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Illustrations of northern antiquities, from the earlier Teutonic and Scandinavian romances

Weber, Henry William

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THE purpose of the present Publication is to introduce the reader to the Metrical Poems and Romances of the ancient Gothic Dialects, a subject intimately connected with the earlier history of European literature, but to which English antiquaries have as yet but partially turned their eyes. The field of Icelandic Antiquities has indeed been investigated by Percy, by Johnstone, and more lately by Mr Herbert, with zeal, perseverance, and success. But the Romances of ancient Germany have been as yet unnoticed, and, with the Metrical Tales of Denmark and Sweden, offer a new and interesting subject of speculation to the English reader.

Should the present volume be favourably received by the public, it is the purpose of the Editors to extend their researches to the Romances of Russia ; to the more rare and less-known Sagas of Scandinavia ; to the Original Songs of the Letts and Esthonians ; and to the Poetry of the Celtic Dialects. Upon each of these subjects materials have been collected, and means of access to eminent antiquaries and libraries on the continent

are in the power of the Editors. They would also esteem themselves honoured by communications from any man of literature, whose taste may have led him to this field of investigation.

The intended prosecution of the work will depend on the public taste: and although the Editors cannot augur brilliant or extensive success for a work which relishes too much of pure antiquity to be generally popular, they are not without hopes that, since their materials are new to British literature, enough of countenance may be extended to their labours, to encourage perseverance in their present undertaking. Its end and import may be expressed by reference to the beautiful lines by which Pope has described the northern front of the Temple of Fame:—

“ Of Gothic structure was the NORTHERN side,
O'erwrought with ornaments of barb'rous pride:
There huge Colosses rose, with trophies crown'd,
And Runic characters were grav'd around.
There sat Zamolxis with erected eyes,
And Odin here in mimic trances dies.
There on rude iron columns, smear'd with blood,
The horrid forms of Scythian Heroes stood;
Druids and Bards (their once-loud harps unstrung,)
And Youths that died to be by Poets sung.”