hidden riches of Alaska; and the only fair inference to be drawn from Mr. Dall's book is, that that country is a valuable acquisition to the United States.

Mr. Dall gives interesting descriptions of the various tribes inhabiting the different districts of Alaska. Each tribe has its peculiarities, but all have the same general characteristics; and, "in short," the Alaska Indians are scarcely the persons we should desire for intimate friends. The better classes live in houses which are thus described: "All the houses were strongly built, roofed with sheets of spruce-bark, pinned and fastened down by long poles. The sides are plastered with a white mortar made from shell-marl, obtainable in the vicinity. Most of the windows were of parchment, but those of the commander's house were of glass. The latter was provided with good plank floors, and the doors and sashes were painted red with ochre. The yard was free from dirt; and the houses, with their white walls and red trimmings, made a very favorable comparison with any of those in the Russian posts."

The account of the habits and superstitions of the different tribes is very interesting, and occupies an important portion of the volume. The poetic element is not lacking in these Indians. The Russians have had but little difficulty with the Indians of Alaska; but as soon as the treaty of cession was signed, and our flag floated on an Alaskan wind, our Indian troubles began. This little fact suggests a train of thought that would be satisfied only with a whole article in "Old and New."

The great drawback to Alaska is its nomenclature. It will forever remain a marvel how so many long and unpronounceable names could be purchased for seven million dollars. We reckon them as obstacles to civilization, but must take them as we take the volcanoes there, which occasionally give evidence of internal trouble, seeking outward expression. The offskis and loffskis are formidable; and, should railroads ever thread that country, what train could stop long enough at a station for the conductor to announce the name?

The book is very valuable. It is reliable, and contains all that there is to be known of Alaska, up to this time. The publishers have put the work in sumptuous form, and, in all respects, it is creditable to our literature and to our engravers.

"THE STORY OF THE VOLUNGS NIBLUNGS." 1

"This is the Great Story of the North, which should be to all our race what the Tale of Troy was to the Greeks,—to all our race first; and afterwards, when the change of the world has made our race nothing more than a name of what has been,—a story too,—then should it be to those that come after us no less than the tale of Troy has been to us."

With these noble words, the cheerful Saxon singer brings forward these earliest stories of our race. The Icelander and the Teuton may dispute for precedence; but, to the lovers of poetic life, the tale has the same interest in either version.

"The Story of the Volsungs Niblungs."

"Oh, hearken, ye who speak the English

tongue!

How, in a waste land, ages long ago,
The very heart of the North bloomed into
song,

After brooding o'er this tale of woe,

Hearken and marvel how it might be so,—

That such a sweetness, so well-crowned,
could be

Betwixt the ice-hills and the cold gray sea."

The line of the Volsungs descended
from Odin ends with Sigurd, the son
of Sigmund. In his adventures, and
in the working out of the life and
death of those near him, lies the chief
interest of the tale. After twelve
chapters of preparation, the hero
appears. Later, he is thus pictured: —

"Now, the hair of this Sigurd was
golden-red of hue, fair of fashion, and falling
down in great locks; thick and short
was his beard, and of no other color; high
nosed; broad and high-boned of face. So
keen were his eyes, that few durst gaze up
under the brows of him. His shoulders
were as broad to look on as the shoulders
of two. Most duly was his body fashioned
betwixt height and breadth, and in such
wise as was seemliest; and this is the
sign told of his height, that when he was
girt with his sword Gram, which same was
seven spans long, as he went through the
full-grown rye-fields, the dew-shoe of the
said sword smote the ears of the standing
corn; and, for all that, greater was his
strength than his growth. Well could he
wield sword and cast forth spear, shoot
shaft and hold shield, bend bow, back
horse, and do all the goodly deeds that he
learned in his youth's days."

The Anglo-Saxon has come justly
to his love of speech-making.

"Of many words he was, and so fair of
speech withal, that, whosoever he made
it his business to speak, he never left
speaking, before that to all men it seemed
full sure that no otherwise must the matter
be than as he said."

The "Volsunga" is a poem lacking
only verse. The rhythm is full and
sweet, the imagery bold and clear.
The art which formed it is true as
Nature herself; for rejecting the pig-
ments, which in mortal hands must
ever be artificial colors only, the art-
ists have wrought in the light and
shade which is real. Their language
is true to the form: it lights and it
shadows the idea beneath; but obtrudes
no color of its own.

Sigurd had won his treasure, guarded,
as it always is, by a fearful drag-
on. Fafnir, the dragon, or worm as the tale has it, slain and dying, says,—

"Ride there, then, and thou shalt find

golden by to suffice thee for all thy life-
days; yet shall that gold be thy bane, and
the bane of every one soever who owns it.

"Then up stood Sigurd, and said, 'Home
would I ride, and lose all that wealth, if I
deemed, that, by the losing thereof, I
should never die; but every brave and
true man will fain have his hand on
wealth till that last day.'"

Lays from the Edda are mingled
with the prose of the Saga. None are
finer than the songs of the woodpeck-
ers, when Sigurd, having eaten of the
serpent's heart, is able to interpret
them.

"Then the forth sang,—

"Soft on the fell
A shield-may sleepeth;
The lime-tree's red plague
Playing about her.
The sleep-thorn set Odin
Into that maiden,
For her choosing, in war,
The one he willed not."

The sleeping maiden of all romance
is here Brynhild, daughter of King
Budli the Budlung.

Noble Brynhild! a pure and aus-
tere virtue fills thy presence. A high
heart and a wise brain attend thee.
Sigurd freed the "shield-may" from the long sleep; and they plighted troth. Minerva-like, she prevailed over all women; and many men she surpassed in warlike deeds. The fates grant such women all things else, but deny them happiness.

"Brynhild answers, 'I shall gaze on the hosts of the war-kings, but thou shalt wed Gudrun, the daughter of Giuki.'" "Sigurd answered, 'What king's daughter lives to beguile me.'"

At last, Sigurd goes among the Giukings; and Grimhild, Giuki's wife, gives him a drink, causing him to forget Brynhild and all their mutual life. (What potion could make a hero forget the woman he loved, not for her wisdom, but for herself?) He weds Gudrun; and readers who have fallen in love with her in Mr. Morris's poem of her lovers will be glad to read of her in these earliest renderings.

The Devil abides near all matchmaking mammis; and Grimhild sets her son Gunnar to woo Brynhild. Gunnar is not man enough to do the deed which shall win lofty Brynhild. Her lover must ride through the fire blazing about Hlyndale Hall. Gunnar fails, though his brother-in-law loans him the mighty horse Grani. At last, Sigurd, as was planned by devilish old Grimhild, assumes the shape of Gunnar, and gets his bride for him. All might have gone well; but the queens brag and quarrel, when all comes out, and the shield-may finds herself deceived. But no spot nor stain is on this noble woman, — maiden or wife. None of the loose ways of Olympus run through the Saga pages. Cheated though she was, the stern, loyal Norse woman says, "Nor will I have two kings in one hall; I will lay my life down rather than beguile Gunnar the King."

The curse which follows the understanding when it is not illumined by inspired reason overthrows Brynhild. She yields to jealous rage, and incites Gunnar. The Giukings plot together, and slay Sigurd unarmed and unawares.

Though the reader's interest is in the greater Brynhild, Gudrun is made the heroine. She rises into dignity in her mourning.

"Gudrun moaned, and drew a heavy breath; and Brynhild heard it, and laughed when she heard her mourning. Then said Gunnar, 'Thou laughest not because thy heart-roots are gladded, or else why doth thy visage wax so wan?'

The Lament of Gudrun, Mr. Morris deems "the most lyrical, the most complete, and the most beautiful, of all the Eddaic poems, — a poem that any age or language might court among its most precious possessions."

"Hushed was Gudrun
Of wail or greeting,
But with heavy woe
Was her heart a-breaking.

"Once was I counted
By the king's warriors
Higher than any
Of Herjaú's mays;

"Now am I as little
As the leaf may be,
Amid wind-swept wood
Now when dead he lieth."

Through much wailing and sorrow, the tale wears forward. Much sooth-saying and foreseeing is wasted; for the weary actors are not helped thereby. Then, as now, it is not the vision of the future which prevails, but the true vision of this present moment.

Gudrun weds Atlí, brother of Brynhild, now gone to her end. Atlí kills her kindred to get the gold of Sigurd, Fafnir's — Bane.
Great-hearted Hogni lies condemned to death. A counsellor says, “Better rede I see thereto; take we the thrall Hjalli, and give respite to Hogni; for this thrall is made to die, since the longer he lives the less worth shall he be.”

“Then in such wise spake Hogni. A man seldom speaketh who is fallen into hard need, for he prayed for the thrall’s life, and said that these shrieks he could not away with, and that it were a lesser matter to him to play out the play to the end; and therewithal the thrall gat his life as for the time.”

In his turn, Atli is slain. Guðrun, sick at heart, attempts to drown herself; but the billows cast her a-land, and she is given in marriage to King Jonakr. Her sons avenge Swanhild, her daughter by Sigurd, who had been slain by Jormunreik. This is the last chapter, for the sons of Guðrun are stoned.

“And now has come to an end the whole root and stem of the Gjukings.”

“NOW MAY ALL EARLS
BE BETTERED IN MIND!
MAY THE GRIEF OF ALL MAIDENS
EVER BE MINISHED,
FOR THIS TALE OF TROUBLE
SO TOLD TO ITS ENDING!”

In the latter part of the volume are printed “Certain Songs from the Elder Edda, which deal with the story of the Volsungs.”

“These are the only metrical sources existing of those from which the Sagaman told his tale.”

The blue-cloth cover is blazoned in quaint device of gold, from Morris’s own pencil; as if he put the volume forth with a loving hand.

We hope to see an American reprint at once; for this work should be well known and well studied, in this, the broadest land of the English tongue. Cute people in these days complain of the Greek lore. Here they may have the poetry of the Northern nations in words pellucid as our own lakes. No word-painting overlays these pages, but word-life glows through them all. In those days, the passions of men sped in arrow-flights. Love and hate filled all the heart; and there was little room for sentiment, be it sickly or be it wholesome. True, the individual conscience was well-nigh dormant, for an iron fate compelled the will. As poor Brynhild said, “I might not see clearly, or divide the good from the evil, because of the veil that lay heavy on my fortune.” Truth once seen was mighty, and men stood by their kin as the planet holds to the sun.

It is well now and then to turn from this complex life of ours, and from this round we term culture, to the simpler ways of the early time, to the simple means by which great men grew to great deeds.

SHAKESPEARE AS AN ARTIST.

The object of this volume is thus stated in the introduction. “The sum of Shakspearian criticism, thus far, has been to establish the fact that the plays are organic. As the result of two and a half centuries of study, this statement looks very meagre; but it denotes a mighty stride from the criticism of the eighteenth century. It is a stride from chaos to order, from death to life. It, moreover, indicates the path of future effort. It is probable that knowledge of Shakspeare will, in future, be deepened and widened chiefly by the

"It is written that the old good name of a man is soon gone and passed when it is not newed."

CHAUCER.
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