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

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ON THE

## ANTIENT TEUTONIC

## POETRY AND ROMANCE.

No nation can boast of a larger, and, in general, more ancient and valuable stock of early poetry in the vernacular language, than the Germans. The era during which the best and most considerable of their romances were produced, was exactly co-eval with the most flourishing period of the Norman romanciers and the Provençal troubadours, who have given occasion for volumes of dissertations, historical deductions, and hypotheses as romantic, to the full, as the poems they were intended to illustrate and recommend, while that of their eastern neighbours has been absolutely unknown to foreigners, and, till within these few years, very little studied by the natives themselves. The respectable volumes of Schilter, which were published after his death, by the learned Scherz, in 1727, were almost confined to the most ancient biblical and monkish rhymes, and chiefly compiled with a view of deducing the gradual advancement of the language; for which reason they afford great gratification to the students of etymology, but furnish little which can interest the lovers of romance, and

of ancient poetry, for its own sake.<sup>1</sup> About the middle of the eighteenth century, several laudable attempts were made by the poetic veteran Bodmer, in conjunction with Breitinger, a learned Swiss, to revive the study of their early poetry; the principal of which were the publication of the Parisian Codex of the works of a hundred and forty troubadours, (*Minnesænger*), which appeared in two volumes quarto, at Zurich, in the year 1758, and an edition of the latter half of the great romance of the *Nibelungen*. In 1784, a second attempt of the same kind was made by another learned Swiss, Professor Miller. He published two quarto volumes of Teutonic romances, and a third was begun some years after,<sup>2</sup> by Koch, a clergyman of Berlin, author of a most valuable *Catalogue Raisonné* of German poetry. But the encouragement for this species of research was so cold, though the work was liberally supported by several German princes, and by most of the universities, that the third volume remained incomplete, being broken off in the middle of a long romance; and the greater part of the impression was sold for waste paper.

Within these ten years, however, the study has suddenly become popular, and was carried on, with the characteristic enthusiasm of the Germans, so rapidly, that the greater and more valuable part of their romances would have been given to the public, if the confused state of the nation, the complete abolition of the constitution, and the intolerable tyranny of their Gallic oppressors, had not entirely paralysed the press, and the exertions of the learned. A second large collection of romances<sup>3</sup> was projected, and the first volume published by F. H. von

<sup>1</sup> The same observations hold good with respect to the valuable publications of Goldast, Eccard, Lambecius, Michaelis, Petz, &c.

<sup>2</sup> The following are the contents of this scarce work. Vol. I. The romance of the *Nibelungen*, with the Lament, (*Klage*); the *Æneis* of Veldeck; *God Amor*, a pretty allegorical poem in the style of the Troubadours; *Percival*, by Wolfram of Eschenbach; and some *fabliaux*.—Vol. II. *Gotfried* of Strasburgh's *Sir Tristan*, with Vriebert's continuation; *Florice and Blanchefour*; *Ywain*, by Hartman of Ouwe; *Fridank*, a continued string of gnomes; and a collection of lays of love and devotion.—The fragment of the third volume contains one half of *Conrad* of Wurzburg's *Trojan War*; fragments of *Wigolais* and of *Partenopex*; and a score of *fabliaux*.

<sup>3</sup> Entitled, '*Deutsche Gedichte des Mittelalters*,' Berlin, 1808, 4to. The volume con-

der Hagen, a nobleman, enthusiastic and indefatigable in the cause, and Dr J. G. Buesching, the son of the great geographer of that name. But we understand (though we sincerely hope our intelligence is erroneous) that the undertaking, for want of the very moderate encouragement required, has been dropped. Several other works of a similar nature, though not of such extent, have been published; the most valuable of which we have been so fortunate as to procure from the continent, for insertion in the present Work.

To give a short and general sketch of the history of Teutonic poetry of the middle ages, and to exhibit an analysis, with specimens of their original and most interesting romances, is the purport of this portion of our work; and we sincerely hope to be able to communicate some of our enthusiasm in the cause to our readers. At any rate, the subject is entirely new in this country; and if the abstracts of the romances should fail to amuse, on the score of the interest of the story, or the merit of the translated specimens, they cannot fail to awaken the curiosity of those who are anxious to investigate the very singular history of the connection between the romantic legends and traditions of the different nations of Europe.

SECT. I.—*A Sketch of the History of Teutonic Poetry and Romance.*

We need not make any reference here to the songs of the ancient German bards, mentioned by Tacitus, which are irrecoverably lost. They have been said to have been collected by the order of Charlemagne; but it is more than probable that the passage in Eginhart\* has been generally misunderstood. There is no actual reference to the bards, who, in-

tains King Rother, Duke Ernest of Bavaria, Wigamur, St George, and Solomon and Morolf.

\* *Barbara et antiquissima carmina, quibus veterum regum actus et bella canebantur, scripsit memoriaeque mandavit.*—Eginharti Hist. Caroli.—See on this subject some ingenious remarks in Schlegel's *Athenaeum*, Berlin, 1799, II. 306, from which some of the arguments in the text are copied.