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JOURNAL OF
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ORDINARY MEETING, APRIL 20TH, 1874.

THE REV. PREBENDARY ROW, M.A., IN THE CHAIR.

The Minutes of the last Meeting were read and confirmed, and the following Presentations to the Library were announced :—

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| "Transactions of the Geological Society." Part 117. | <i>From the Society.</i> |
| "End of the Ungodly." By the Rev. R. Gordon. | <i>From the Author.</i> |
| "Funeral Oration." By the Rev. R. Gordon. | <i>From the Author.</i> |

The following Paper was then read by the Author :—

THE ETHICAL CONDITION OF THE EARLY SCANDINAVIAN PEOPLES. By EDMUND W. GOSSE, of the British Museum.

WE are all of us familiar with the outlines, at least, of the particular form of culture which Christianity superseded in the south of Europe. We know that in Greece the Gospel had to contend against an elaborate system of pure ethics fallen into decay, against a moral obliquity only the more impervious because it held the outward form of an earlier, far nobler morality, and against a system of literature and the fine arts, the most perfect in execution that the world has ever seen. In Rome, Christianity met with an opposition more crude and less insidious, partly because culture there took a less æsthetical and more practical form, and partly because the hands of the younger power were still muscular and vigorous. The opposing forces, however, were of the same inner nature, whether in Greece or Rome, and the immediate and obvious benefit exercised on society by the new religion was the creation of a moral conscience, and the scattering of spiritual salt over successive generations, whose predecessors, supplied as they were with every other requisite, had passed into a shameful state of ethical putrescence for the want of it. I propose to show this evening how totally distinct was the mission of Christianity to the peoples of the North; to sketch

before you the habits of thought peculiar to the heathen nations of Scandinavia; and to show in what respects they had learned, spontaneously, as one may say, the axioms of moral wisdom, and in what respects their condition left them with much of this quality to receive from the Gospel. In studying the relative conditions of Greece and Scandinavia, two famous collections of lyrical poems are of extreme, incalculable value in determining the state of the moral atmosphere at the introduction of the Christian religion; on the one hand, the Anthology of Meleager; on the other, the Edda of Sæmund Sigfussen. As the one gives us the fullest and most minute account we possess of the sentiment of later Greece, so the other contains, if not so exhaustive a store, still the gravest and most suggestive thoughts of the wisest of Icelandic skalds, and throws a vast deal of light on the moral philosophy of their age. It will, therefore, in preference to any of the prose Sagas, be taken as in some sort the text of my discourse, and I may be allowed at once to remind you that this celebrated work, though collected by an ecclesiastic, consists almost entirely of Icelandic lyrics, composed long before the introduction of Christianity by bards whose very names are lost. Sæmund flourished in the 11th century, when the literature of Iceland was passing from the creative into the critical period, and when no pains were spared to preserve the relics of an earlier and, although pagan, precious inspiration.

2. This is a convenient moment for acknowledging from what other sources I have drawn the information I lay before you to-night. Before all I must express my deep obligations to that masterpiece of learning, the *Danmarks Historie in Hedenold* of Professor Niels Matthias Petersen, a man of whom it was difficult to say whether he excelled more in graceful scholarship or in indefatigable patience of research, whose name is an honour to Denmark. Whatever this great work has not supplied me with, I have gathered from the *Altnordischen Studien* of Professor Weinhold, and from other useful books, whose names I need hardly specify.

3. The moral conscience of a people is reflected in its popular religion. The earlier Doric races did not differ more from the Greeks of the decadence than the warrior-gods of Homer did from the Indian and Egyptian deities foisted on the luxurious contemporaries of Rufinus and Petronius. Buddha reflects the changeless, meditative temper of the Hindoo; in Mohammandanism we have a fit faith for the restless, austere tribes that founded and dispersed it. Christianity alone takes no colour

from the psychological conditions that surround it, but moulds to itself men of every shade of temperament. The Scandinavian of a thousand years ago had no Bacchus or Aphrodite to dream of and imitate; but his deities were no less the mirror of his mind than these had been of that of his Græco-Roman neighbour. For him the great figure on the spiritual horizon was Odin, sailing through the ocean on his magic ship *Skidbladnir*, learning the auguries of fate from the dead lips of the embalmed head of Mimir, or, as in the *Vafthrúdnismál*, holding strange converse with still older deities on the primal cosmogony. The wild legends of Odin Allfather, in their mystery and vague sublimity, show at the outset the current in which the thought of the Norsemen flowed. The other inhabitants of Ásgard, the younger Æsir, partake of the same solemnity and force. Among them there existed the incarnation of good, Baldur, and the incarnation of evil, Loki, and these figures display in their very conception a clearness of vision in morality that one looks for in vain among the more cultured races of the South. The figure of Baldur, the impersonified goodness and beauty, against whom none of the destructive elements would exercise their function, is one of the most beautiful in the mythologies of the world, and the legend of his death, shot by the blind deity Hod, whose hand is directed by Loki, is too noble to have occurred to a debased or foolish people. Their cosmogony, with all the strangeness of its details, was not inconsistent with a shrewd kind of natural philosophy. It was believed that Midgard, the home of human creatures, was situated in the midst of the world, protected by a circular wall from the land of the Jötuns, the wild and lawless country that lay round the shores of the infinite ocean. Above Midgard, in a subtly-interwoven network, spread the roots of the ash Yggdrasil, the centre of the universe, under whose branches the high gods sat daily in judgment. The boughs of Yggdrasil covered the heavens, and its roots roofed the three divisions of the lower world, Midgard, and Hell, and the land of the malignant giants. This mystical ash-tree was regarded as the embodiment of vital nature, "as moved and ruled by the divine power, which had its seat in it as the soul has in the body." At its top an eagle sat, emblem of spiritual force; at its root lay Nidhëgg, the dragon of death, constantly gnawing it away. Four harts bruised its branches and bit its buds, significant, perhaps, of the constant destructive forces that war against nature. Up and down its trunk ran the squirrel Ratatösk, carrying the words of malice and discord between the

eagle and the dragon, type of the hourly strife between good and evil, between life and death, between light and darkness. Under the branches of Yggdrasil sat the Æsir, the high gods, in solemn council; they were waited on by three maidens, the Norns, who stayed in their chamber under the ash-tree till they were called on to determine the fate of the children of men. Were everything left to them, all would go well, but their beneficent purposes are thwarted by three dread sisters, the Evil Norns. The life of mankind is a constant struggle between the Good and the Evil Norns, and over all the turmoil and sorrow the serene gods watch in silence, constantly intervening through occult agencies, clothing spirits in a thousand disguises, vivifying stones and plants and beasts, incessantly interested in the motley life of man.

4. The notion of holiness, of the spiritual exaltation of a pure existence, seems to have occurred to the Scandinavians alone of pagan nations. It is not in Baldur, the beautiful and faultless God of the Morning, the type of invulnerable comeliness, that we find this thought carried out; the best myths of Apollo present just as bright a figure; but in Heimdall, the White God, the immaculate deity, who was born before the beginning of the world, without father, without mother, trained by nine mystic maidens, and nourished on the vital strength of the earth and the cold pure foam of the sea. He, the watchman of the gods, sits at the earthward end of heaven, and the rainbow springs from his feet. He sees all things and hears all things, and lying awake at night, listens to the grass growing all over the world. In his ineffable purity he sits alone, without passion or emotion, waiting for the end of all things. Under the roots of Yggdrasil he has hidden his great horn, but one day he will set it to his lips and blow, and all the worlds will hear it, and the very dead will rise.

5. There were twelve Æsir, above all of whom Odin Allfather sat supreme. Of these eleven were beneficent, one only evil and rancorous. Loki, hated of gods and men, was an incarnation of evil, presenting in some respects a parallel to the position we find Satan allowed to occupy in heaven in the book of Job. It was permitted to Loki to pervert the ways of men, to traduce them, and even to cause the counsels of the good gods to fail in their execution. After consummating his crimes by instigating the death of Baldur, the Æsir attempted to destroy him, as is related in the wild legends of the prose Edda, but in vain. His infinite cunning suggested to him so many metamorphoses that the gods themselves were baffled in their

efforts to get rid of him. He remained in heaven, an element of evil and discord.

6. Such, briefly sketched, were the cosmogony and mythology of the North. Conscious of the presence of evil, of the limited power of their gods to check or divert it, they waited for a happier condition in the dim future. A horrible age, they thought, would come at last, when all the fountains of the ocean would break up, the demon wolves would devour the sun and moon, horror would fall on all things, and the world be overwhelmed with ruin. Then, as the grim poem of the *Völuspá* tells us, Heimdall will stand up and blow his great horn. Through all the crash of worlds and chaos of dying men, the horn will thunder, and the *Æsir*, gathering up their robes for death, will meet before Heimdall in council. The ash *Yggdrasil* will tremble to the core. Clad in their golden armour, the *Æsir* will go out to fight with the powers of destruction. Odin will die first, and then all the rest. At last Loki will stand alone with Heimdall, wickedness face to face with holiness, and they will slay one another; then blackness and conflagration will engulf the universe.

7. But out of chaos and death a new and beautiful world will arise. The good *Æsir*, renewed in youth and loveliness, will come to inhabit it for ever, and thither the souls of good men will come when they are dead. Loki alone will not revive. There will be no jarring elements in the new heavens, and the renovated earth will exist in peace and holiness, a reflection of the calm of heaven. One single God, the Mighty One, will rule all things with beneficent wisdom, and will make firm his reign in perpetual peace. Such was the dream that comforted these virtuous pagans in their sorrowful struggle against conscious evil and error; a baseless dream, indeed, and the speculation of an ignorant people, but one not ignoble in itself, and not wholly unworthy to prepare their minds for the pure light of gospel truth.

8. It is necessary, in realizing the condition of a race of men separated by many centuries from ourselves, to be careful to avoid measuring them too much by our own standard, and judging them by opinions that spring from prejudice and custom. In the very outset of our examination of the habits of life in the North, we are confronted by a fact so truly obnoxious to our feelings, that we run the risk of being hopelessly scandalized at once. Immediately after the birth of a child, before the ceremony of initiation was performed, the infant's body was carefully examined, and if it showed signs of deformity

or debility, or in any sense seemed unfitted to struggle with the world, it was immediately exposed. To prevent ourselves from over-estimating the enormity of this custom, we must realize the ideal of the people, their determination to be a race of athletes or nothing. It was well enough for slaves or for Teutons to nourish ill-favoured or puny children : it would be ruinous for Norsemen. Their gods were heroes : Odin, king of men ; Thor, of the gigantic hammer ; Baldur, the essential loveliness ; and the highest attainment of mortals was to ascend to a faint shadow of the perfect strength and beauty of the deities. Viewed in this light, the exposure of diseased and deformed infants presents nothing violently inconsistent with the moral standard of the people. The act had little in common with the horrible kinds of infanticide practised among many overcrowded Oriental peoples, where the poor children are put out of the way to indulge the parsimony or laziness of the parents. Again, such an infant had no spiritual existence, in the belief of an old Scandinavian. It was not till he grew to something of man's estate, and began to emulate the high deeds of the gods, that the soul in him was supposed to germinate. Until the process of initiation, which was, curiously enough, performed by sprinkling water over the babe, had been gone through, the father had absolute power over the child's life ; but as soon as this sort of pagan baptism had been performed, the exposure of the child was regarded as murder, and punishable by law.

9. When the infant was not so unfortunate as to be doomed so miserably and so soon to end its life, it was prepared with the utmost rigour for a life of hardship and enterprise. Boys were more highly regarded than girls, and more pains were expended on their education. The bodies of young children were habitually bathed in cold spring water, and subjected to almost uninterrupted exercise in the open air. The first thing a boy learned was to handle arms and to kill. There were certain sports among the young men, to which no boy was admitted till he had slain an animal, just as for a grown man it was the greatest of disgraces never to have seen human blood. It would be easy to point to passages in the Sagas which prove that, so far from its being held a crime to kill a man in fair fight, mothers were accustomed to rejoice when their young sons distinguished themselves in this way, believing that the deed gave promise that the boy would prove a virtuous vikingr. In the magnificent opening of the "Lay of Helgi Hundingsbane," when, to the noise of shrieking eagles and the thunder of cataracts, the

Norns meet to bless the new-born Helgi, the highest gift they promise for him is, that he should be a most famous prince and the greatest of all the warriors of his time. Various means were resorted to to give strength and courage to the young hero. Bodily exercises of the fiercest kind gave his muscles the elasticity and hardness of steel, and it was thought that vigour could be given to the spirit by feeding on the flesh of wild beasts and drinking their blood. On such food, it was imagined, Baldur attained that consummation of masculine beauty, which it was the first desire of every youth to emulate; and the heroic legends abound with stories of great warriors, whose young limbs were invigorated with the raw flesh and blood of animals.

10. Never, probably, since the world began, save during one short century on the plains of Nemæa and Olympia, have men so perfect in vigour and shapeliness been seen on the surface of the globe as those who shot over the ice or galloped in frantic races over the hill-sides in the palmy days of pagan Scandinavia. We read in the Sagas of youths who could outstrip horses in running, who could swim and dive more nimbly than seals, or, like Olaf Tryggvesen, hew down men with a battle-axe in each hand. The exaggeration of a poetic narrative may have over-coloured these and similar statements, but it is impossible to deny that the universal testimony of early Northern literature proclaims the existence of a vigour and sturdy greatness in the ancient times of which the human race now knows nothing. The careful elimination of all elements of physical weakness, the unwearied and unsparing system of muscular training, the absence of those epidemic diseases that afterwards sapped the health of all Northern Europe, combined to produce a nation whose magnificent virility and well-balanced bodily perfection have hardly found a rival in the world's history.

11. A nation of athletes will be found to regulate itself by special and singular rules. Where the bodies of members of a community are mature and healthy, afflicted by none of the irritating maladies that attack the intelligence and the temper, a comparatively simple ethical code will regulate the public life. The outward existence may be one of turmoil and riot; the inner life will remain simple and serene. The meaner vices find no resting-place in pure and vigorous bodies, and the complex crimes of modern civilized peoples are scarcely known to the primal and untainted races. On the other hand, the athletic race, like the athletic individual, has special dangers to which it may fall a prey, has special vices which a milder form of life makes it easy to ignore. Trained in the perfect exercise

of a muscular frame, ready to handle arms at any moment, the Scandinavian grew up, as he was sure to do, a warrior. The fountain-head of all that was noblest and best in the greatest epoch of the race, the barren island of Iceland, was too poor a country to support a nation by agriculture or commerce. Its inhabitants were a race of aristocrats—the nobility of the whole of Scandinavia—and in the splendour of their manhood and the pride of their birth they regarded neighbouring nations with much the same scorn as the Hellenes regarded Persians or Sicilians. War, with its glory and its spoils, became the highest and only fit occupation for a gentleman, and the traditions of religion gave their approval. The great Æsir were gods of war. The most solemn oaths were taken by the implements of battle, as in the *Völundarkvida*, where Völund makes Nidud swear by ship, by shield, by steed, and by sword. But of all forms of the religious frenzy of fighting, there is none so strange as the tales told of the Berserker, those high priests of Odin, whose marvellous feats have given rise to so much bewildered controversy. The name of Berserk is familiar enough to us all, but the full meaning of the word is not so well known but that I may be excused in pausing to define it. The Berserk was a warrior, who went into battle in his bare shirt or sark, that is, unprotected by armour; it was believed that the flesh of these fanatics had become so perfectly hardened by exposure and by divine influence, that spear or sword could scarcely wound it, and that these men themselves were endowed with a superhuman strength, so as to be capable, during one of their fits of exalted excitement, of feats far beyond the power of ordinary mortals. The physical explanation of this extraordinary phenomenon, which rests on far too abundant evidence to be thrown aside as absurd, has never satisfactorily been given. It is certain that moods of furious afflatus would pass over whole companies of men, when they would seem to forego their mortal nature, and, becoming something more or less than men, would rush on what was called *berserksgánger*, an expedition of berserking. It was impossible for sane men to oppose these half-naked maniacs, who would fill the air with their howls, bite pieces out of their shields, rush through fires with their bare feet unscorched, and perform actions of the most unbridled violence. In later times, kings of the stamp of Rolf Krake kept a group of these men as a kind of body-guard, for it appears that this superhuman excitement might be directed into definite channels and prove of use to an army in moments of sudden emergency. The archetype of the Berserker was Thore himself, who put on

his Ása-strength, his force of frenzy, when performing his great deeds against dwarfs and Jötuns. But the Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus, speaks of the whole as the result of witchcraft, and there can be little doubt that it was regarded in early Christian times with all the more suspicion, because of the deep veneration that it had called out among the pagans. As after the Iacchic festivals in Greece, so after a Berserksgång, the performers suddenly became exhausted and comatose, and presented the appearance of men barely alive after a crisis of fever. Something parallel is to be seen nowadays in the Asiatic dervishes, who are inspired with a kind of religious catalepsy, and, after a period of frenzy, fall down in the utmost exhaustion. The chief interest this physical phenomenon has for our inquiry, is the light its existence and encouragement throw on the temper of the race. To a people so essentially lovers of athletic exercise as the Norsemen, such a condition of superhuman power would present something of the glory of an apotheosis, and we find such to have been the case. The Berserker were regarded as men specially dowered with gracious gifts from the gods.

12. In their rules for battle, and for attack and defence, the Northmen appear to have been guided by a natural sense of what was upright and just. Shouts and the noise of arms, the whistling of arrows, the ringing of shields, manly deeds, courage and enterprise,—these combine to form the unvarying record of their battles. Fighting for its own sake was a virtue. But in the descriptions of incidental circumstances of warfare we find more that is characteristic. The rules of *hólmgångr*, or duel, in which the two contesting parties retired alone to a quiet place, generally an uninhabited island or holm, and there fought till one was dead, were elaborately framed with a view to exclude the possibility of foul play. This openness of proceeding was universal in the Northern warfare. Even in that very constant form of attack, always called in the Sagas *at nema hús á einn*, literally, to take the house from one, which consisted of gathering in a body as many men as the clan could afford, and, torch in hand, surrounding the settlement of the enemy—generally the little castle of the chief and the clustering dwellings of clients and slaves, circled by a wall, and setting fire to the woodwork,—even in this violent form of attack there were rules of honour which all true Norsemen strictly attended to. It was the extreme means when two clans had long remained in open strife, but it must not be attended by any kind of treachery. The onslaught must be made in open day, and

cowardly subterfuge of every kind was rigidly forbidden. Again, the Edda several times asserts that a refusal to give indemnity for the slain, or to pay the blood-fine, was an act of meanness that brought down the ire of Odin on the delinquents.

13. But the young warriors rarely were willing to remain at home to amuse themselves with merely local broils. Every year the fjords of Iceland and Norway sent forth some young Ulysses, bound for more perilous voyages than the Greek sailor dreamed of, and destined to scarcely less picturesque adventures. The passion of going a-viking, of being a vikingr, was inherent in the Scandinavian race. The Swedish writer, Professor Geijer, in his well-known poem *Vikingen*, gives a wonderfully dramatic study of this passion of the sea-rover. To a young Northman it became impossible to remain at home; he would wander along the shore, sick at heart with longing, till at last a chance came of sailing out into the wild open sea, and finding new lands and new men to rule and conquer. This universal custom of sea-roving was, doubtless, the cause of the extraordinary precocity of culture that surprises one so much in the history of Norway. The young vikingar penetrated through the Mediterranean to the Black Sea itself; harried the coasts of France and Britain, and carried home again not only wealth and experience, but some echo, at least, of the faded civilization of classic times. Not intimately enough connected with the inhabitants of Southern Europe to be deeply influenced by them, still less to be warped by the blindness and littleness of the forms of culture prevalent in the early Middle Ages, the vigorous and observant young Northmen would rather be excited into the expression of their own individuality, and into the formation of a moral and ethical code intimately expressive of their own pure though violent modes of life. The art of poetry flourished in Iceland when it was dumb elsewhere in Europe, and the luxurious products of the South, introduced by the vikingar, gradually led to the adoption of such a highly-cultivated life among the pagan Norsemen, that it was possible for Iceland to produce during the darkest midnight of the Middle Ages a brilliant school of poets, historians, and critics. The revival of learning and literature in Europe was almost cotemporaneous with the final decadence of those arts in Iceland. The death of Snorre Sturlesen preceded the birth of Dante by about twenty years, and in Snorre the literature of Iceland found its most splendid and almost its last exponent. The life of this truly wonderful writer, with all its magnificence,

luxury, and violent end, parallels with strange exactitude what is recorded of the poet-tyrants of the Greek colonies; and in reading it we find it almost impossible to realize that one is being introduced to an inhabitant of that barren and desolate land that lies just under the Arctic Circle. The introduction of Christianity was the ruin of all this intellectual splendour. The light of Norse imagination refused to burn in the dingy lanterns in which the monks proposed to hide it, and no sooner was the pagan worship extinct than the decay of literary production came, and a merely critical epoch set in. It is, doubtless, an instructive question to ask ourselves,—why has the spread of Christian truth been in so many parts of the world a death-blow to the fine arts? Shall we call the results in Greece, in Rome, in Iceland, in Europe after the Reformation, a mere string of coincidences? or shall we confess that when God speaks to the nations with a special voice of awakening, it is needful that the beautiful, innocent arts that occupy them should for a while be put aside, and the whole attention of the earnest-minded be given to the things that are essential to His Kingdom? It would seem so; and as all of us in our graver moments would confess it is Luther and not Rafaele, Wickliffe and not Chaucer, for whom as men and as Christians we have to thank God most, it seems to me to show little wisdom to regret, as many writers have done, that the beautiful literary arts of the North were destroyed by the introduction of Christianity, since, though that Christianity was indeed a wretched twilight of monkish superstition, it paved the way for the brighter light of the Reformation, and made it possible for Norway, that had once seen Snorre Sturlesen's dragon, with its gilded mast and its silken sails, glide out of the Trondhjem Fjord, to watch from the same shores the humble bark of Hans Egede and his beautiful wife Gertrude sail out to carry the Gospel to the miserable savages of Greenland.

14. The position of women among the Scandinavian nations presents some very interesting peculiarities. It was one of the noblest sides of the Northern character that appeared when the fate of a woman was discussed. All through the Sagas we find foreshadowed the principles of that chivalry by which the Norman descendants of the Vikingar succeeded in infusing some degree of moral purity and poetic grace into the sordid life of the Middle Ages. It was the Norseman's creed that there existed something sacred and divine in woman; and in consequence he treated his wife and daughters with gentleness

and courtesy, and the rest of their countrywomen with respect. Admiration mingled largely with this feeling of veneration. The Icelandic language is singularly full of delicate and passionate phrases to express the beauty of woman, and must reflect, in this respect, the feeling of the nation at large. The Sagas abound with incidents of a character far more sentimental than one would be ready to expect, and throughout the old literature the passion of love is treated with a delicate reticence that reminds one of very modern romance, and contrasts most favourably with the rude and coarse love-tales of the Middle Ages. The universal testimony of the poets bears out the view that the same order and reticence regulated the conduct of the Norsemen towards their own free-women, and the laws of marriage that have come down to us testify to the solemnity and force of the rites that accompanied domestic ties. The education of the girls was tinged with the same athletic spirit that gave so strong a colouring to that of the boys. If she was not to be a hero, the daughter was at least to be trained to be the mother of heroes. Accordingly a certain manly force, a masculine temper, were the subjects of admiration and praise in a woman. Even some pale reflection of the berserk-fury seems to have reached the women. It is curious to read of heroines who shared the toils of warfare with the men; in doing so they imitated the Valkyriur, those warrior-maidens of the gods. One of the lays of the poetic Edda is occupied with the feats of Svava, the daughter of King Eylimi, who fell in love with Helgi, and protected him in battle. But no story is more curiously illustrative of the manners of the time than that one in the Völsunga Saga, which records the warlike achievements of the chaste and valorous Alfhilda, daughter of the King of the Ostrogoths, Sigurdr.

15. The laws of maidenly propriety and the customs of wooing and betrothal were quite modern in their exactitude of detail; by all but those roughest warriors and most lawless vikingar who lived altogether outside the pale of social life, these laws were strictly observed. The higher the rank of the individual the more was she bound by the bondage of etiquette. A maiden of the highest class was obliged, by custom, to refuse several suitors before she consented to change her condition. It was the fashion, too, among the daughters of kings and chieftains to send the accepted suitor on expeditions of great danger and difficulty, and to consent at last only on his return covered with the glory of renown in arms. Many high-born ladies would rather die than accept a man of ignoble lineage or un-

tried in warfare. It follows from all this that a girl was free to choose her suitor, and to accept whoever seemed most pleasing in her eyes. This freedom, however, which is positively asserted by Saxo Grammaticus, and of which many Sagas give proof, was in most cases restricted by the power of intervention possessed by the father of the maiden. The Egilssaga, which teaches us so very much of the social and ceremonial life of the Norsemen, gives us reason to believe that in most cases the male head of the family, or, in want of such head, the King himself, superintended the betrothal, and might forbid it. If the father refused his permission, the lover had still one remedy at hand; he might challenge the father or brother of the girl to fight, and might win her by his death. Nor would a Scandinavian maiden have shrunk from alliance with the man she loved, even though he came to her with his hands still wet with the blood of her nearest of kin, supposing, always, that this blood had been shed in fair and open fight, according to the strict laws of *hólmgánger*.

16. Whatever the measure of liberty in choice given to the damsel, one thing is certain, that the ceremony of marriage, besides being very protracted and formal, was accompanied with certain business relations between the families united. The bridegroom was said to buy his bride of her father; it was a kind of commercial exchange. The word for wedding, *brúðkaup*, which signifies bride-purchase, shows that, in form at least, this ancient and barbarous proceeding was continued down to the Christian times. No doubt, in the more polished ages, the purchase resolved itself into merely a sum paid, as a sort of reversed dowry, to the parents of the bride, when they became deprived of her services by her marriage; but such a gift was always essential if the marriage were to be a legitimate one at all.

17. The wedding, which was always celebrated in the house of the bride's father, was formulated by an appeal to the hammer of Thor. The bride and bridegroom exchanged rings, and in many respects the ceremonies were much the same as those of the same countries in Christian times. One little feature of the scene was not without its interest: the wife was invested with a bunch of keys, in token of her new position of mistress of household arrangements. The wedding was celebrated with much pomp and with a lavish display of hospitality, open house being held for eight days, or even a month, until the end of which time the bride and bridegroom remained in the father's house. The newly-married pair, arriving at last at home, were

met by their entire clan, into which the new wife was formally received, and she became at once the partner of her husband's honours, and manager of the household affairs. It is interesting in the light of recent efforts in legislation to know that the personal property of a Scandinavian woman was out of her husband's reach, unless special provision to the contrary had been made at the time of the marriage. For the rest, the man's power over his wife was almost unbounded; but against its misuse, she could always oppose her right to demand a divorce. This menace appears, however, to have been of little avail in the more barbarous settlements. Practically, the husband could chastise, sell, and even, if she were untrue to him or sought his life, kill his partner. The *Njálsaga* bears evidence that even very noble women took blows from their husbands without reproach. The man's right to sell his wife demands explanation; we have already said that he was understood to *buy* her, and it is to be hoped that the one custom was practised as little as the other. In passing, it is vastly amusing to note that Professor Petersen, with true continental complacency, points out the "still prevailing" parallel custom in England of men selling their wives at a market!

18. In spite, however, of all excesses that local barbarity may have fallen into, without question the position of a Scandinavian woman was more honourable than that of any of her sex in other parts of Europe in that age. She was in no wise a slave or a dependent: on the contrary, the history and the poetry of the North abound with examples of heroic women whose gravity and grace made their households admirable, while their judgment and sense rendered them the constant counsellors and companions of their husbands. Domestic love, of the sober, steady, reticent kind, that we are apt to think rather a modern growth of the races kindred to ourselves, evidently was an everyday matter among the early Norsemen, a quality that only needed the illumination of pure religion to make it the shining and beautiful thing it has now been for centuries. The Icelandic laws concerning separation and divorce were very elaborate and strangely consistent with the general views of modern thought on the same question. If the wife, accused of a crime deserving divorce, chose to defend her innocence, it was usual to appeal to one of those physical tests so constant in the early history of nations, such as running barefoot over burning coals, or plunging the naked arm into boiling water. These picturesque features are preserved in several of the oldest Sagas, as in the *Gudrunarkvida* in the Edda, where Gudrun answers

the accusations of Herkia by plunging her beautiful arm into the scalding caldron, and drawing it out unscathed, having seized the *iarknastein*, the milk-white opal of innocence, at the bottom. On the whole, we may say that marriage, though in the outset more a matter of expediency than of pure inclination, yet in practice brought with it a mutual fidelity that often ripened into strong affection. The wife died in ancient times on the bier of her husband, less, it would seem, from conventional obligation than from real sentiment, for widows were free to re-marry, and, in doing so, they retained their social status and the respect of their kindred.

19. Domestic rule seems to have been orderly. The Northern laws and practices show far more consideration for individual rights than those of Germany. A man was master of all in his house, but the rights of wife, children, and hired servants were accurately defined. He might strip his wife to her sark, and drive her from his door, keeping her dower and her wedding gifts, if she were proved to be faithless; but whatever he did must be done openly, and in the presence of her own kindred. The rest of the laws of the household partook of this rigid formality. Strict regulations guarded the interests of free servants, who could claim wages and compensation for unjust dismissal. Hired servants could leave the master's house if not well fed, or even in case they were not nursed when ill. But they could be beaten and forced to work, if they were *lazy*.

20. It was in the treatment of slaves, however, that the savagery of pagan life made itself most keenly felt. Redress was to be found for all freemen, but there was no redress for slaves. They formed an indispensable portion of every Norse family, for no race of free artisans existed, and all hand labour was intrusted to bondmen. This unhappy section of the community consisted of the descendants of earlier, conquered races, or of criminals who had been punished by loss of liberty. They were held in the deepest contempt; it was shameful to join in the same work with a slave; to die by the hands of one was held to be a terrible disgrace. They might be killed if they were mutinous or disobedient, and in some cases they were even offered in sacrifice to the gods, like cattle. They were bought and sold like chattels; their marriages were informal and unrecognized, and they were not counted as members of the household. They possessed nothing on earth, and after death were hurried out of sight like beasts. In spite of these social indignities, however, there is no reason to believe that any

special inhumanity was practised towards them; such a supposition, indeed, would be out of harmony with what we know of the genial serenity of the Scandinavian aristocrat, when he was not inflamed with the passion of war. The duties of the slave were simple and humble. He had to cultivate his master's land, to cut and gather in hay, to reap and prepare the grain, to look after the cattle, to grind salt, and perform the other menial duties of the household. The hired servants, of whom I lately made mention, were chiefly men who had been liberated by their masters, and whose position, though entailing civic rights, was not in everyday matters much more elevated than that of the slaves themselves. I cannot leave the discussion of the domestic life without calling attention to a beautiful trait in the Scandinavian character, which must temper somewhat our natural indignation at the treatment of the slaves. We find abundant proof that tame animals were valued and carefully tended as part of the family. The dog and the cat were provided for even in the laws of Iceland, and are spoken of repeatedly as honoured and cared-for guests. Surely we cannot believe that those who could show a sense of the responsibility of man towards his dumb dependents far higher, alas! than that shown at this day in several countries of Europe, could in practice have been very barbarous towards their human dependents, though the legal position of the latter may have been savage and degraded to the last.

21. There was no fear of death among the Northmen, who had no belief in punishment after death, nor any dread of annihilation. They anticipated a continuation of sensuous enjoyment in Odin's halls, and believed that after the solitary passage of the spirit into the other world, the cares and sorrows of earth would cease. One kind of death alone was horrible of them,—death in bed, or by natural causes. This kind of decease, to which they gave the contemptuous title of straw-death, was repugnant to their religious traditions, for Odin had promised to receive into Valhal only those who died in battle. The fate of straw-diers was doubtful, and hence those who were not fortunate enough to fall in battle, acquiesced when they grew old and weak in the expediency of putting an end to their own lives, or, like Stærkodder, of accepting death at the hands of others. No part of a heathen life is so dreary as its close; never do the consolations of revealed religion appeal so strongly to the natural reason of the student of history as when he is occupied with the dolorous expedients by which the cowardly heathen seeks to evade or the heroic one to hasten the inevitable close of life. Strange as it may seem, a not unusual mode

of suicide was hanging; several heroes and heroines in the Sagas chose this mode of death, which was considered to have nothing shameful in it, and which was performed in the presence of the people. One singularly impressive mode of self-destruction, the one, perhaps, of all which takes the imagination most by its solemnity and beauty, was that adopted by Sigurd Ring and others, who went alone on board a burning ship, and suffered themselves to be blown with full sails out into the open ocean. Captives would solicit death at the hand of their captors, the usual form chosen being the exquisitely horrible one of carving an eagle, as it was called, on the captive's back,—that is, cutting with a sword-stroke down the backbone and then across the ribs, so as to expose the lungs,—a mode of death truly worthy of an athletic savage.

22. There are still some points in the Northern character that I should be glad to discuss, such as the estimate of wealth and the fidelity of friends and foster-brothers, but time fails me before the subject approaches exhaustion. I have said enough, I trust, to demonstrate in what chief particulars Scandinavian pagan civilization forestalled the advantages of Christianity, and in what particulars it glaringly failed to approach them. In the consideration of the modes of life among, perhaps, the most elevated people of heathen antiquity, one is struck by the utter inability of the unilluminated conscience to perceive any nobility in those passive virtues which Christianity alone inculcates, and which the life of its Divine Founder so uniformly and so exquisitely illustrated. That social and domestic order are good, that it is well that women be guarded and honoured, that temperance, mercy, and uprightness are excellent qualities, are ideas which, it would seem, may spontaneously start in the mind of a thoughtful pagan, but those words of self-abnegation that struck the antique world with dismay,—“love your enemies,” “blessed are the poor in spirit,” “come unto me for I am meek and lowly,” for these there is no echo in the unawakened, unilluminated heart, and for the just understanding of these more knowledge of divine things is needed than the wisest skald or sophist can weave out of his own unaided intellect.

The CHAIRMAN.—It is now my duty to move a vote of thanks to Mr. Gosse for his interesting paper. For myself, I should have been glad if it had pointed out how far the matters with which it deals are purely mythical, and how far they distinctly rest upon an historical basis, and also if the dates of the events alluded to are historical.

Mr. SIMCOX.—I think there is very little authentication in history of all the marvellous things that we hear about the Berserkers.

The CHAIRMAN.—In his paper Mr. Gosse says :—

“Christianity alone takes no colour from the psychological conditions that surround it, but moulds to itself men of every shade of temperament.”

This is more than doubtful. Let us look at the aspect which Christianity assumed in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries. It was largely coloured by the intellectual tone of the Greeks, with whom it passed into a metaphysical discussion. On the other hand, the German form is one of the highest forms of Christianity that has ever existed. It is plain that the Christianity which has prevailed in different regions has been largely modified by the habits of thought and previous civilization which have prevailed in those regions ; in fact, it has followed the same common law which has affected other departments of human progress ; and, as I have said, it has been largely coloured in its conception by the intellectual and moral forces by which it has been surrounded. This, I think, will not be denied by any one who has studied the history of the Christian Church. In the fourth paragraph of the paper there is a remarkable assertion that the Northern races had a higher moral ideal than had the Greek and Latin races. If we look at the Greek and Latin races, their representation of the idea of holiness is a strange misconception. Take the whole range of their literature, and you will not arrive at what we call the idea of holiness in its treatment of morals. The idea of holiness seems to have been never comprehended by the ancient races, and the Christian idea of purity is wonderfully absent from all ancient ethics. The Greek and Latin ideas of holiness consisted almost exclusively in outward observances, and their purest moralists have indulged in images which we freely designate as impure. Our modern ideas on this subject have been largely developed in German Christianity, and I should have been glad if this paper had been a contrast, pointing out the distinctions between the grand idea of the German character and the grand idea of the Scandinavian character, and I should have been glad to have known the effects produced by the Scandinavian character, as distinguished from those produced by the German character. We know that the social position of woman has been vastly superior in the Christian ages to what it ever was in Greek and Roman society, where it was extremely degraded. I cannot doubt that the state in which females were placed in the ancient world exercised a necessary lowering influence upon the moral aspects of that world. I have recently been reading Renan's last work, and he states that the elevation of women and slaves first really began with the Neronian persecution. This is a remarkable admission for such an author. In his seventh paragraph, Mr. Gosse has referred to a very peculiar feature in these Icelandic people. It seems that they had an expectation of a renovation of society at some future period. If so, that is a most striking contrast to the ideas of the ancient world. The millennium of the Greek and Roman philosophy was always placed in the past, and the general despair with which the philosopher contemplated the prospect of man in the

future was of a most striking kind. The utmost a philosopher hoped was to keep things right, but a millennium in the future was never hoped for by him. And when modern unbelief appeals to the progressive advancement of modern life, I say this is an aspect of Christianity, because before Christianity the hopes of the future were of the most dismal character. I should like to know more of the actual historical character of the fact which is set down by Mr. Gosse, in his thirteenth paragraph, where he says,—

“It is, doubtless, an instructive question to ask ourselves, Why has the spread of Christian truth been in so many parts of the world a death-blow to the fine arts?”

This passage must be accepted with considerable qualification. I suppose that the author meant to refer to the effect of the Reformation. What is the actual position which Christianity has held with respect to the fine arts? The fine arts of Greece and Rome were unquestionably associated with the ancient idolatries, and, to a great extent, with the moral degradation of ancient society. Christianity has nothing to do with it, as a result. In Renan's “Life of St. Paul,” one which unbelievers are not very fond of, speaking of his speech at Athens, Renan says he lifted up his hammer and broke the elegant creations of Greek genius to pieces. He in his intense admiration of them calls them “their gods and goddesses.” Of course Christianity was hostile to the Pagan forms of art, which were all idolatrous; they ministered to the worst forms of moral corruption; but while this is the case, as a matter of fact, there is nothing in the New Testament which is opposed to the general progress of art, and there cannot be a doubt that Christianity has created an art of its own. (Cheers.) I do not use too strong a term in saying that the moral improvement of art has been more or less effected by Christianity. But there is a great danger in mixing art too largely with Christian worship, because we see that a certain aspect of it has a tendency to corrupt it. Although Christian art may not have produced that pure exhibition of the beauty of the human form which is seen in Greek and Roman statuary, it has created the magnificent Gothic cathedrals and other works, and Christian painters have been able to create productions of art, as great as were ever accomplished by the artists of Greece and Rome. In one paragraph, Mr. Gosse says, a Scandinavian woman might choose her own husband, while in another it is stated that the power of a man over a married woman was of the most terrific nature. I cannot understand how the two statements are capable of reconciliation. But this shows us that, taking Paganism in its best form, woman was degraded, and I cannot help thinking that the elevation of woman to the proper position which she now occupies in society is greatly due to the results of Christianity. Christianity has fallen upon very favourable ground in the German and Northern races of mankind, but I cannot see the portion of this paper which gives so extremely favourable a view of the position of woman in the Northern races, is quite borne out by the character given by Tacitus of the Germans. No doubt the highest teaching with regard to the position of woman is that given by St. Paul in the well-known passage which I need hardly quote. (Cheers.)

Rev. J. SINCLAIR.—As far as this paper is an exposition of Scandinavian mythology, I can say nothing except that I thank the author for the explanation he has given us. Every man who reads picks up something of every subject, but I am afraid that this is a subject of which many besides myself have but a very fragmentary knowledge. But there are many questions suggested by this exposition which are collateral to the exposition itself, and which we may be capable of forming an opinion upon; such as those which have just been indicated to us so ably in the speech of the Chairman. Now, I cannot help thinking that the author of the paper is more nearly right about the development of Christian art than is the Chairman. I think Mr. Ruskin, who is a high living authority on every question of art, has, in his *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, expressed his opinion of the incompatibility of high art, or of some developments of high art, with a high degree of religiousness or spirituality. I think that all experience justifies and confirms this opinion. It is true that some of the great painters, both Italian and English, and of one or two other nations, have been eminently Christian men; but I think you will not find any people who, as a whole, were equally distinguished for spirituality and for taste,—refined and artistic taste. I am not aware of any such example. On the other hand, we find that some of the nations most distinguished in this respect have been also no less distinguished for their sensuousness. A little consideration of human nature in its actual condition, as we know it, is quite enough to account for this fact. There is a kind of antagonism between sensuousness and spirituality,—at least, as realized and manifested by man in his actual condition. The very essence of religion is, that the emotional and affectionate nature goes out towards the Divine Spirit. I believe that in the heavenly spirit, when men's moral and spiritual natures have been fully developed, and all extraneous elements have been rejected, then art—the beautiful in form and colour, and other aspects of which we can now form no conception—will not only be compatible with this perfection, but associated with it as a result. But, in man's present imperfect state, I think there must be a certain degree of antagonism and counteracting influence between spirituality or high religiousness, and the high development of the artistic elements in human nature. There is just one other question on which the paper gives an opinion in which I cannot so thoroughly agree with the author. Mr. Gosse speaks of the humanity of those people as shown in their treatment of their dependents, slaves, and the lower orders of society. He adduces the fact that they were distinguished by their kindness to the lower animals—dogs and cats especially—as a presumptive proof that they were not so harsh in their treatment of their slaves as the laws and customs of their community would seem to infer. Now I am afraid the premisses scarcely warrant the conclusion. I have often observed that children who are very fond of petting their cats and dogs are very much addicted to quarrelling with one another; and I have often asked them how it was that, being so kind to cats and dogs, they were so different with their brothers and sisters. That is a very significant fact, which one has observed for one's self; and it may be accounted for in this way. Tame

animals are submissive; they never contradict one, if they did, they would receive a different kind of treatment. A great cause of conflict in society is opposition of interests, and the conflict of whims and notions. I think there is nothing which marks the real progress of a nation in true Christianity so much as this one thing; that is, the manner in which the wealthy and the powerful are wont to treat those who are dependent upon them, and beneath them in social circumstances. I think we can measure our own religious condition very well. If any one were to judge British society by the true Christian standard, it would be discovered that while we have made progress as compared with the Scandinavian community, there is yet very great progress to be made in the feelings with which men ought to regard one another, and the treatment they give to each other, especially when it is in their power.

Dr. E. HAUGHTON.—As regards art, if we want guides and rules for genuine refinement, worthy of mankind, we shall find them nowhere else than in Christianity: there we find all that is right in man and woman. We shall find the highest ideal embodied in Christianity, and we never need be afraid that that will interfere with culture, which in itself is good and desirable, it being evidently the Divine idea that all ranks and conditions and occupations of men should be equally penetrated with the same spirit of courtesy and self-denial.

Mr. R. W. DIBDIN.—In his eleventh paragraph Mr. Gosse speaks of Iceland as the fountain-head of all that was noblest and best in the Scandinavian race. I rather doubt the correctness of this. Iceland was colonized at the end of the ninth century by some of the Vikings driven out from Norway by the conquests of Harold Haarfager, and it is interesting to remember that the descendants of some of these Norsemen, at the close of the tenth century, were the first European discoverers of America, long before the time of Columbus. It is curious to notice what hold such legends as that of the death of Baldur, to which Mr. Gosse alludes in his third paragraph, still have in Scandinavia. On the eve of the longest day almost every town and village in Norway has its Bale fire lighted to commemorate his death. Whilst he lived, the days were said to have been getting longer and longer and brighter and brighter, but as soon as he died they commenced to darken and contract in length.

The CHAIRMAN.—You will find many of these things in this country. If you go into Cornwall you will find many Pagan customs there.

The HON. SECRETARY.—And in Ireland, on the Eve of St. John, which is the longest day, after the sun sets they light what they call Baal fires, in which wood and turf,—but never coal,—are used, at cross roads and on the tops of mountains. These fires are kept burning till next morning, and the peasants throw their children from one to another through them.

Mr. DIBDIN.—Possibly the name of Baal fires may be derived from Baldur, the good spirit. Mr. Gosse says in his first paragraph:—

“I propose to show this evening how totally distinct was the mission of Christianity to the peoples of the North; to sketch before you the habits

of thought peculiar to the heathen nations of Scandinavia ; and to show in what respect they had learned, spontaneously, as one may say, the axioms of moral wisdom, and in what respects their condition left them, with much of this quality to receive from the Gospel."

I have been much struck in noticing how the Scandinavian mythology and cosmogony corresponds in many points—some of which have been pointed out by Mr. Gosse, and some of which have not—with the truths of Revelation. "Learned spontaneously" was hardly, I think, the phrase to use in describing the means by which the Scandinavian people obtained those ideas. It seems to me more probable that these traditions had their source in the early knowledge, possessed by their ancestors, of matters revealed in Holy Scripture. It is doubtful where the present race of Norsemen came from, as there is no accurate history before the seventh century ; but if the common opinion be true,—and it is an opinion supported by the great authority of Munch, in his "Det Norske Folks-Historie," that the tribes who drove out the Laps and the aboriginal people of Norway, came from Asia, under Odin, it would tend to confirm my theory. Coming from Asia, they would be more likely to be acquainted with Revelation than if they had existed immemorally in the distant lands of Scandinavia.

A MEMBER.—I have listened with very much interest to this paper, having studied Scandinavian mythology to a great extent. There is one point in the paper, with regard to the temporary destruction of fine art in Scandinavia, upon which I should like to say a word or two. All I can say of European art generally, seems to my mind to apply to art in Scandinavia. The decadence of art, Scandinavian, Teutonic, or Latin, sets in when a cataclysm sets in in regard to the religious feelings of the people themselves. We have had a pre-Christian art in Rome, and a Christian art, and there is no disruption in the whole line, Pagan or Christian ; and indeed there is a continuity in art from the earliest times, which is carried out by those links which adapt themselves to the requirements of particular times and phases of civilization. Mr. Gosse says :—

"All of us in our graver moments would confess it is Luther and not Raffaele, Wickliffe and not Chaucer, for whom, as men and as Christians, we have to thank God most."

I must say I think we may thank God for art as well as for its appreciation. Coming back to the philosophic consideration, we find the Latin races imbued with the Roman Catholic form of Christianity. That was a Christian ideality and symbolism. In order to give a tangible idea to their religion, they appealed to the senses of the people. They attracted to religion by means of beautiful works of art, and pictures which have tended so much to the development of art and civilization. But as we know the ideality in time became so much impregnated with errors, that the people lost their hold upon the æsthetic portion of religion, and gave themselves up more to considerations of personal ambitions than to those considerations which religion placed before them. So we have decadence in art, and decadence to a great extent, but not decadence for ever. We find this true of the Puritanical reign in England,

when we had a revulsion of public sentiment, which was only a spring of resentment against the errors under which the people had been brought to labour, and that led to the demolition of pictures, and ornaments, and sculptures all over the country; and it was seen in the demolition of the figures which bedecked the front of Westminster Abbey. They broke down those works of art which were used to symbolize in the freest sense of the word. They broke down those works of art which added to religion the encumbrances of superstition; and instead of showing their resentment to its utmost against those people who by their acts brought about the Reformation, they imagined that the cathedrals and churches were the cause of all that they objected to, and that led to the decadence of English art. When the people came to a true sense of their position, and discovered that it was not the buildings that caused their discomfort, but that it was human error, they found that they had been acting upon the wrong side, and began to regard those cathedrals and churches as houses erected to the Lord, and thus we had a revival of British art, and a restoration of cathedrals all over the kingdom. If we look at the phenomenon of the apparent declension of art in Scandinavia, consequent on the destruction of paganism, we shall be able to apply that theory to explain the problem, just as I have endeavoured to explain it with regard to England.

Rev. J. MARTIN.—Would the author give us a little more information in reference to his fourth paragraph, as to the Scandinavian notion of holiness? I particularly desire to know what warranty the author has for saying that Heimdall is a holy god in the Christian sense of holiness. I do not mean beneficent, but pure in the Christian sense of purity.

Mr. H. CADMAN JONES.—I should like to touch, for a moment, upon one question which has been raised. It has been stated that Christianity is practically modified by the psychological conditions of the nations that adopt it. There is no doubt that Roman Catholicism is prevalent among the Latin races, and Protestantism among the Scandinavian and Teutonic races, and I should not be disposed to deny that there is something in the natural character of each of these races which rather predisposes it to that form of religion which prevails there. But we must take care not to carry this view too far. I have lately heard it put forward almost in this shape,—that Roman Catholicism is the form of Christianity which is naturally adapted to the Latin races, and Protestantism the form naturally adapted to the Scandinavian and Teutonic races, and that we, therefore, cannot expect either race to change its form of religion. I should be sorry to adopt a principle which, if carried out, might lead us to the conclusion that heathenism was the natural religion of some races, and that we must not expect them to change it. It is an interesting subject of inquiry, how far the difference of religion in different countries is owing to difference of national character, and how far to those controlling circumstances which influence the destiny of nations. At one time the Protestants were a majority in Poland, and it hung in the balance whether Protestantism should not become the established religion of the country. The balance turned against Protestantism, and by

the efforts of the Jesuits, with the help of a zealous Roman Catholic king, it was gradually rooted out without persecution. In France, though the Protestants were never a majority, they formed a large and influential minority, including some of the noblest spirits in the country, such as Coligny and Mornay du Plessis. It does not, therefore, seem that national character would have made France a purely Roman Catholic country: that it has nearly become so is owing to two centuries of rigorous repressive measures. I think it would be found that the difference in the forms of Christianity in different countries is to be accounted for, not so much by differences of national character, as by differences of controlling circumstances.

Mr. Gosse.—As to the first question put to me, it was, if I understand it, whether the excitement of the Berserkers was anything more than we find among some other peoples. I think that may be admitted, but that is in favour of my theory, that the Berserkers, like the Oriental dervishes, acted under a religious fervour. Then the Chairman has touched on a vast variety of subjects, but he may be said to be generally in my favour rather than an objector. Mr. Martin has raised an objection to the holiness of Heimdall. I have not laid down that point authoritatively, but have simply stated my belief that in the case of Heimdall there was a singular instance of the metaphysical idea of inherent holiness and purity of thought and action. Another present asks what more information I can bring forward on the subject; there is very little indeed: the same story is told with exceeding diffuseness in one of the poems of the Edda, and I can add very little more. Everybody must judge for himself whether the facts I have stated bear out my statement or not. One subject which has been discussed bears reference to the effect of Christianity on art, and on that point I feel that I differ extremely from all who have spoken. Perhaps my own mind is too much an artist's in feeling to conceive some of the views which have been expressed. I had no intention of discussing this point at all, but only of stating my opinion that when a great spiritual and, if you like, pietistic movement is stirring in the world, at that moment and place the fine arts do not flourish; I leave it to theologians to explain the cause. I merely say that at moments when pietistic feeling has been very strong, the arts have dwindled. Look at Florence; the decadence of Florentine art is marked by the rise and success of Savonarola, one of the most striking instances that occurs to me.* With regard to what I have said about Iceland, I may add that as any one writing upon ancient Greece would take Athens as illustrating what was best and noblest in art and literature, although the pre-eminence of Athens scarcely overlapped a couple of generations, and would take Athens as the head and centre of Greek art; so Iceland, in the same way, is the centre of all that was most intense and brilliant in Scandinavian art and literature.

* It is noteworthy that Michael Angelo first began to study painting, under the brothers Ghirlandajo, ten years before the death of Savonarola in 1498.—Ed.

Not only Norway, but Denmark and Sweden, and Finland and Pomerania, all enter into the description which I have attempted to give you here.

The CHAIRMAN.—What was the population of Iceland about that period?

Mr. Gosse.—It is very difficult to tell, in the absence of anything like a census. The present population is about 64,000, and there is no doubt whatever that then it had vegetation enough to keep at least double that population, and probably a great deal more, because they subsisted largely on stores from other countries,—stores of corn and meal, and various necessaries of life, brought from Norway and England and the Teutonic countries generally. I should think 200,000 people might easily have been sustained on the island then, though there is nothing in the Sagas to suggest that so large a population actually existed.

The Meeting was then adjourned.
