to another" is the order of the Master.

The author of "The Aryan Race, Its Origin and Its Movements," gives many very convincing proofs of the similarity of the beliefs and customs of the Israelites and the Aryans, which I have not space to quote here. On page 168 in an article that I must, however, quote, it reads: "The Hebrews were a people who not distinctively a patriarchal organization, and their religious ideas present traces of ancestor-worship. Abraham was, and is looked upon as the father of the race, its remote ancestor. It is not Abraham, however, but the God of Abraham, or rather a compound of this deity with the God of Moses, that is worshipped today by the Jews. The indications are strong that this special God of the Hebrew patriarch, the family God of Abraham, with whom he conversed and held personal relations, represented an ancestral divinity. * * * He expanded with the growth of the Hebrew intellect into the supreme ruler of heaven and earth." About the Aryans he says on page 172: "That in ancient Arya each house was a temple, each hearthstone an altar, each household a priest, each family a congregation, with its private deity and its private ritual of worship."

FAMILY WORSHIP TRACED.

The same author refers to the highland tribes and clans in Scotland as the evidence of the evolution of the Asiatic family worship into that of the clan. The plain traces of family worship or rather ancestral homage are to be found in the history of all the Indo-German, or Teuton-Scandinavian races. Among them the household stood as a central figure of several generations, as the living and the dead. He represented all those, he was the family priest and he spoke with the voice of the whole body of ancestral debts, and was responsible to them all, both the living and the dead, for the faithful performance of his sacred function.

This it seems to me ought to be of deep interest to the Latter-day Saints. I shall close this article with an important quotation from that eminent English writer, Samuel Laing. He says: "All that man hopes for of good government and future improvements in his physical and moral conditions, all that civilized men enjoy at this day of civil, religious and political liberty—the British constitution, representative legislation, the trial by jury, security of property, freedom of mind and person, the influence of public opinion over the conduct of public affairs, the reformation, the liberty of the press, the spirit of the age—all that is or has been of value to man in modern times as a member of society, either in Europe or in the new world, may be traced to the spark left burning upon our shores by the northern barbarians."

THE GOTHIC RELIGION.

"The old Gothic, or Odinic religion," says Prof. R. B. Anderson, "had embodied in its principles and elements which had a tendency to make its votaries brave, independent, honest, earnest, just, charitable, prudent, temperate, liberty-loving, etc.; principles and morals that in the course of time and under favorable circumstances evolved the Republic of Iceland, (A. D. 874-1266) the Magna Charta of England, and the Declaration of Independence."

ODINIC RULES OF LIFE.

The same author also remarks that the rules of life as indicated by the "High Song" of Odin, and other poems in the Icelandic Eddas are briefly summed up by Prof. Keyser as follows: 1—The recognition of the depravity of human nature, which calls for a struggle against our natural desires, and forbearance toward the weakness of others. 2—Courage and faith both to bear the hard decrees of the fates, and to fight against enemies. 3—The struggle for independence in life in regard to knowledge as well as to fortune, an independence which should, therefore, be earned by love of learning and industry. 4—A strict adherence to oaths and promises. 5—Candor and fidelity as well as foresight in love, devotion to the tried friend, but dissimulation toward the false, and war to death against the implacable enemy. 6—Respect for old age. 7—Hospitality, liberality and charity to the poor. 8—A prudent foresight in word and deed. 9—Temperance, not only in the gratification of the senses, but also in the exercise of power. 10—Contentment and cheerfulness. 11—Modesty, and politeness in intercourse. 12—A desire to win the good will of our fellow men, especially to surround ourselves with a steadfast circle of devoted kinsmen, and faithful friends. 13—A careful treatment of the bodies of the dead.

TRIBUTE TO ICELAND.

I know nothing more appropriate to add to this than the following from the pen of Thomas Carlyle: "Much would have been lost had Iceland not been discovered by the Northmen. This Old Norse people were, many of them, natives of Iceland. Iceland was settled mostly from Norway, but there was a good sprinkling among them of Scotch and Irish Celts. They were, people who preserved the true characteristics of their race. They preserved the traditions of their race, and one of the vocations of the Icelandic village was to make a yearly round of the courts of the German, Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon monarchs of Europe, and relate there either in story or song the tradition of their ancestors, in which was left in the works of Snorri Sturluson in his Heimskringla and Edda, the Viking tales of the north, and other important works which compose the ancient literature of Iceland. This summer C. W. Fenrose, of the council of the twelve, and others, while in Copenhagen, inspected the old Icelandic sagas, which are preserved in the Royal Library, and in a letter to me, Elder Fenrose expresses his appreciation of the literary value of those important works of the JOHN THORPELSON, Tristram, Utah.

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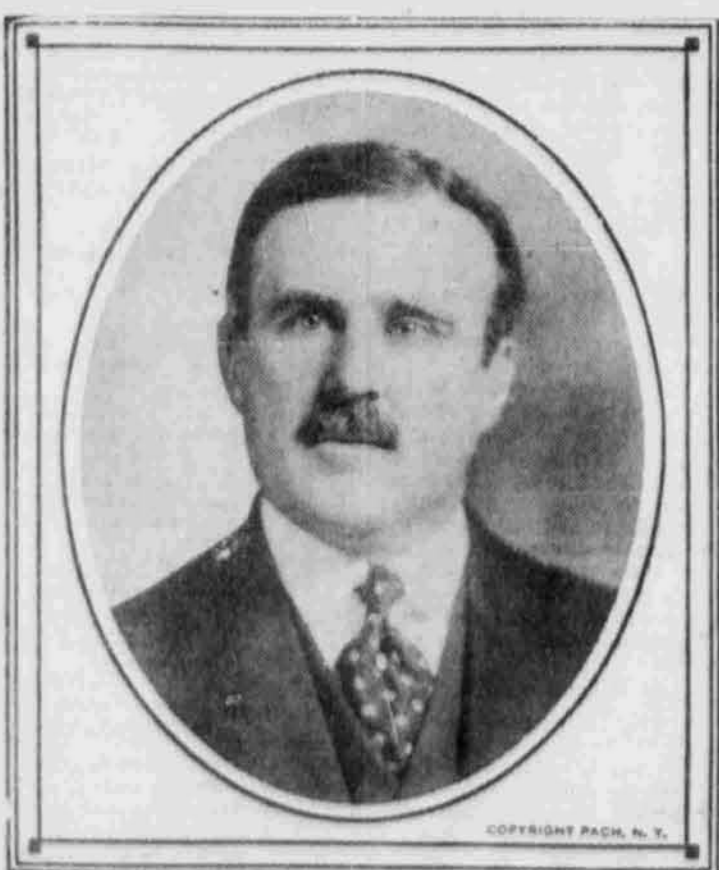
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