

S. A. DUNHAM

**THE HISTORY
OF DENMARK,
SWEDEN
AND NORWAY**



S. A. Dunham

The History of Denmark, Sweden and Norway

**From the Ancient Times in 70 A.D. until Medieval
Period in 14th Century (Complete Edition)**

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Inquiries into the origin of nations have never been productive of much good. Over that of all, with the single exception of the Jews—an exception which we owe to inspiration—a cloud hangs, that no learning, no criticism can penetrate. It is easy to be speculative—it is easy to be ingenious—it is easy to make a considerable parade of learning by citing the opinions of various writers, and by attempting to show how little dependence is to be placed on any one of them; but, though the vanity of an author may be thus gratified, his labour must be useless. If he has not authority or legitimate inference for what he advances, he is worse than uselessly, he is perniciously employed: he is wasting his own time and that of his readers, and he is involving the subject, which he ought to elucidate, in greater confusion than it was before. Thus every age and every writer adds to the mass of fable, or at least of uncertainty, until the truth is for ever hidden beneath it.

These observations especially apply to northern history. Yet, dark and uncertain as this subject is, and monstrous as are the hypotheses which native ingenuity has framed respecting it, curiosity will be gratified with a mere glimpse at them. Thus, in regard to the Swedes, we shall find their origin wrapt in an obscurity deep as that which covers the cradle of most other people. Many are the fables which grave historians, listening only to tradition, or wresting to a certain purpose the words of some obscure writer, or confounding the actions of many people, or misled by a fancied analogy and similarity of names, have perpetuated on this subject. That sage authority, the archbishop of Upsal, has no doubt that Noah was king of the whole earth;

that he settled in Scythia, which was inhabited a century before Italy; that his son Japhet, to whom Europe fell, spread his colonies still farther to the west; that Magog, the son of Japhet, was the first chief that colonised Sweden and Finland; that from Sweno, the son of Magog, sprung the Swedes, and from Gothar or Gog, another son, the Goths; that Thor, German, and Ubbo, brothers of Sweno, and his great vassals, were successful propagators of mankind; that Ubbo, who succeeded his brother Gothar, founded the city of Upsal, the most ancient metropolis of the north; that Siggo, successor of Ubbo, and the fifth king of the Goths, called Sigtuna into existence; that Eric, grandson of Gothar, and the sixth king of the Goths, began to reign about four hundred years after the universal deluge, and conferred great splendour on those northern regions; that, after his death, idolatry began in the north, the magnificent temple of Upsal being erected in honour of Thor, Odin, Frigga, and other divinities; that the Swiones or Swedes, and the Gothi or Goths, as being sprung from different roots, were frequently under different sceptres, though both regarding themselves as kindred, and for many generations living in harmony with each other; that, after the introduction of idolatry, this peaceful disposition began to be impaired, and in the course of a few reigns it wholly disappeared; that the Finns, Jutes, Gothones, Swiones, and other neighbouring people, became at length so numerous and so powerful, as to pillage the coasts of Sweden; that, to oppose them, no less than to procure the necessaries of life, which long-continued intestine wars had rendered very scarce, a large army was raised and a powerful fleet equipped, in about

nine hundred years after the deluge; that the expedition, which extended along the southern no less than the northern shores of the Baltic, from Holstein to the confines of Lithuania, gave rise to a new kingdom; that at this period the empire of the Goths, comprising so many people beyond the bounds of Scandinavia, was one of the most powerful in the world, notwithstanding the fact that the conquered provinces on the European continent were subject to their own king (to him who had led the expedition from Sweden, and to his successors), while Sweden obeyed another king who had been left at home with the necessary authority; that the new empire, the seat of which was in Poland or Hungary, sent off its conquering swarms into Asia and Egypt; that, the regions of the Goths being too extensive for the government of one man, they at length elected rulers independent of one another, and thus broke this vast empire into numerous fragments; that the origin of the Hungarian dynasty, which was purely Gothic, added to the weakness of the race; that, while these events were passing in Europe and Asia, the Swedish monarchy subsisted, though weakened by the emigration of its chief warriors; that this diminution, alike of population and strength, emboldened the Danes, who had hitherto been tributary to the more northern kingdom, to assume the offensive, but being themselves assailed by the Saxons, and unable to resist that martial people, they eagerly submitted to the Swedes, and chose Dan, a Swedish prince, the son of Humel, or Humble, the sixteenth native king of the Goths, to rule over them; that this prince gave his name to the Danish kingdom, while his brother Angul, the first king of the

English, left his name to that people; that Dan was succeeded by Lothar his son, and Lothar by Skiold—while, in Sweden, Humble was followed by Gothilas and Sigtrug; that Gro, the daughter of Sigtrug, became the wife of Gram, son of Skiold, king of Denmark, but contrary to the wishes alike of her father Sigtrug and of the Swedes; that her abduction by Gram led to a war between the Danes and the Swedes, in which the latter were vanquished; that Scarin, the successor of Sigtrug, was slain in battle by Gram; that, on his death, Swibdager, king of Norway, was elected king of the Goths and the Swedes, who detested their conqueror and the whole Danish nation—a detestation which was heartily returned; that, in revenge for the rape of Gro, a daughter of Gram was carried away into Norway; that Gram, arming to revenge the injury, was defeated and slain by Swibdager, who, however, had the generosity to place Guthrum, son of Gram, over the Danes; that they remained subject to the Swedes and Goths until Hadding rose against Asmund, the twenty-first king of the latter, and delivered his country from subjection. For these more recent events, for all subsequent to Skiold, the good archbishop has scarcely any other authority than Saxo, the Danish historian, whose facts, however, he does not scruple to alter whenever the honour of his country is concerned.^[1]

So much for fable—at least in regard to the greater portion of this rapid condensation of the archbishop's history. If we had not already had enough of this ingenious trifling, the *Atlantica* of Olaus Rudbeck would supply us with enough to fill many such volumes as the present. This writer far outdoes the prelate, whom he exceeds alike in

imagination and knowledge of tradition. To him the reader who may be fond of the marvellous, who may delight in traditional lore, and who may wish to see on how slight a foundation the most gigantic theories can be erected, may have recourse.^[2]

In claims to a remote origin Norway is by no means behind the former kingdom. According to Torfœus, one of the most learned, and, considering that he lived in recent times, least critical of mankind, the population of the whole country has been derived from four distinct sources. 1. Of these the giants were the most ancient. These, this historiographer contends to have been really what they are called, viz., much superior in bulk to the rest of mankind; and not that evil spirits, by magical rites, were permitted to effect such appearances. Though he rejects, as pure romance, the stories of many giants alleged to have been seen in comparatively modern times, he is sure that such a race did once inhabit the north; and he is inclined to derive them from Shem, the son of Noah. That they once lived, that their bones are still to be found in several regions of the world, that they may now live in Patagonia or some other country, cannot, he thinks, be disputed. We read of giants in Scripture; who, therefore, can doubt of their existence? As we have already intimated, he represents, as old women's fables, all the stories, however rife in his time, of giants being produced by the prince of evil spirits; nor will he allow that they are the offspring of men and huge beasts. If they did not spring from either of these causes, they must, necessarily, have derived their origin from one of Noah's sons. Nor can we be surprised at their appearance in the

north of Europe, seeing that we have so many proofs of their existence in Canaan, Egypt, Greece, Spain, Britain, and, indeed, all the world over. Their arrival in the north, however, was no voluntary act; being expelled from Canaan in the time of Joshua, they were glad to seek other settlements; and while some spread themselves throughout northern Africa, northern and central Europe, and, perhaps, found their way to America, others directed their steps towards Sweden and Norway: yet, before the arrival of these exiles, others of the same race might, for ages, have been in that peninsula. 2. After the giants, and, indeed, immediately after them, came the *Goths*; but the period cannot be fixed. Joannes Magnus and Rudbeck contend that it was immediately after the flood; but Torfœus dares not ascend to so high an antiquity, and he is satisfied with deriving the Goths from the Trojans, and with referring their arrival in the north to the age in which Troy was taken. 3. After the Goths came the *Asae*, or *Scythians*, whom he holds to be the third distinct race of men that helped to people the north. These were the followers of Odin, whose empire, at once spiritual and temporal, attested *his* policy and *their* prowess. 4. Yet it may be doubted whether these were the sole, or even the original, colonisers of Norway. The people of this as of every other country must have their indigenous families, or families, at least, who were here long before any strangers arrived. Thus, a certain man, Forniot by name, had three sons: Hler, ruler of the winds; Logi, lord of fire; Karl, sovereign of the sea. Snaer was the grandsire of this last-named monarch, and a celebrated prince he was. He had one son, Thor, and three daughters, Faunna, Drifa, and

Miollis. Thor was more powerful than the father, since he reigned over the whole of the northern part of the Scandinavian peninsula, including Finland; and divine honours were paid to him by at least one great tribe of his subjects. Thor had three children, Nor and Gor, who were males, and Goe, a daughter. This princess being stolen away, her two brothers went in pursuit of her. Nor went westward, subduing and killing many native kings, among whom were Hemming and Hunding: in short, he conquered the whole of Norway, to which he gave his name. The ravisher of Goe was Rolf, or Rollo, the son of a great prince, who submitted to Thor, and whose sister, Hodda, had the honour to become that monarch's bride. While he was performing these feats, his brother Gor was subduing all the islands of the Baltic and of the Icy Ocean, which constituted his dominion. The sons of Nor divided the vast region among themselves; hence the many separate principalities which were so long the bane of Norway.^[3]

No reader will be at a loss to perceive that this fourth race of men is a mythologic creation. These rulers of the elements, fire, water, wind—*Snaer*, or snow; *Jokul*, or frost; *Faunn*, or frozen snow; *Snifa*, or sleet—with many others, sufficiently attest this curious fact. Whether the Norwegians invented these elemental gods first, and called their mortal heroes after them; or whether they elevated those heroes after death to the dignity of local gods, we shall not attempt to discuss. The probability is, that in this country, the march of the human mind was the same as in other countries, viz., that men celebrated for their great qualities were believed to have originally sprung from a divine source, and after this

life to return to that source; to be invested in another state with a superiority akin to that which they enjoyed in this. As to a northern inhabitant, the sea and the winds were the most important elements, so the deities that they obeyed were the most powerful, the most dreaded, the most worshipped. Every page of the earliest Norwegian history (or fable, if the reader pleases) bears evidence to this inference, that long prior to the arrival of the Goths in that region there was a religion quite distinct from that which followed it; one of truly primitive character, which admitted of no refinement, which dealt with sensible objects, which appealed to the fears and hopes of mankind. The honour in which Thor, the father of Nor, and the common ancestor of all the Norwegian princes, was held, sufficiently accounts for his superiority over Odin himself, in the religious creed of that people. The Danes and Swedes held the former, the Norwegians the latter, to be the supreme god—supreme, at least, as far as the government of this world is concerned. Hence there must, at some period subsequent to Odin's arrival, have been an amalgamation of the two religions. If the successors of Odin in Denmark and Sweden forced the Norwegians to acknowledge him as a divinity, and to place his statue with that of Thor, it is manifest that they only paid him a secondary veneration; Thor sitting in state, surrounded by all the attributes of majesty, while the warrior god—the foreign Asiatic god—was made to stand beside him. On this subject, however, more in the proper place.^[4]

Denmark is, in no respect, behind either Sweden or Norway in its claims to antiquity. In the valuable collection of

Langebek, we find a list of monarchs in Icelandic^[5] as old, at least, as the tenth century, sufficiently ample for the vanity of any nation. It begins with Noah; passes down through the intervening generations to Odin, “that king of the Turks whom the Romans forced towards the north;” and ends with Hardecanute. Another branch of the same list deduces the regal genealogy from Odin to Harald Harfagre, the well-known monarch of Norway.^[6] In both cases, the names must be considered as strictly belonging to the Asiatic potentates, who were never alleged to have set foot in the north of Europe. During *their* reigns, fabulous or true, Scandinavia was not without its petty kings, or, if the reader pleases, hereditary chieftains, whose authority was similar to the patriarchal. Their names are given by Saxo Grammaticus and other native writers, who, following their own traditional songs, knew little of the Asiatic predecessors of Odin, and were therefore unable to enumerate them. Thus, too, with the Swedes, who, as we have seen, had their internal, no less than their external, kings—their domestic, no less than their foreign, potentates. Hence, in all these states, two distinct races of rulers—the native and the foreign—the former indigenous, the latter wholly strangers, to the regions of northern Europe.^[7]

That the Goths were resident in the north of Europe before the times which we denominate historic—that they had for ages, perhaps, been there when the Romans came into contact with them, is very probable. “Many vestiges,” says Gibbon, “which cannot be ascribed to popular vanity, attest the residence of the Goths in the countries beyond the Baltic.” Still no man in the least conversant with

antiquity—unless, indeed, like Joannes Magnus and Rudbeck, he has prejudices which no information can remove—will contend that they were the *first* settlers: it may even be doubted whether they constituted the second immigration into those regions. The Cimmerians, or Cimbri, were in Jutland, at least, before them; but whether even these were the first people that forsook their Asiatic abodes for western Europe is very doubtful: probably they were preceded by some other swarms whose very name time has destroyed, just as *they* were the predecessors of the Celts, a race sprung from themselves. The Finns and the Lapps, whose manners, language, and character are so different from those of the other European nations, are probably tribes of some race which arrived in more southern regions at a period lost in the depth of antiquity; and which the hostile incursions of Cimmerians, Celts, Goths, and other barbarians, exiled into the snows of the north.^[8]

Such are the conclusions of reason. They are not opposed to authority. What ancient history really informs us concerning the people of the north may be comprised in a few lines. They were split into tribes; and of these the *Swiones*—the Swiar of the middle ages—were the most conspicuous. They were a rich and powerful maritime nation; and, if Tacitus is to be credited, their kings were despotic. Lest they should turn against one another, or, what was worse, against their rulers, their arms were taken from them, and kept by the royal slaves. They were, no doubt, a tribe which inhabited Sweden. In the same region were the *Guttones*, or Goths, another tribe, probably, of more ancient arrival. As the lands of the two were

conterminous, the Swiones must have often called on their king for weapons, unless, indeed, their enemies, too, had been disarmed. But this alleged disarming is pure fable, and we know not how Tacitus could be so thoughtless as to relate it. The *Dankiones*—probably the Danskir or Danes—bordered on the Guttones. Whether they were confined merely to the islands now forming the Danish monarchy, or were also spread over, at least, part of Jutland, may be disputed. If, by Cadononia, Tacitus really means the peninsula, the Teutones were also there. There can be no doubt that all these tribes were kindred: they all came from Asiatic Scythia, however different the periods of their arrival. But, in regard to the *Fenni*, who are manifestly the Finns, he doubts whether he should call them a Teutonic or a Sarmatian tribe. Ptolemy locates them in western Lithuania; Tacitus, more to the north; and from the close affinity which a modern Polish professor has established between the Letts and the Finns, we may safely infer that they are of the same origin. Probably the stream of colonisation passed from Livonia across the gulf.^[9]

The distinction of tribes inhabiting northern Europe being granted, and authentic history assuring us that the Scythian Goths were the last people that reached western Europe—the Slavi, their hereditary enemies, scarcely penetrating to the centre—we naturally inquire, “At what period did they arrive?” Most antiquaries of the north, as we have already shown, have not hesitated to affirm that it was immediately after the deluge, and, consequently, that the Goths were the original inhabitants. Other writers, however, are satisfied with a more recent origin, and place this arrival about two

thousand years before Christ. Others, again, are willing to deduct a full millenium from this latter antiquity; but it may be doubted whether a single tribe of Goths had set foot in the north five centuries before Odin's arrival. Few tribes of them were probably there when he introduced a new faith. The opposition which his followers encountered in their political, no less than their religious character—in their conquests no less than their preaching—confirms this supposition; and the fact that nearly all the kings of the north boasted of their descent from some one of Odin's royal sons, almost elevates this hypothesis to the dignity of an historic fact. As the Goths—both those who accompanied Odin and those who had preceded him—were the conquering and, therefore, the dominant caste, the sceptre was generally held by princes of that nation; the conquerors were comparatively few in number; and the original inhabitants, though they constituted the bulk of the population, were constrained to bend in sullen acquiescence before the power of the strangers. By degrees, the amalgamation of these strangers with the former race (or, perhaps, races) produced that form of society peculiar to the north. The more we reflect on this subject the more we incline to the opinion that prior to the Odinic times the Goths were not very numerous in Scandinavia. They might have kings four or five centuries before Christ; probably there were immigrations of Goths from Asia before even that period; still there is more safety, because more reason, in the conclusion that, from remote antiquity to the arrival of Odin, the bulk of the population in those countries were of native, that is, of Finnish or Jutish stock, and that the sons

of the Asiatic conqueror were the first Gothic *monarchs* of the north.^[10]

That the original inhabitants, whether Finns, or Jutes, or Laplanders, or a combination of all the three, differed widely from the Gothic conquerors, in language, manners, religion, and character, is certain. The earliest poems of the latter—those traditional relics of a far more ancient age—are filled with allusions to this distinction. They represent the Finns and Lapps as magicians, as invested with uncontrollable authority over the elements; and the Jutes as at once giants and magicians. But the warriors of Odin arrogated to themselves no such powers, though their priests might. Legend, indeed, records some instances in which these powers were communicated to fortunate Gothic heroes; but the old inhabitants were the teachers, and what knowledge they imparted—which was always grudgingly imparted—was little in comparison with that which they retained. In the old Sagas, in the collection of Snorro Sturleson, in Saxo Grammaticus, and even in later authorities, we everywhere discover a marked antipathy between the victors and the vanquished. It originated in a twofold cause—in the difference of religion no less than that of race; and it was embittered in the same degree that it was perpetuated by mutual hostilities. The Finn, indeed, was unable to cope with the powerful Goth; but this sense of inferiority sharpened his invention, and made his hostility to be dreaded in proportion to its secrecy. The blow was struck in darkness; and the Goth, who had a sovereign contempt for the valour of his foe, was led to attribute it to supernatural rather than to human agency.^[11]

We have already seen the meagre sum of information which Tacitus has bequeathed to us respecting the state of the north in his time. For many centuries afterwards, no great additions were made to it. In the fifth we learn that between the Elbe and the Baltic—no doubt, too, on both sides of that river, to some extent—were Angles, Jutes, and Saxons. Of these the first had no other seat. The second were doubtless a bastard colony from the more northern parts of the peninsula; and the last were an offset from the great Saxon confederation. The Jutes were the fewest in number; yet they were the progenitors of the men of Kent and the Isle of Wight, and of a tribe among the West Saxons. The rest of the Saxons—West, East, and South—were derived from the Saxon division of the colonists. The Angles gave their name to the people who bore it (the East Angles and Middle Angles) and likewise to the Mercians and Northumbrians. Such, according to that venerable authority the Saxon Chronicle, was the connection between these people and our island. But, reverting to the state of northern Europe after the time of Tacitus, yet before geography made us well acquainted with it, king Alfred, in his epitome of Orosius, adds some particulars which he had learned from his own inquiries. These particulars he derived from Otter, a Norwegian, and Wulfstan, a Danish seaman. The former said that he lived north of all the Northmen, in Halgoland, opposite to the west sea; that north of him there was an immense waste land, some parts of it, however, being visited by the Finns for hunting in summer and fishing in winter; that he had once sailed round the North Cape to the White Sea, and on the coast had found a people called

Beormas, who spoke a kindred language with the Finns. "This Otter," says the king, "was a rich man, according to the opinion of his own country: he had 600 tame deer, and six decoy ones, whose value in catching the wild deer was incalculable: hence these decoy deer were much esteemed by the Finns." But this Norwegian captain had not above twenty head of horned cattle, and as many sheep and swine. The Finns paid rent in skin, feathers, whalebone, and ropes for shipping. (The proprietors of these lands were evidently Goths, the conquering tribe.) Otter further said, that the country of the Northmen (Norway) was long and narrow, cultivated on the sea coast, but to the east overlooked by wild barren mountains. Yet Finns inhabited them even in the ninth century—a proof that they were tributary to these Goths, especially as we may infer from this Norwegian's account that they were the only people that paid rent: the dominant race were freeholders. Opposite to this country of the Northmen, in the south, was *Swevland*, or Sweden; and to the north, the country opposite was *Cwenaland*, or that portion of the region between the Gulf of Bothnia and Mount Sevo. "These Cwenas," says Otter, "frequently assailed the Northmen, and the Northmen were no less inclined to pass the mountains against the Cwenas. From Halgoland, where Otter dwelt, to the north of the land inhabited by the Northmen, is a great distance—so great that no one could reach it by sea in a month." To be brief, the whole course of the navigation from the extremity of Norway to the south of Jutland, is so minutely described, as to render it impossible

for any one to mistake the localities intended, or to refuse credit to the relation of this old Norwegian navigator.^[12]

The distinction, for which we have given some reasons, between the various tribes of the north, is now acknowledged by all the native writers, and by all foreigners, who have paid much attention to the subject. “The followers of the historic Odin,” says a living writer, “were the Sviar, known unto Tacitus under the name of Suiones; and the inhabitants whom they found in the country were another tribe of Goths, who had emigrated thither at a remote period, veiled from the eye of history. The primitive people by whom it was occupied, were the Jötnar and Dwarfs; the Feuni of Tacitus; the Skrithfiuni of Procopius, and the Cwenas and Finnas mentioned by the Norwegian navigator to king Alfred. They were gradually expelled, and driven further north, towards the arctic circle, by the Goths and Sviar, with whom they maintained perpetual war, embittered by religious rancour, often represented, in the fictions of the northern age, under the allegory of a contest between the celestial deities and the giants or evil genii.” But of this subject more hereafter, when we come to the exploits and policy of Odin.^[13]

Of the Scandinavians, prior to the arrival of Odin, and, indeed, for centuries after that event, little, as far as regards their domestic history, is known. Rejecting wholly, as fabulous, the boast of native writers, that they had *monarchs* centuries before the foundation of Rome; we may, however, admit that they had kings—or, if the reader pleases, local judges—in time of peace, and military chieftains in war. There is reason to think that their

chieftains, who assumed the regal title, were at one period, and, indeed, generally, exceedingly numerous. "At this time," says a chronicler, speaking of the age following our Saviour's birth, "there were *many* kings in the north." Sweden had a dozen of them; Norway no fewer than eighteen; Jutland had usually two; and the various islands composing the rest of the Danish monarchy, had each one. As in the heroic age of Greece, so in that of Scandinavia, the same condition of society produced the same form of government. Of these *reguli*, some were probably hereditary, some elective; some were certainly principal, others tributary. This distinction was the result, first, of some fancied superiority in the family of certain princes, but in a greater degree of their superior success. In Norway, for instance, the Finnish family of Fornjoter (Forniot) was esteemed the most ancient, and was that to which all the princes of that country referred their origin. But let us not forget that little dependence is to be placed on the alleged progenitors of these *reguli*, or the names of the *reguli* themselves, or their respective order of succession,^[14] or on the deeds attributed to them. All is darkness, uncertainty, contradiction. In the history of Norway, for instance, we are referred to Swedish kings as contemporary, whom the history of the latter kingdom places many generations before or after the alleged period. This is more strikingly the case in regard to the Danish and Swedish kings. In the history of the one we are referred to that of the other; yet the latter, in a majority of cases, have not one syllable on the subject. Names and events, on which the destinies of each country seems to turn, are mentioned by one class of

historians, and passed over by another as having had no existence. But if so little reliance is to be placed on these regal successions, we must not lose sight of the fact, that were they and the events ascribed to them wholly fabulous (yet wholly fabulous they are not, since tradition does not so much create as amplify and distort), they would still demand our attention. Reject them, and nine tenths of northern history must be rejected with them. And these traditional songs, which form the entire history of the north, deserve our notice in another respect—they supply us with the best, the only picture of national manners. For this reason, we shall cast a hasty glance at the more remarkable events which Saxo represents as prior to the Odinic times, but which, in fact, were subsequent.

Of the Swedish and Norwegian history, during this fabulous or mythologic, or, at best, doubtful period, we have little information beyond what is afforded us by the historian of Denmark, and he only mentions them incidentally. Not so in regard to the Danish themselves, which, thanks to his romantic bias and untiring industry, are sufficiently well known to us.

Prior to the reign of *Dan*, the son of Humble, Denmark, like the whole of the north, was subject to chiefs—whether hereditary or elective we need not inquire. But such a form of government had its evils. A hundred tyrants were more galling than one; and Dan, who gave his name to the nation, was invested with an authority superior to the other chiefs, and with the regal title. On his death, the sceptre passed by election, and not by inheritance, into the hands of his son *Humble*; but the people found that monarchy, too, has its

curses, though they are neither so numerous nor so great as those inseparable from an aristocracy. *Lother*, the brother of Humble, revolted, was victorious, and enabled to usurp the regal dignity. As he had been a rebellious subject, so he made a tyrannical king. The most illustrious of the Danes he deprived of property or life, until a conspiracy served him as he had served so many others. *Skiold*, the son of Lother, was raised to the vacant dignity, a proof (always supposing the traditionary guides of Saxo to be worthy of credit) that the hereditary principle has great force even in the most ancient forms of society; indeed, the application of this principle to the chief magistracy of the state, is the natural and almost inevitable result of the patriarchal system—a system which we all know to be coëval with the existence of the world. Skiold was the Hercules of his age; and at a time when wild beasts disputed with man the empire of the forest, he was a greater benefactor than if he were merely a warrior. Even in his youth he was a prodigy; he would seize and fetter the most savage bear, leaving to his followers the less noble task of despatching the monster. Yet he frequently struggled with the bravest of his own species; no wrestler of Scandinavia could withstand him; in a single combat, he overthrew the duke of the Alemanni or Swabians, his army and that of his enemy being spectators; reduced that people to the condition of tributaries, and returned home in triumph, accompanied by the daughter of the duke, the beautiful Awilda, whom he made the partner of his throne. Nor was he less distinguished for wisdom than for valour. He was a legislator: bad laws he abolished, and enacted such as were required by an improved state of

society. He was a great friend to the poor and the afflicted; the debts of others he often paid from his own treasury; the spoils taken in battle he uniformly abandoned to his followers; and it was one of his noble sayings, that, while money was the reward of the soldier, glory was enough for the general. So much esteemed, indeed, was this prince, that his posterity were glad to derive additional distinction from his name; and the Skioldungs, or the descendants of Skiold, were long dear to Denmark.^[15]

Gram, the son of Skiold, and the fifth king, was endowed with equal strength and equal enterprise, and his life was more romantic. His first consort was the daughter of his tutor or governor, a grim old chief; but thinking this lady beneath him, or, more probably, anxious to reward his brother in arms, Bessus, he soon bestowed her upon that hero. The dearer the gift, the greater the merit of the action; nor are similar instances of liberality wanting in other pagan heroes of the north. Probably Gram undervalued a conquest so easy as the wife he thus presented to his friend; and his ambition was roused by the hope of obtaining a lady whom nothing short of the highest courage could win. Gro, the daughter of Sigtrug, king of the Swedes, had been affianced to a giant, viz., a Jute or a Finn. Indignant at this prostitution of royal blood and virgin modesty, the Danish monarch, attended by his never-failing companion, Bessus, passed into Sweden, killed the relatives of Gro, subdued the country, and brought away the princess in triumph.^[16] But, with all his valour, Gram was inconstant. Leading his army against the king of the Finns, he was so struck with the beauty of that monarch's daughter, that he was speedily

converted from an enemy into a suitor; and he obtained a promise of her hand on the condition of repudiating Gro. Scarcely, however, had he left the Finnish territory, when a Saxon duke arrived, courted the lady, and the nuptial day was appointed. But he was not of a temper to bear this insult. Leaving his troops, he repaired silently and quickly into Finland, assumed a mean disguise, entered the royal palace, and took a humble seat. Being asked what brought him there, he replied, his profession as leech—a character held sacred in all ancient communities, and sure of access to every house. As he had expected, the assembled guests were soon steeped in drunkenness. According to the manner of the times, he sung his own exploits, beheaded the unsuspecting bridegroom, prostrated many of the attendants to the earth, and bore away the princess to his vessel, which awaited him on the coast. But his end was fatal. By Swibdager, king of Norway, he was deprived of empire and of life; his dominions became the prize of the victor; and his two infant sons, Guthrum and Hadding, were secretly carried to Sweden, and confided to the charge of two giants.^[17]

Here Saxo is careful to explain what he means by the word *giant*. There were, he assures us, three species. First, there were the vulgar giants; those who excelled all mankind in bodily stature. Next, were the wise men, who were as much inferior to the former in bulk, as they were superior in knowledge: these penetrated into the secret workings of nature, and were enemies of the monster giants, whom they subdued. Like the Persian magi, they struggled for, and obtained, the chief power of the state

wherever they settled, and arrogated to themselves a divine, no less than a regal, authority; in short, they were expert magicians, able to delude all mankind by their prestiges. Next, we have the third class of giants, who were the offspring of the two preceding, and were inferior to one parent in magnitude of body, to the other in knowledge; yet, in both respects, they were above the ordinary standard of our nature, and were thought, by their deluded admirers, to inherit some portion of divinity. After this sage distinction, the Danish ecclesiastic observes, that we ought not to be surprised at the credulity of the northmen, for were not the Romans, though the wisest of men, equally credulous? Whatever may be thought of that distinction, or of the personages whom he has drawn from everlasting obscurity, of the existence of this credulity we have abundant evidence; and it furnishes one of the best comments on the manners and opinions of the times.^[18]

Swibdager, the conqueror of Gram, and the sixth king of Denmark, found the weight of three crowns too much for one brow. At the entreaty, therefore, of Gro, the divorced queen of Gram, he recalled her son Guthrum from exile, and placed him, as a vassal, on the throne. This prince was naturally despised as the slave of a foreign prince. Not so his brother *Hadding*, who, preferring liberty to a dependent court, and the hope of avenging his father's death to the smiles of that father's murderer, remained in exile, and with him were the hearts of Denmark. Of all the ancient heroes of the monarchy, this is, perhaps, the most celebrated. Wondrous, indeed, were his actions. While a youth, he inflamed the heart of Hardgrip, the giant daughter of his

giant foster-father, who urged him to make a corresponding return. How could he love a giantess? Was he—whom she could, almost, inclose in one of her hands—a fit match for her? The thing was impossible. “By no means,” was the reply. “We of the superhuman breed can change, at pleasure, our forms, and even our substances; in short, we can reach the clouds, or reduce ourselves to your size.” The royal youth consented; and never had man a more useful or more faithful companion. Her magical knowledge was of more avail to him than her valour, for in that he could equal her; but she could furnish him with superior weapons, defend him from unseen danger, and cure his wounds where human aid would have been useless. At length, perceiving that he yearned to revisit his native country, she resolved to accompany him. On their journey, they one night arrived at a house where a corpse was duly laid out, until the mournful funeral rites were celebrated. Here was an opportunity of consulting the will of the gods, and the magic giantess availed herself of it. Producing a piece of wood on which certain verses of might, in Runic characters, were inscribed^[19], she caused it to be placed under the tongue of the deceased by Hadding. The effect was instantaneous: the corpse began to speak, and to utter the direst anathemas on her who had disturbed the repose of the dead. It predicted her immediate destruction in a neighbouring wood. No sooner, indeed, had they reached the wood, and erected their tent for the night, than a huge hand was seen to move around them. The terrified Hadding called on his companion for help; and she, dilating her body to a great extent, was able to seize the hand, and present it for

amputation to the prince. From the wound issued more venom than blood. But the victory was dearly purchased; the gigantic witch was torn to pieces by the irritated powers of darkness. “Neither her supernatural condition,” says Saxo, “nor her vast bulk, availed her.” Hadding, however, did not much suffer by the event: a wise old man with one eye, pitying his disconsolate situation, provided him with a brother in arms, a celebrated pirate, and both entered into what was considered the holiest of compacts in the manner of the times, viz., each besmeared the footsteps of the other with his own blood. The two heroes being conquered by a chief on whom they made war, the same old man took Hadding on horseback to his own mysterious seat, and both renovated and prodigiously fortified him by a magic drink. At the same time a metrical prophecy told him how he was to escape from the captivity which impended over him. Who was this unknown benefactor? On his return to the place whence he was taken, he could perceive, through the folds of his mantle, that he was conveyed over the sea. The horse which bore him was evidently a demon, obedient to Odin, the god of the north.^[20]

After some great exploits in the east, to which his ardour, no less than his fear of Swibdager, bore him, Hadding returned to Scandinavia. In a sea-fight he defeated and slew his enemy, and thus became sovereign of Denmark, or, we should say, of the Danish islands—for Jutland and Scania obeyed different princes. Asmund, the son of Swibdager, he thus transformed into a foe, and a foe, too, greatly to be dreaded. In a battle which ensued, finding that the tide of success was against him, he silently invoked the aid of the