ished at anything, but to wait for every marvel to be explained by time. [Here follows the same incident of the wife attempting to make the son speak and then accusing him.] Then the king called all his barons, high ecclesiastics, and learned scholars together to give judgment on his son, but found that they refused to condemn him. [Then follow the stories told alternately by the wife and a wise man, the last being told by the prince himself.] So at last the queen was condemned to die by fire."

The number of the stories told varies in the French poem and in *Syntipas*, in the latter being fifteen, in the former five-and-twenty, and of these only four are identical in the two versions, viz. (according to the headings in the English romance), *The King and his Stiward*, *The Bore and the Herd*, *The Magpie*, and *The Knight and his Grehound*. The last especially is a well-known story, and is found in all oriental as well as western versions, except *Nachshebi* and the *Seven Viziers*, and indeed elsewhere beyond the *Books of the Seven Wise Masters*, *e.g.* it forms the basis of the Welsh legend of Llewellyn the Great and his hound Gellert. That it is also found in classical antiquity I have proved long ago, and as this is the oldest form of the story, it may be interesting to give it at length.

According to Pausanias x. 33, 5, the inhabitants of the town of Ophiteia, in Phocis, told the following story :—

"There was once a rich man who had a little son, whom he put into a jar (ἀγγεῖον) and hid in a safe place from the lying in wait of his enemies. There a wolf fell upon him, but at the same moment a snake wound itself round the jar to defend the child. But the father when he came by and saw the snake, thought it would have slain the boy, and hurled a javelin at it, which killed not only the faithful snake but also his own son to boot. Some time after he found out how it was from the herdsmen of the place, and he took the two carcases and burned them upon one pyre. And hence the town is called Ophiteia from the snake (ὄφις)."

To return to Comparetti's acute, careful, and fruitful research, we have no doubt that it will be well received by all students of the Literature of Fables. FELIX LIEBRECHT.

The Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs, with certain Songs from the elder Edda, translated from the Icelandic by Eirikr Magnússon, translator of 'Legends of Iceland,' and William Morris, author of 'The Earthly Paradise.' London: F. S. Ellis, King Street, Covent Garden.

THE translators challenge attention to their work as the great Epic of the North as the tale of Troy is the great Epic of the South, and certainly there are points of contact. The tale of Troy was the property of the whole Greek race, and the tale of the Volsungs and Niblungs is the property of the whole Teutonic race. Both introduce the heroes of many divisions of the race which subsequently became separate states. In both, mythical and legendary elements are inextricably entangled. We are sure that Sigurd slaying Fafnir is the same as Apollo slaying Python; we are sure that Briseis and Chryseis must be cosmical impersonations of some kind, for they appear in India as well as in Greece. But when we try to carry the cosmical interpretation through, we find the same difficulty in both; the story is rooted in geography, and in the tale of the Volsungs and Niblungs the proper names coincide with those of historical characters so often that it is hard to believe that all the coincidences are accidental. It is not surprising that the ethnographical patriotism of the translators has made them overlook the reasons why stories which have such a similar place in the history of the Greek and Teutonic race have such a dissimilar place in the history of Greek and Teutonic literature; why Homer, as represented by Dictys and Dares, has been so much more to Englishmen than the *Edda* or the *Nibelungenlied*. It is probable that the Greek race was more highly gifted for artistic purposes than the northern; it is certain that the society of the Homeric age was artistically richer than the society of the Icelandic sagas, for it was more complex and more regular. These Icelandic compositions are largely influenced by a spirit of *naïve* "historical veracity, a desire to get as quickly as possible through all that is remembered of the traditional facts. This tendency is not without its value; it excludes inartistic loitering," and sobriety is always impressive. But a literature of this kind is not suggestive, it does not germinate; it begins and ends in ballads, and the compilations that come between are scarcely epical—even in dimensions. *Volsunga Saga* is constructed like all Icelandic stories on the principal of beginning the Trojan War with Leda's Egg, and the Return of Diomed with the Death of Meleager, yet it is not a quarter of the length of either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, which deal each with a single episode of the tale of Troy.

And the Sagaman was not a Homer, he was not even a Sir Thomas Mallory. The quaint archaic English of the translation with just the right outlandish flavour, does much to disguise the inequalities and incompletenesses of the original. No one can trace in the translation the difference of style between the equable prose of chapters 1–8, 10, 40–41, with part of 43 (according to the division of the translators) where the compiler seems to have followed the lost *Sigurd's Saga*, quoted by old writers,—and the clumsy paraphrases of lays which make up the rest of the work, except chapter 22, which together with a few phrases elsewhere is taken, with little variation, from Wilkina Saga. The translators are aware of this coincidence between a work of the thirteenth century and one which they assign to the twelfth; but they give no explanation of this point, and no grounds for the date they assign. We have reason to be grateful to the awkwardness of the compiler for continually allowing poetical phrases to crop up in his prose, so that they can sometimes without trouble be turned back into verse, for the original of chapters 23–30 belonged to the lost leaves of our only MS. of Saemunds Edda; but this circumstance, which is an attraction to the student, is a difficulty, perhaps a temptation to the translator, who is led by literary interests to claim a liberty not always compatible with fidelity.

When a clumsy and unequal writer is to be brought up to an empirical standard of archaic elegance, it is easy to see how Vala-ript (which means quite literally Welsh cloth or Welsh stuff) comes to be translated "cloth dyed red by the folk of the Gauls." The same tendency to prettiness invades the notes; we are actually told that Valkyrja means "Chooser of the Elected," and Valhall "Hall of the Elected," instead of "Chooser of the Slain," and "Hall of the Slain." On the other hand, while "Battle-apple tree" of a warrior is paraphrased "Fair fruit of the byrnie's clash," other uncouth and difficult phrases like "Helmstaffe" for "warrior," or "Windhelm," *i. q.* "helmet of the wind," for "sky," or "sharp steel's root and stem," for "warrior," and the like, are left not only unadorned but unexplained, and where an explanation is given it is not always adequate. It is quite true that an outlaw was a *wolf's head*, but there is a difference between this and a *wolf in holy places*. This last condition surely answers rather to excommunication and to the profanation of the holy places than to outlawry. It would have been as well also to explain that the verse in Fjolnis's song translated "Great is the trouble of foot ill tripping" refers to the omen of stumbling before going into a battle or beginning a war, which Harold Hardrada vainly endeavoured to elude at Stamford Bridge. The last line of the same song is positively mistranslated, "And base to fall before fate grovelling," which has no connection with what goes before, and contradicts Norse sentiment into the bargain, for there "old age bends all knees, and fate and death lays all prostrate, rich and poor, weak and mighty." The

real meaning is "it is ill to rush headlong before (a man's) luck," which coincides admirably with the precepts of cheerful prudence just before. The notion is, the headlong fool rushes into destruction, leaving his luck behind him; while the wise man is wary and gives good luck time to go before and prepare his way. In the same spirit we are told that a "fey"-man's fylgja or "fetch" follows behind, whereas the fylgja of a man in health and wealth walks before him and heralds his coming.

The translators have not been able to efface the gaps and discrepancies of their story as completely as they have effaced its inequalities of style. The ballads which the compiler tried, or did not try, to work into his narrative, were written at different times and places; they sometimes represent incompatible traditions, and to appreciate them we ought to remember that, for the most part, they were intended to stand alone. The old poets are not responsible for the difference of tone between the scenes where Brynhild and Gudrun are contrasted as lioness and lamb, and those where Gudrun outdoes the ferocity of Medea, first in defence and then in revenge of her brother. They are not responsible for the way in which Sigurd's son disappears from the story, leaving his murder, among so many, to be a matter of inference, alluded to, but never stated. They are not responsible either for the omission of the love passages between Gunnar and Oddrun, which would be some excuse for the treachery of Atli, or for the identification of Sigrdrifa, the companion of Odin and the goddess of victory, with Brynhild. This last identification gives a thoroughly sophistic look to the commandments of the goddess, and makes the portion of the lay, which the translators have called Sigrdrifa Mal, appear a mere marvel of science and courtesy for Norse gentlemen; a rhetorical exercise of the same order as Nestor's advice to Neoptolemus, composed by Hippias. The translators have aided the identification by omitting Sigrdrifa, which is given as the name of the sleeping shieldmay in the birds' song. We notice, by the way, that the exigencies of alliteration have produced a fresh variation of every stanza of Sigrdrifa's song of the formula ("Thou shalt know" such and such "runes"), which opens all. Nor are the old poets to blame for the astonishing chronological confusion of the story as we have it, where Sigurd's widow marries a king of the fifth century, her daughter marries Jormunrek or Ermanrik, a king of the third, while his other daughter marries Raguar, a king of the eighth or ninth. The legend lived on in many lays, and it fitted itself to many historical names; but while it was alive it never fitted itself to all at once. It is hard to see why the translators have omitted the story of Heimir and Aslaug, Brynhild's daughter, which has as much to do with the main story as the tale of Erp and Hamdir, and serves, besides the beautiful legend of the harp child, to connect the cycles of Sigurd and Raguar. But unanswerable questions were sure to multiply when the translators decided to use the lays as a supplement to the compilation, instead of using the compilation as a key to the lays. The worst consequence of this mistake is, that as we read the Saga continuously, the principal incidents are all anticipated before the birth of Sigurd. Sigi is betrayed like Sigurd by his brothers-in-law, Atli like Siggeir betrays, and Signy's vengeance is an anticipation of Gudrun's, both in its treachery and its ferocity of self-sacrifice. Sigrun's invocation to Helgi is just like Gudrun's invocation of Sigurd.

Still, with all its defects even the prose Saga abounds with beauties which justify the praise of Mr. Morris's lovely *Prologue in Verse*. There are touches of pathetic elevation, like the last words of Signy: "All these things have I done that vengeance might fall on him, and that I too might not live long; and merrily will I die with King Siggeir, though I was nought merry to live with him." And all the situations of the lays, where Brynhild is the heroine, are too lofty to be spoilt by paraphrase. Where she expounds Gudrun's dream, which is a prophecy of all that is to pass between them; where she meets Sigurd for the last time, and sacrifices her love to duty and revenge, and refuses his offer to undo what has been done by mistake; where she forbids any to be driven by hand or word to follow her to her wedding with Sigurd on the funeral pile, while she offers wealth to be enjoyed beyond the grave to all who will follow her of their own accord,—the story is on the highest level of artistic tragedy. Gudrun's lament is later and more literary; it turns like Mr. Tennyson's well-known lines, "Home they brought her warrior dead," on the difficulty of winning tears. Each of her women in turn recounts her own greatest sorrow, till the wisest uncovers the face of the dead, and bids her embrace him once more. Then the tears come, and the words; and it is an unimpeachable testimony to the power that they gain from the situation that St. Gertrude sang the Low Dutch version of Gudrun's lament daily as a lamentation for her beloved. The story falls where the story of the *Nibelungenlied* rises, when it comes to the death of the Giukungs. The way in which Gunnar receives the tokens, feigned and true, of Hogni's death, is of course very lofty; but the effect is marred by the motionless self-distrust with which he provokes his brother's death. The murder of Erp is grimly told by Sorli, and Hamdi's is grimly told; but it is almost too silly to be tragical; and it is hard after all to care for the deaths of men who did not care for their own lives. Norse literature, when all is said, must still be left to students. When will the author of *Jason* give us the final perfect English Odyssey? G. A. SIMCOX.*

Petrarque: Étude d'après de nouveaux Documents. Par A. Mézières. Paris: Didier, 1868.

THE life of Petrarch has been written frequently, and in many languages, but the present biography, though in some respects a sketch, may claim to be the first that is really complete. The reason of this is to be found in the neglect with which a great part of the poet's correspondence has been treated. Petrarch collected and edited his letters in the latter part of his life, excluding those which he regarded as of inferior interest, and arranging the rest under the heads of *Familiar Letters*, and *Letters in Old Age*, together with a smaller number which were formed into a separate collection in order to lessen the bulk of these volumes. The *Familiar Letters* composed twenty-four books, and of these only eight were published in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: at the beginning of the seventeenth century the greater part of three more books were added to those; but the rest of this series, and more than half the miscellaneous letters, remained unpublished till the present day. It seemed almost as if a fatality interfered with their publication. At the end of the last century the project was taken in hand by the poet's biographer Baldelli, but he was prevented from proceeding with it, and the Abbé Meneghelli, in whose hands he placed the documents he had collected, after zealously prosecuting the work, also died without accomplishing the task of publication. The same fate overtook the next possessor of the manuscripts, Joseph Vedova, of Padua, and it was not until 1859 that they began to see the light, under the editorship of Signor Fracassetti: thanks to his indefatigable labours, we now possess a complete edition of the *Familiar* and *Miscellaneous Letters* in the original Latin, together with an Italian translation and elaborate and careful notes, especially

* The philological criticisms in this article are due to Mr. G. Vigfússon.