



Old Norse Poems

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THE GROUP of poems offered in this volume comprises practically all the more considerable (non-Skaldic) verse material not in the Edda. Indeed, it has been subtitled "the most important non-skaldic verse not included in the poetic edda". It is a supplement to the Edda and it shows, even better than that remarkable collection, the wealth of independent poetic inventions and forms that flourished in the Scandinavian North before and immediately after the introduction of Christianity, especially when we bear in mind that much has been irretrievably lost. As to the contents of these poems, with respect to the first group of nine, range from the genuinely "heroic," realistic, dialogic-dramatic, earlier lays (such as the Biarkamól) to the more "romantic," legendary, monologic-elegiac, retrospective, later lays (like Hiálmar's Death Song); though the lines of demarcation are by no means sharp and, in fact, nearly every poem represents an individual combination of these traits. A very different type of lay is seen in the three contemporary encomiastic poems which celebrate the life and deeds of the (historic) rulers of Norway-the only non-Skaldic efforts of this genre so exceedingly numerous in Old Norse literature. There is no common denominator for the four poems at the end of the volume, except possibly their arch-heathen character. As a finale the Song of the Sun marks the transition from heathen to Christian spheres of thought. Common to all of this material is its unliterary, that is, unbookish, character which is in marked contrast to virtually all of Anglo-Saxon epic literature, influenced as it is, to a greater or lesser degree, by Christian or classical models. That is to say, we deal here with the genuinely native expression of the North. 33% of the net profit will be donated to charities for educational purposes. Yesterday's Books for Tomorrow's Educations

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