Review

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Misprints are : p. 32 *Schiò* for *Schio*; p. 54 *Stagliano* = *Staglieno*; pp. 57 and 95 *Val di Pera* = *Pesa*; p. 87 *Misc. Rossis Theiss* = *Rossi*; *Neapel* : *pestusillo* = *pertusillo*; p. 92 *Calasca Ossola Navarra* = *Novara*; p. 107 *Varese* : *altra vita esedo* = *credo*; p. 123 *Monza* : *S. Bartolomeo chc* = *che*; p. 176 Dante, *Inf. I* : *aver* = *aër*; p. 192 *Agardo* (*Belluno*) = *Agordo*; p. 194 *Lupari* = *Lupia*; p. 205 n. *Barile* = *Basile*; p. 300 n. *giugne* = *guigne*; p. 305 *Mortava* = *Mortara*.

C. FOLIGNO.

OXFORD.

The Elder Edda and ancient Scandinavian Drama. By BERTHA S. PHILLPOTTS. Cambridge: University Press. 1920. xi + 216 pp. 21s.

Drama, of a sort, is easy to find in the old Northern poetry; perhaps Miss Phillpotts might have said more about earlier critics who have taken something like her view. But her judgment is her own, and does not need references to other writers in order to make it clear. There is much in her estimate which will continue to help the understanding of the poems, whether her opinions be fully accepted or not. She has made it impossible to neglect the dramatic quality of the poems in dialogue; she has marked off the dramatic poems from the poems that use dialogue in support of narrative. The dramatic poems again are plausibly regarded as Norwegian, and as not showing the qualities of Icelandic poetry. Their proper form of verse, *ljóðaháttir*, called 'chant-metre' in this book, is shown to have features of its own, besides those of prosody; a Norwegian gait and demeanour. Miss Phillpotts argues that the Norwegian dramatic poems belong to an old fashion of life, old ritual, old beliefs. 'Divine Protagonists'; 'The Ritual Marriage'; 'The Fertility Drama'—these three headings are significant, and the successive chapters belonging to them are not empty.

Instead of a minute examination which few scholars are able to undertake, may it be permissible for this reviewer to put forward, not cavils or objections, but rather topics and possible considerations, suggested to a fairly attentive and thoroughly grateful reader?

Who are *the people*? The 'flytings' of the *Elder Edda*—such things do not originate with the aristocracy, says our author, but with the people (p. 42): 'It is at least probable that the scurrilous poems of the *Edda* are no more the product of purely aristocratic circles than is the French *fabliau*.' But what were aristocratic circles in Norway in the year 800 or 900? We know something about them; can we find, then or later, much difference of taste between the king and the yeoman? Did the libellous poem thrive better in the uplands than in the king's hall? 'Flyting' in verse is not in other countries a mere rustic occupation; we need only remember Dunbar and Kennedy and the other Scottish courtly makers. The king himself, James VI, in his *Art of Poetry*, recognises 'flyting' as an allowable kind. *Loka senna*, the flyting of Loki, may be in one sense ribald, but it is not a vulgar poem. The *fabliaux* may come in, fairly enough, as examples of popular or even

churlish humour; but there are greater villainies extant in the lyrical satire of the most accomplished and courtly artists of the Provençal school.

Is enough attention paid to the form of the Eddic poems which are not dramatic Norwegian dialogues in chant-metre? Some remarks of Miss Phillpotts on the Nibelungen cycle in the *Edda* seem rather hard to justify. The poems dealing with the Nibelungen and Ermanaric cycles are said to owe 'their substance, and therefore possibly their form, to foreign models' (p. 79); 'Poems on borrowed subjects are not likely to give the most faithful reflection of the native form' (p. 82). Does Miss Phillpotts think that the *form* of *Goðrúnarkviða*,

Ár vas þats Goðrún
Gerðisk at deyja

owes anything to a Low German poet? Is *Oddrúnargrátr* worked on a Saxon or any other foreign frame? Surely it leaps to the eyes from the *Elder Edda* that the Nibelung story is what the poets choose to make of it, and that there are many poets at work on the story for various poetic ends and aims that have often little to suggest them in the German tradition. The Northern poets were not slower than the Greeks to see how legend might be remodelled in all sorts of ways. From *Gripisspá* to *Hamðismál* is not forty pages in *Codex Regius* as it stands; but what a variety of forms and motives and scale! And we have to reckon in, besides, what we know of the lost poems of the lacuna. There is no less diversity of poetical ideas here than in the Greek tragedians dealing with Orestes and Electra. Some of the Eddic poems are clearly later than others, yet there is everywhere such evidence of poetical craft that one hesitates to put any limit on the possibilities of variation. The poems in chant-metre may be older in fashion than the poems of the griefs of Gudrun, but they need not be taken as absolutely rustic and simple-minded. There is nothing, of course, among them to be compared with the dialogue poem of Bacchylides, which in sixty lines and four stanzas gives the history of the young Theseus, ending in suspense just before he comes to Athens. Yet this wonderful new shaping of an old and well known history does the sort of poetical thing that many Northern poets attempted; working through allusion, bringing large matter into small space, like a convex mirror.

The finest passage in this book is possibly on p. 79, where a difficult, scarcely intelligible strophe in *Hamðismál* is transferred to a context where it is more at home. There is no need to repeat the particulars here. It seems a thoroughly satisfactory procedure.

One small addition may be made to the interesting Danish story of Bovi (p. 123). The Durham book of *Exempla* in which it occurs was edited by Mr A. G. Little some years ago for the Society of Franciscan Studies.

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LONDON.