A handbook of Norse mythology

Mortensen Karl Andreas
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A HANDBOOK OF
NORSE MYTHOLOGY

BY

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TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This popular presentation of the myths and sagas which took shape here in the North but whose foundation is common property of all the people who speak a Gothic-Germanic language, first appeared in 1898 and has been used since then in the study of Norse Mythology in the high schools and universities of all the Scandinavian countries. Since Professor Crowell has thought that the little book might also achieve a modest success in the youngest but richest and most powerful branch which has grown from our common root, I have without hesitation accepted his friendly proposal to translate it into English. I find great satisfaction in having my work put into the world's most comprehensive language and placed before students in the United States, where I have so many friends, where so many relatives and fellow-countrymen have found a home and a
future, and toward which country we Northerners look with the deepest admiration and respect for the mighty forces which are seeking to control material things and to break new ground in the infinite realms of the intellect.

I sincerely thank Professor Crowell for his intelligent rendering of my Danish text, since on account of the nature of the subject and the half-poetic form, it has called for patient work and for uncommon insight. I would likewise thank the Thomas Y. Crowell Company of New York for their willingness to publish the book.

It is my earnest hope that the American student into whose hands the book may fall will be able to reap from it the advantage which the translator has had in mind and to feel awakened in him some of the love for our oldest common memorials, which has inspired the author in his task.

Karl Mortensen.

Odense, Denmark,
December, 1912.
TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

The idea of translating Dr. Mortensen's *Nordisk Mythologi* suggested itself when my attention was called to the book by Professor E. Mogk of Leipzig.

I am chiefly indebted to the author, who has read the translation of all the prose and commented upon unusual points, all with friendly and cordial interest. With his consent I have translated the illustrative strophes from the Icelandic, according to the text of B. Sijmons in the *Germanistische Handbibliothek*, having for consultation H. Gering's *Vollständiges Wörterbuch der Edda*, the German translation of Gering, the Danish of Gjessing, and the English of some unpublished selections by my friend, the late Dr. Adrian Scott, sometime member of the Brown University faculty. When the work was practically complete, I saw Olive Bray's more recent translation and was slightly influenced by it. Dr. H. Her-
mannson of Cornell University has read my strophes, making corrections and suggestions. I thank him for his interest and encouragement, and I thank Professor A. Heusler of Berlin for many helpful hints. I have also been assisted in many ways by my wife, Carrie E. Crowell, A.M.

Professor W. H. Schofield’s translation of Sophus Bugge’s *The Home of the Eddie Poems* has been most valuable for reference, especially in the matter of spelling.

A. C. C.

Providence, R. I.,
January, 1913.
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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1. By "Norse mythology" we mean the information we have concerning the religious conceptions and usages of our heathen forefathers, their faith and manner of worshiping the gods, and also their legends and songs about the gods and heroes. The importation of Christianity drove out the old heathen faith, but remnants or memories of it long endured in the superstitious ideas of the common people, and can even be traced in our own day.

There has never been found on earth a tribe of people which did not have some kind of religion, but the lower the plane of civilization on which the people are found, the ruder and less pleasing are their religious ideas. Religions consequently change and develop according as civilization goes forward. One can, therefore, learn much by knowing the mythology of a race, since it shows us what stage the
people in question have attained in intellectual development, what they regard as highest and most important in life and death, and what they regard as good or evil.

Sun-worship and Nature-worship.—We can easily perceive that a belief in counseling and controlling gods presupposes a far higher civilization than savage people in their earlier history possess. Religious ideas proceed partly from soul belief, belief in the continued life of the soul, and partly from the belief that nature is something living, peopled by mysterious beings which control regular and irregular changes in nature upon which man feels himself dependent. Such beings are often designated by the Greek word Demons. These nature-demons make themselves plainly known through the roaring of the storm, the rippling of the water, or the wind’s gentle play with the tree-tops. But races in the childhood period of their development cannot hold fast to a belief in life apart from bodies. Demons, therefore, are thought of in bodily form—as men or beasts. At the same time man feels his helplessness and powerlessness in the presence of Nature and its mysterious forces; he is prompted, then, by offerings and supplications to gain friendly relations with these powers which he with his own strength cannot overcome. In this we begin to find the first germ