



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

HEROES OF ASGARD

A. & E. Keary

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

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by

A. & E. KEARY



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PREFACE.

In preparing the Second Edition of this little volume of tales from the Northern Mythology for the press, the Authors have thought it advisable to omit the conversations at the beginning and end of the chapters, which had been objected to as breaking the course of the narrative. They have carefully revised the whole, corrected many inaccuracies and added fresh information drawn from sources they had not had an opportunity of consulting when the volume first appeared. The writers to whose works the Authors have been most indebted, are Simrock, Mallet, Laing, Thorpe, Howitt and Dasent.

INTRODUCTION.

If we would understand the religion of the ancient Scandinavians, we ought to study at the same time the myths of all Teutonic nations. A drawing together of these, and a comparison of one with another, has been most beautifully effected by Simrock, in his *Handbuch der Deutschen Mythologie*, where he tells us that whilst the Scandinavian records are richer and more definite, they are also younger than those of Germany, which latter may be compared to ancient half choked-up streams from which the fuller river flows, but which, it is to be remarked, that river has mingled in its flowing. Grimm says that both religions—the German and the Northern—were in the main identical, though in details they varied; and as heathenism lingered longer in Scandinavia than in any other part of Europe, it is not surprising that there, rather than anywhere else, we should find the old world wants and hopes and fears, dark guesses, crude imaginings, childlike poetic expressions, crystallised into a pretty definite system of belief and worship. Yes, we can walk through the glittering ice halls of the old frozen faith, and count its gems and wonder at its fearful images; but the warm heart-reachings from which they alike once flowed, we can only darkly feel, at best but narrowly pry into here and there. Ah! if we could but break up the poem again into the syllables of the far off years.

The little tales which follow, drawn from the most striking and picturesque of the Northern myths, are put together in the simplest possible form, and were written only with a design to

make the subject interesting to children. By-and-bye, however, as we through their means become in a slight degree acquainted with the characters belonging to, and the parts played by, the various deities of this mythology, it will not be uninteresting to consider what their meaning may be, and to try if we can trace the connection of one with another. At present it seems best, as an introduction to them—and without it they would be scarcely intelligible—to give a very slight sketch of the Northern mythology, as it is gathered from the earliest Scandinavian sources, as well as a short account of the sources from which it is gathered.

Laing, in the introduction to his Translation of the *Heimskringla* Saga, says,—“A nation’s literature is its breath of life, without which a nation has no existence, is but a congregation of individuals. During the five centuries in which the Northmen were riding over the seas, and conquering wheresoever they landed, the literature of the people they overcame was locked up in a dead language, and within the walls of monasteries. But the Northmen had a literature of their own, rude as it was.” Songs and sagas, mythical and heroic, were the staple of this literature of the north; and these appear to have been handed down by word of mouth from skald to skald until about the beginning of the twelfth century. Then Sæmund the Learned, and others, began to commit them to writing. Sæmund the Learned was born in Iceland about the year 1057, fifty years after Christianity had been positively established in that island. He passed his youth in Germany, France, and Italy, studying at one time with a famous master, “by whom he was instructed in every kind of lore.” So full, indeed, did Sæmund’s head become of all that he had learnt, that he frequently “forgot the commonest things,” even his own name and identity, so that when asked who he was, he would give the name of any one he had been reading about. He was also said to be an astrologer, and a charming

little anecdote is related of him in this capacity, which, however, would be out of place here. When he went back to Iceland, he became priest of Oddi, instructed the people about him, studied the old religion, and, besides writing a history of Norway and Iceland, which has been lost, transcribed several of the mythic and heroic songs of the North, which together form a collection known by the name of the *Poetic, Elder, or Sæmund's Edda*. The songs themselves are supposed to date from about the eighth century; Sæmund wrote them down in the twelfth. The oldest copy of his original MS. is of the fourteenth century, and this copy is now in the Royal Library of Copenhagen. A few years ago they were translated into English by B. Thorpe. So much for the history of the *Elder Edda*—great-grandmother the name is said to mean, but after all she scarcely seems old enough to be called a great-grandmother. We have traced her growing up, and seen how she has dressed herself, and we begin to think of her almost as a modern young lady. When we listen to the odd jumble of tales she tells us, too, we are more than half inclined to quarrel with her, though without exactly knowing whether it is with her youth or her age that we find fault. You are too young to know what you are talking about, great-grandmother, we complain; but, oh dear! you mumble so and make use of such odd old-fashioned words we can scarcely understand you. Sæmund was not the only man who wrote down songs and sagas; he had some contemporaries, many successors; and, about fifty years after his death, we hear of Snorro Sturleson, a rich man, twice Supreme Magistrate of the Icelandic Republic, who also lived for some time at Oddi, and who has left many valuable additions to the stock of Icelandic written lore. Laing says of him—“Snorro Sturleson has done for the history of the Northmen, what Livy did for the history of the Romans.” Amongst other things, he wrote a sort of commentary or enlargement of

Sæmund's *Edda*, probably drawn from MSS. of Sæmund and of others, which were preserved at Oddi. This is called the *Prose, Younger, or Snorro's Edda*, and was translated many years ago by M. Mallet into French. Added to these two sources of information respecting the Scandinavian mythology, there are many allusions to the myths scattered through the heroic lays with which Northern literature abounds.

The *Poetic Edda* consists of two parts—the mythological and the heroic. The mythological songs contain an account of the formation and destruction of the world, of the origin, genealogies, adventures, journeys, conversations of the gods, magic incantations, and one lay which may be called ethical. This portion of the *Edda* concludes with a song called "The Song of the Sun," of which it is supposed Sæmund himself was the author. Thorpe, the English translator, says, "It exhibits a strange mixture of Christianity and heathenism, whence it would seem that the poet's own religion was in a transition state. We may as well remark here that the only allusion to Christianity in the *Elder Edda*, with the exception of this last song, which stands quite alone, is a single strophe in an incantation:—

"An eighth I will sing to thee,
If night overtake thee,
When out on the misty way,
That the dead Christian woman
No power may have to do thee harm."

Which savours curiously of the horror which these heathens then evidently felt of the new faith.

The *Younger Edda* is a very queer old lady indeed. She begins by telling a sort of story. She says "there was once a King called Gylfi, renowned for his wisdom and skill in magic;" he being seized with a desire to know all about the gods, and wishing

also to get his information first-hand, sets off on a journey to Asgard itself, the gods' own abode. When he gets there he finds a mysterious Three seated upon three thrones—the High, the Equally High, and the Third. The story-teller is supposed to have taken this picture from a temple at Upsal, where the thrones of Odin, Thor, and Frey were placed in the same manner, one above another. Gylfi introduces himself as Gangler, a name for traveller (connected with the present Scotch word gang), and proceeded to question the Three upon the origin of the world, the nature and adventures of the gods, &c., &c. Gangler's questions, and the answers which he receives, will, with reference to the *Elder Edda* tales, help us to get just the short summary we want of the Scandinavian mythology—the mythology grown up and old, and frozen tight, as we find it in the *Eddas*.

“What was the beginning of things?” asks Gangler; and Har (the highest of the Three), replying in the words of an ancient poem, says,—

“Once was the age
 When all was not—
 No sand, nor sea,
 No salt waves,
 No earth was found,
 Nor over-skies,
 But yawning precipice
 And nowhere grass.”

This nothingness was called Ginnungagap, the gap of gaps, the gaping of the chasms: and Har goes on to relate what took place in it. On the north side of Ginnungagap, he says, lay Niflheim, the shadowy nebulous home of freezing cold and gathering gloom; but on the south lay the glowing region of Muspellheim. There was besides a roaring cauldron called

Hvergelmir, which seethed in the middle of Niflheim, and sent forth twelve rivers called the strange waves; these flowed into the gap and froze there, and so filled the gap with ice: but sparks and flakes of fire from Muspellheim fell upon the ice. Ginnungagap on the north side was now filled with ice and vapour and fleeting mists and whirlwinds, but southwards with glowing radiancy, with calm and light and wind—still air; and so, continues Har, the heat met the frost, the frost melted into drops, the drops quickened into life, and there was a human form called Ymir, a giant. “Was he a god?” asks Gangler. “Oh! dear no,” answers Har; “we are very far indeed from believing him to have been a god; he was wicked and the father of all the Frost Giants.” “I wonder what he ate?” said Gangler. “There was a cow,” Har went on to explain; “she was made out of the drops, too, and the giant fed upon her milk.” “Good,” answered Gangler; “but what fed the cow?” “She licked the stones of Ginnungagap, which were covered with salt hoar frost;” and then Har goes on to relate how by degrees a man, Bur, grew up out of the stones as the cow licked them, good, not like Ymir, but the father of the gods; and here we may remark that the giant and the god equally were the sole progenitors of their immediate descendants. Ymir was the father of the first giant, Bur had a son called Bōr. But after that the races mix to a certain extent, for Bōr married a giantess and became the father of three sons, Odin, Vili and Ve.

“Was there any degree of good understanding between these two races?” asks Gangler. “Far from it,” replies Har; and then he tells how the sons of the god slew all the frost giants but one, dragged the body of old Ymir into the middle of Ginnungagap, made the earth out of it,—“from his blood the seas, from his flesh the land, from his bones the mountains, of his hair the trees, of his skull the heavens and of his brains the clouds. Then they

took wandering flakes from Muspellheim, and placed them in the heavens." Until this time, says the *Völuspá*.

"The sun knew not
Where she a dwelling had,
The moon knew not
What power he possessed,
The stars knew not
Where they had a station."

About this time it happened that the sons of the god took a walk along the sea-beach, and there found two stems of wood which they fashioned into the first man and woman:—

"Spirit gave them Odin
Sense gave Hœnir
Blood gave Lodin (Loki)
And goodly colour."

After this it is said that the all-holy gods, the Æsir, the Lords, went to their judgment seats, held council, and gave names to the "night and to the waning moon, morn, midday, afternoon, and eve whereby to reckon years." Then they built a city called Asgard in the middle of the earth, altars and temples, "made furnaces, forged tongs and fabricated tools and precious things;" after which they stayed at home and played joyously with tables. This was the golden age of the gods; they were happy. "To them," says the old song, "was naught the want of gold, until there came three maids all powerful from the giants."

In some mysterious way it appears that a desire for gold seized upon the gods in the midst of their innocent golden play. Then they formed the dwarfs, in order that these might get gold for them out of the earth. The dwarfs till then had been just like maggots in Ymir's dead flesh, but now received human likeness. A shadow begins to creep over the earth, the golden

age is past. At the same time three things happen. The gods discover the use or want of gold; the first war breaks out, as it is said, "Odin hurled his spear amid the people, and then was the first war;" and the three all-powerful giant maids appear. "Gold," says the old song (and calls her by a name as if she were a person), "they pierced with lances,—

"And in the High one's Hall
Burnt her once,
Burnt her thrice,
Oft not seldom,
Yet she still lives.
Wolves she tamed,
Magic arts she knew, she practised,
Ever was she the joy
Of evil people."

The three giant maidens are the three Fates—the sisters,—Past, Present and Future. They came from giant land, which in this place typifies the first mixed cause of all things; they came at the moment when the golden age was disappearing; they stand upon the very edge of its existence, at once the bringers and the avengers of evil. "The golden age ceased when gold was invented," is an old saying. "After the golden age, time begins," is another, or, in the words of a German proverb, "To the happy no hour strikes." And now let us see what sort of looking world these giants, gods, men, dwarfs and fateful maids whom Har has been talking about were living in.

"Round without," Har says so; but a *flat* round. The outmost circle a frozen region full of frost giants; inside that circle, the sea; in the middle of the sea, the earth in which men live, called Midgard, and made out of Ymir's eyebrows; in the midst of the earth Asgard, the city of the gods. It seems to be rather a disputed point whether or not Asgard was on the top of a hill.

Heavenly mountains are mentioned in the *Edda*, but they are placed at the edge of heaven under one end of the rainbow, not at all near Asgard, if Asgard was in the middle of the earth. However, to make the city more conspicuous we have placed it on the summit of a hill in the picture of the Scandinavian World which stands at the beginning of this chapter, and here remark that this picture must not be looked at exactly in a geographical light even from a Scandinavian point of view. It is rather an expression of ideas than of places, for we have tried to figure by it what is said about the great World Tree Yggdrasil and its three roots. "That ash," says Har, which was indeed the earth-bearer, "is the greatest and best of all trees." Its branches spread over the whole world and even reach above heaven. It has three roots, very wide asunder. One of them goes down to Ginnungagap. The frost giants live over it, and over this root is a deep well which we shall hear more of by-and-bye. In the picture this root could not be shown, but the branches which encircle the ice region are supposed to spring from it. Another root extends to Niflheim, the old roaring cauldron lies under it, a great snake called Nidhogg gnaws it night and day as the old lay says. "Yggdrasil's ash suffers greater hardship than men know of. Nidhogg tears it." Under this root also lies Helheim, a home of the dead. The third root is in heaven: gods and men live under it, in Asgard and Midgard; the giant fate-sisters also live under it, at the top of the Rainbow's arch in their palace very beautiful, which stands by the Holy Urda Fount. They water the tree every day with the holy water, so that ever "it stands green over Urda's Fount."

These maidens are called Norns;—they fix the destinies of men, Har says; "but besides them," he adds, "there are a great many other norns—indeed, for each man that is born there is a norn to decide his fate."

“Methinks, then,” says Gangler, “that these Norns were born far asunder; they are not of the same race.” “Some belong to the Æsir, some come from the Elves, and some are dwarfs’ daughters.” Besides these wonders, we are told that an eagle perched amongst the highest branches of Yggdrasil with a hawk between his eyes, four harts ran amongst the branches and bit off the buds, and a squirrel called Rataösk or branch borer ran up and down, carrying messages between the Eagle and Nidhögg, as one account says, causing strife between them—a kind of typical busybody, in fact.

Such is the myth of Yggdrasil, of which Jacob Grimm remarks “it bears the stamp of a very high antiquity, but does not appear to be fully unfolded.” Of course, it was only the symbol of a thought, the Scandinavians could not have believed that there was such a tree. But of what thought was it the symbol? The editor of Mallet’s *Northern Antiquities* says, “We are inclined to regard this mythic Tree as the symbol of ever-enduring time, or rather of universal nature, ever varying in its aspects but subsisting throughout eternity.” It is called somewhere “Time’s hoary nurse,” and we see the principles of destruction and of renovation acting upon it. One root in the formless elemental abyss, one in the formed ice-frozen-over giant land, its branches spreading over the whole world; one reaching up to the unseen. Its name means “Ygg”—terror, horror, fear—“drasil”—horse or bearer—and the first syllable is one of the names of Odin the chief god. We must not omit to mention that our Maypoles and the German Christmas trees are offshoots of Yggdrasil, “that ash, the greatest and best of trees.”

“But who is the first and eldest of the gods?” Gangler asks. “We call him Allfather,” says Har, “but besides this he has twelve names.”

Allfather, Odin or Woden, the eldest son of Bör by a giantess,

is the chief god of the *Eddas*, and it is quite true, as Har says, that he has many names. He was called Allfather—the father of gods and men, and Valfather or the chooser, because he chose which of the slain in battle should come and live with him in heaven; he called himself by many names when he travelled, he was known as Ygg, but generally, chiefly, he was Odin. The meaning of the first syllable of this last name is terror (like Ygg), or violent emotion. Simrock says that air in calm or storm lies at the root of Odin's being; from this he grew up to be a god of the spirit, a king of gods, "as in the simple ideas of the people," he says, "nature and spirit are inseparable; he became as much a commander of the spirits of men as of the forces of nature." Air, widespread and most spiritual of the elements, how naturally akin it seems to that wind, blowing where it listeth, which moves in hidden ways the spirits of men. Inspiration, madness, poetry, warrior-rage, the storm of wind, the storm of mind—we find Odin in them all. Thor the thunder-god stood next in importance to Odin. Odin was his father, and he had a giantess mother, Jörd (the earth). Besides these Har enumerates Baldur, Tyr, Vidar, Vali, Hödur, Bragi, all called sons of Odin;—we shall hear the stories that belong to them by-and-bye.

All these were of the race of the Æsir or Asgard gods; there were other deities counted amongst them, and yet kept a little distinct—the Vanir gods and goddesses. These were of a different race, and it is not clear how and when they became mixed with the Æsir. What the *Eddas* say about it is simply this, that the Æsir made peace with the Vanir and exchanged hostages with them. Amongst these we find Niörd a kind of sea-coast god, the original of Nipen still known in Norway, his son and daughter Frey and Freyja, "beauteous and mighty,"—Frey presiding over rain, sunshine, and the fruits of the earth; Freyja goddess of the beautiful year and of love, and Heimdall, a god who lived upon

the heavenly hills at one end of the rainbow. A sea-king called Ægir, whose nature is not quite defined whether he belonged to the god or the giant is occasionally mentioned in the *Edda* tales, and also a wise giant Mimer. But there is besides a mysterious being whom we name last because he requires a little explanation. This is Loki. He was one of the Æsir; we read of his being with Odin when that god took his fateful walk along the seashore and made man, he helped Odin in the work; we come upon him frequently travelling with the gods, sometimes at least as a friend, and yet it is evident that Loki was looked upon as an evil being. "Some call him the calumniator of the gods," says Har, "the contriver of all fraud and mischief, the disgrace of gods and men. Loki is handsome," he adds, "and well made, but of a very fickle mood and most evil disposition. He surpasses all beings in those arts called cunning and perfidy." Simrock says that fire lies at the root of Loki's being as air lies in that of Odin,—fire which has good and evil in it, but most outwardly *destructive* power; hence the beginning of the idea of his evil-heartedness. From simple nature myths, it is quite easy to conceive that the moral principle, as it grew up in a people, would develop spiritual ones, and the character of the gods would materially alter with the growth of the religion. Good and evil are scarcely conceptions which the wars of the elements give birth to. By the law is the knowledge of sin. The name of Loki, it is said, may mean the bright element.

Amongst the goddesses who were called Asyniur, Frigga stands out chief in the *Eddas* as Odin's wife, but several others are named, and also the Valkyrior, swayers of the battle and heavenly serving maidens. The peace between the Æsir and the Vanir, and the perceptible difference between these races of gods, points to an amalgamation of the religions of two tribes of Teutons in very early times: their faiths would be similar,

drawn indeed from one source, but would have been modified by the circumstances and requirements of the divergent tribes. Simrock supposes that the Vanir worshippers may have been dwellers by the sea, and have had a special reverence for wind and water deities—mild, wide, beneficent airs. Their gods are a little milder in nature than those of Asgard, they are also more purely nature deities, with less of the moral element in their characters, which looks as if the two faiths had joined at different stages of development, at different levels one may say, so that the line between them is still discernible. We have seen how Har explains to Gangler the formation of the universe in Ginnungagap out of the strange ice waves; primeval giant; beneficent might of the gods; its endurance, rooted in the mighty Tree, that reached from depth to height,—

“Laved with limpid water,
Gnawed by more serpents
Than any one would think
Of witless mortals.”

He had also something to say concerning the future of the world. “What hast thou to tell me about it?” said Gangler; and Har replied,—“In the first place there will come a winter;” and then he described the destruction of the world—flood and storm, and ice and fire, and warfare, a supreme conflict; all the powers of evil, the chaotic powers—primeval chaos surging again out of Niflheim and Muspellheim—on one side, the gods, the forming orderly principle of the course of the universe, on the other—all rage within, and through the mighty ash, which itself trembles, “Groans that aged tree.” Monsters and gods alike fall, killing each other, and one cannot say with whom the victory lies; for though the sun, moon, and stars are made away with, and the earth sinks into the flood, it soon emerges

again, “beauteously green,” destined, as it would seem, to run a second course. Brighter, purer? The account is so mixed that one cannot say, and why should we puzzle over it; perhaps they knew as little what they thought and hoped as we know about them—those old song-singers and myth-spinners of days gone by, as one of them says,—

“Few may see
Further forth
Than when Odin
Meets the wolf.”

Notwithstanding, we cannot help feeling, as we contemplate this myth, that there was something noble, very grimly courageous in its fatalism. Simrock says, “the course of Northern mythology is like a drama.” The world’s beginning, the golden years, the first shadow of evil, evil that came with times, evil fated to come, the troubles of various kinds, all death shadows which fell upon the gods (we shall trace them in the following tales); and above all, hanging over all, crowning all, the twilight, the struggle, the end, the renewing; for it is not, be it observed, the end of the world, of time, of succession of events that is recorded in this myth (called the Ragnarök Myth), but rather of the struggling powers that had been brought by these, that had formed these. Looking through this drama two things chiefly strike us, fatalism and combat. The two do not contradict one another. The gods fight the giants from the earliest times; they go on fighting them in a thousand ways, even though they know that their own final defeat and destruction are fixed—they ward off the evil day as far as possible, hoping through its shadow again and again, dauntless to the end. It is impossible to help admiring the impulses which led to the building up, and dictated the worship of this idea,—the worship of the gods who

were to die, who were, in spite of most courageous defiance of it, after all but the servants of the inevitable. Of course it was perfectly simple and natural that this conception of unceasing strife, of the alternate victory and defeat of light and darkness, cold and heat, should arise in the minds of any worshippers of the natural world, but it must, one would think, have acquired some moral significance to these heathen Northmen by the time that Odin had come to be Allfather, even Valfather, and Frigga, through the nourishing earth, the lady of married love and of the hearth. A good deal of this courageous spirit of conflict and self-surrender comes into the Scandinavian myths and heroic tales. We read of one of the gods' messengers, who, when implored to desist from an undertaking because danger threatened, replied, "For one day was my age decreed and my whole life determined." In a lay of Odin, it says, "We ourselves die, but the fair fame never dies of him who has earned it;" and this reminds us of the Scandinavian custom of engraving the records of their warlike deeds upon their shields. "When a young warrior was at first enlisted," it is said, "they gave him a white and smooth buckler, which was called the 'shield of expectation,' which he carried until he had earned its record." It is related of one of the celebrated Jomsburg sea-rovers called Bui, that finding himself defeated in an engagement, and seeing that all further resistance was fruitless, he took his treasure—two chests full of gold—and, calling out "Overboard all Bui's men," plunged into the sea and perished. But better far is the following:—"A warrior having been thrown upon his back in wrestling with his enemy, and the latter finding himself without arms, the vanquished person promised to wait without changing his posture while the other fetched a sword to kill him, and he faithfully kept his word."

Such traits as these lie on the light side of the Northern

character, pity that the other side is such a dark one. Craft, avarice, cruelty—we cannot shut our eyes to them—cropping up everywhere, in the stories of the gods, and still more frequently in the sagas whose details are sometimes most revolting. Amongst other stories, we have one of a young sea-rover, called Sigurd, by-the-bye, a son of that very Bui mentioned above. Sigurd and his companions had been taken prisoners, and were condemned to be beheaded. They were all seated on a log of wood, and one after another had his head struck off, whilst king Hakon their capturer looked on; the account says, that he came out after breakfast to watch the execution. The sea-rovers all met their fate with unflinching courage, and as the executioner asked each one, before he struck the blow, what he thought of death, each gave some fierce mocking answer; but when it came to Sigurd's turn, and he was asked what he thought of death, he answered, "I fear not death, since I have fulfilled the greatest duty of life, but I must pray thee not to let my hair be touched by a slave, or stained with my blood." The story tells us he had long fair hair, as fine as silk, flowing in ringlets over his shoulders. One of the cruel king Hakon's followers, being moved, it seems, either with pity for Sigurd's hair or admiration of his courage, stepped forward and held the ringlets whilst the executioner struck, upon which Sigurd twitched his head forward so strongly that the warrior who was holding his hair had both his hands cut off, "and this practical joke so pleased the king's son," continues the tale, "that he gave Sigurd his life."

"Thou tellest me many wonderful things," said Gangler; "what are the names of the Homesteads in heaven?" In answer, Har tells him about Odin's halls, and Thor's, and Baldur's, and Frigga's, and many another bounteous, wide-spreading, golden-roofed mansion; amongst them of Val-

halla, which Odin had prepared especially for warriors who fell in battle and who were thenceforth to be his sons, called Einherjar, heroes, champions. "Methinks," said Gangler, "there must be a great crowd in Valhalla, and often a great press at the door among such a number of people constantly thronging in and out." "Why not ask," says Har, "how many doors there are?—

"Five hundred doors
And forty eke
I think are in Valhall."

"But what does Odin give the warriors to eat?" asked Gangler. "The flesh of the good boar Sæhrimnir, and this is more than enough (though few know how much is required for heroes), for in spite of its being eaten every day it becomes whole again every night; truly it is the best of flesh." "And what have the heroes to drink?" asked Gangler "for they must require a plentiful supply; do they drink only water?" "A silly question that," replied Har; "dost thou imagine that Allfather would invite kings and jarls and other great men and give them nothing to drink but water? In that case the heroes would think they had paid dearly to get to Valhall, enduring great hardships and receiving deadly wounds; they would find they had paid too great a price for water drink. No, no, the case is quite otherwise, in Valhall there is a famous goat that supplies mead enough for all the heroes and to spare." "Mighty things these," said Gangler; "but how do the heroes amuse themselves when they are not drinking?" "Every day they ride into the court and fight till they cut each other in pieces, this is their pastime; but when meal-tide approaches they return to drink in Valhall." "Odin is great and mighty," answered Gangler, "as it is said in one of the Æsir's own poems,—

“The ash Yggdrasil
Is the first of Trees,
As Skidbladnir of ships,
Odin of Æsir
Sleipnir of steeds,
Bifrost of bridges,
Bragi of Bards,
Habrok of hawks
And Garm of hounds is.”

“But do all the dead go to Valhalla?” No; down below in Niflheim there was another home of the dead which was ruled over by the underworld goddess Hela, and called after her Helheim. Coldness and discomfort, according to one account, were rather its characteristics than actual suffering; and as all the dead were said to go there who died of sickness or old age, it was probably at one time regarded more as a place of misfortune than of punishment. The cold, hidden-away condition of the dead, separated from the bright, warm life of the upper world, would naturally suggest their being consigned to the keeping of some under-world deity, unless, indeed, they could lay claim to a second higher life by virtue of any great warlike deed done up here. By degrees misfortune must have deepened into suffering; and, as the moral sense quickened, the idea would arise of there being a retribution for misdeeds done on earth as well as an emptiness of its missed glories. There is a description given of some place of punishment—it is not quite clear what place it refers to—in these words,—

“A hall standing
Far from the sun
In Nastrond,
Its doors turn northward,
Venom drops fall
Through its apertures;