

Freia-Holda, the Teutonic Goddess of Love.

FAMILIARITY with the classical gods of Greece and Rome is considered a matter-of-course accomplishment in polite education. To show ignorance on that point, would render a person liable to be placed in the Kimmerian circle of outer barbarians. But how few are there who have even so much as a faint notion of the Germanic Pantheon, in which the creed of that race was once embodied, from which Englishmen have in the main sprung! "Day after day, as the weeks run round," says the author of *Words and Places*, the Rev. Isaac Taylor—"we have obtruded upon our notice the names of the deities who were worshipped by our pagan forefathers. This heathenism is indeed so deeply ingrained into our speech that we are accustomed daily to pronounce the names of Tiu, Woden, Thunor, Frea, and Saetere. These names are so familiar to us that we are apt to forget how little is really known of the mythology of those heathen times."

Sun- and star-worship was, according to Roman testimony, among the earliest forms of creed of the Germanic tribes. The *dies Solis*, and the *dies Luna*, had therefore no difficulty in being translated into a Sun-day and Moon- or Mon-day. In Tuesday we have the name of the Germanic god of war, Tyr, Tiu, or Ziu—in some Teutonic dialects also called *Eru* or *Erich*, the root of which word is no doubt the same as in the Hellenic Ares. Hence Tuesday, in High German *Dinstag*, is in some Alemannic and Bavarian districts called *Zistig*, *Erschtag*, or *Erichstag*. Wodan, the All-father, furnishes the name for Wednesday. Thursday is derived from the God of Thunder. Friday represents the day of the Germanic Venus. In Saturday, the derivation of which was formerly traced to Saturnus, a god Saetere is probably hidden—that name being, to all appearance, an *alias* for Loki, or Lokko, the evil-doing god, of whose malicious mind the *Edda* gives so graphic an account in the song called "The Banquet of Oegir" (*Oegisdrekka eða Lokasenna*)—a Titanic satire upon the dwellers in Asgard.

If we look over the topography of all countries in which the Germanic race dwells, or through which it has passed in the course of its migrations, what deep imprints do we find of its ancient creed in the very appellations of dwelling-places! The God of War; the All-father who rules the winds and the clouds; the God of Thunder; the Goddess of Love; the deity who represents insidious mischief and destruction—they are all to be met with, not only in Germany, Scandinavia, and other Continental lands, but on English soil, too, where Tewesley, Tewin, and Dewerstone; Wanborough, Wednesbury, Woodnesborough, Wansdike, and Woden Hill;

Thundersfield, Thurscross, and Thurso; Frathorpe, Fraisthorpe, and Freasley; Satterleigh, and Satterthwaite, in all probability bear witness to a decayed *cultus*. Even so Balderby and Balderton; Easterford, Easterleake, and Eastermear; Hellifield, Hellathyrne, and Helagh, are no doubt referable to the worship of Balder, the god of light and peace; of Eostre, or Ostara, the goddess of Spring; of Hel, the mistress of the underworld. And again, when in this country we meet with places called Asgardby and Aysgarth, we have no difficulty in referring them to Asgard, the Germanic Olympus.

Still, with all these traces of a pagan religion—which had its grandeur and even some traits of charm—strewn thickly around us, how many are there who think it worth while to read the thoughts of their own ancestors in the mythic system so amply elaborated by them? Among a large class of people of highly cultivated mind, where are the readers of the powerful text-book of heathen Germanic religion? where the students of that folklore in which precious fragments of ancient creed are embedded, even as glittering shells, of brilliant hue, are concealed beneath the incrustated slime of the sea?

Yet, on the mere plea of poetical enjoyment, an extended knowledge of these subjects might be urged. Assuredly—as Mannhardt puts it, who with Simrock, Kuhn, Schwarz, and others, has ably and laboriously continued the immortal labours of Grimm, and of the many Norse scholars—there is not, in the Germanic world of Gods, the perfect harmony and plastic repose of the Olympian ideals of Greece. But their forms and figures tower in lofty greatness through the immensity of space; and if they are not so well rounded off as the deities of the later Greek epoch—if they are somewhat apt to float, before the mind's eye, like fantastically-shaped storm-clouds, or like bright-coloured visions of dawn and sunset, they are, on the other hand, less liable to be taken for mere idols of ivory, brass, and stone.

Can it be said, however, that there is a lack of poetical conception in the figure of Wodan, or Odin, the hoary god of the clouds, who, clad in a flowing mantle, careers through the sky on a milk-white horse, from whose nostrils fire issues? Is there a want of artistic delineation in Freia, who changes darkness into light wherever she appears—the goddess with the streaming golden locks, and the siren voice, who hovers in her snow-white robe between heaven and earth, making flowers sprout along her path, and planting irresistible longings in the hearts of men? Do we not see in bold and well-marked outlines the figure of the red-bearded, steel-handed Thor, who rolls along the sky in his goat-drawn car, and who smites the mountain giants with his magic hammer? Are these dwellers in the Germanic Olympus mere spectres, without distinct contour? And if their strength often verges upon wildness; if their charms are sometimes allied to cruel sorcery—are they not, even in their uncouth passions, the representatives of a primitive race, in which the pulse throbs with youthful freshness?

Again, what a throng of minor deities—surpassing in poetic conception even Hellenic fancy—have been evolved by the Teutonic mind out of all the forces of nature! Look at the crowd of fairies, and wood-women, and elfin, and nixes, and dwarfs, and cobolds, that dance in the moon-light, and whisk through the rustling leaves, or dwell enchanted in trees, or hide in glittering mountain-caves, or waft entralling songs from beneath the water, or bustle day and night through the dwellings of man! The Greeks had all, or nearly all, this—for the elements of mythology are the same in all Aryan lands: but there is a greater depth in the corresponding Teutonic tales: they coil themselves round the heart like invisible threads; they seem so familiar and homely, and yet lead the imagination into a strange dreamland.

Then, what a dramatic development Germanic mythology has! The Hellenic gods sit in ambrosian quiet in their lofty abodes; they are eternal gods, inaccessible to the corroding power of Time. True, there are some faint indications of a final change when Jupiter himself is to make place for a juster ruler. But, in the main, the deities of classic antiquity live on in an unbroken, immortal life; they are, as it has been aptly said, like so many statues ranged along a stately edifice, each statue perfect in itself—no idea of action, of tragic complication, arising out of the whole.

How different is the Germanic view of the Universe! There, all is action, struggle: and the world of gods itself is from the very beginning destined to a catastrophe. So long as the Aesir last, they are regarded as the girders and pillars of the Universe. But at the end of time, the world is to be consumed in a mighty conflagration; the heavens and the earth stand in a lurid blaze; Asgard and Walhalla, the abodes of gods and heroes, are doomed to destruction; the Universe breaks down in a gigantic crash:—

The sun darkens;
 Earth in Ocean sinks;
 From Heaven fall
 The bright stars.
 Fire's breath assails
 The all-nourishing Tree;
 Towering flames play
 Against Heaven itself.

That cataclysm shall be preceded by—

An axe-age, a sword-age;
 Shields shall be cloven—
 A wind-age, a wolf-age,
 Ere the world sinks!

Only after this terrible convulsion shall have ended, will there be introduced a new and peaceful reign, with eternal bliss. Then the white god of peace, whose death Loki had encompassed, will triumphantly

return. In the *Völuspá*, the prophetess foresees the coming of that golden age—

She sees arise,
A second time,
Earth from Ocean,
Beauteously green . . .

Unsovn shall
The fields bring forth,
All evil be amended ;
Balder shall come,
Höder and Balder,
The heavenly gods !

A mythic system of such poetic sublimity is as much worth being studied as that of classic antiquity, or as the Hindoo Pantheon, where we meet with the germs of the pagan religion of all Aryans. I have proposed to myself, in this present essay, to treat especially of Freia, who, in Norse mythology, appears already divided into two distinct figures, namely: Frigg, the consort of Odin; and Freyja, the goddess of love: whilst among the Germans, properly speaking, Freia combines the characters of Juno and of Venus—the motherly and the erotic element.

It may be prefaced here that, in the Norse system, a duodecimal series of gods and goddesses is clearly discernible, to whom the figure of the fiendish Loki is to be added. Germany, so rich in tales which contain the ancient deities under a strange disguise, has in all probability had the same duodecimal system of polytheism. Laborious researches strongly tend to establish that hypothesis as a fact. I will not enter here more deeply into this point to show the scientific mode of procedure, but will only quote a passage from Max Müller's work, which bears upon it. "It might seem strange, indeed," he wrote, "that so great a scholar as Grimm should have spent so much of his precious time in collecting his *Mährchen*, if those *Mährchen* had only been intended for the amusement of children. When we see a Lyell or Owen pick up pretty shells and stones, we may be sure that, however much little girls may admire these pretty things, this was not the object which these wise collectors had in view. Like the blue, and green, and rosy sands which children play with in the Isle of Wight, those tales of the people, which Grimm was the first to discover and collect, are the *detritus* of many an ancient stratum of thought and language, buried deep in the past. They have a scientific interest."

Out of a mass of such popular tales and traditions, the fair form of the German Venus may be reconstructed with a great degree of certainty. There is good ground for believing that the deities whom we afterwards find in Asgard, gradually arose out of an elementary worship—that, like other pagan gods, they are simply the result of a successive anthropomorphic condensation of ideas connected with the worship of the forces of Nature, and with cosmogonic speculations. That historical elements entered into the formation of their divine images, I readily acknowledge. In fact, it seems to me most probable that there is a mixed origin of all mythic

figures. At any rate, the worship of the forces of Nature appears to be the prevailing element in their composition; and thus the first glimpse we obtain of Freia, or Freia-Holda, shows her under the shape of a storm-goddess—that is, as the female counterpart of Wodan, the ruler of the cloudy region, who was originally conceived as the storm himself—as the *máhan átma*, or Great Breath, which pervades the universe.

Now, it speaks much for an early culture of the heart among the Germanic race, that the vague idea of a storm-goddess should have so swiftly become refined, as it actually did, into the form of Freia-Holda, whose very name indicates friendliness, love, and benevolent grace. The process of shaping and polishing the images of the other divinities of the cloudy sky was a longer one. For a considerable time they seem to have retained their floating and somewhat less circumscribed character. Even when they had assumed that form which, under a more developed reign of art, would have rendered them fit for sculptured representation, popular fancy exhibited a marked inclination towards dissolving them, ever and anon, into their aboriginal chaotic substance. Not so with Freia. Round her, also, the most variegated myths clustered. Moreover, the various attributes conferred upon her, were apt to give rise to a number of special figures, ranging—extraordinary to say—from the typification of charms to that of hideous witchcraft, from beauty to that of its very contrast. Nevertheless, there is, as with the Greek deities, a clear, unmarred, central picture, which shows Freia-Holda under an aspect of well-marked, noble beauty. The mind of the people who revered her, fondly dwelt upon the portraiture of her attractions and virtues, always adding new traits, and elaborating it with fresh touches. Hence the mythic circle which surrounds the worship of Freia, is in every respect one of the richest in German folk-lore.

Lapse of time and local tradition have certainly given us a multiform variety of Freia-Holda images. The Gods of Homer and Hesiod were not exactly those of Æschylus and Euripides. In the same way, the Germanic Pantheon was not at all times fitted with the identical forms. The tribal differences among the German race also went far to give a different colouring to the original character of a deity. But even as we have a well-defined idea of the character and attributes of Jupiter, of Juno, of Mars, of Venus, quite irrespective of the special myths, which vary considerably according to time and locality, so also do we possess an average image of Wodan, of Thunar, but most particularly of Freia.

Whilst other deities are heard in the tempest that bends the rustling tree-tops of primeval forests, or hurriedly pass along the vault of Heaven: the Goddess of Love gladdens more visibly the glance of men, as she glides slowly over flowery meadows, amidst a rosy sheen.

She is represented as being of entrancing beauty, with long-flowing, thick, golden hair of great heaviness. Her body is snow-white; she is clad in a white garment, which spreads a rosy effulgence. On her forehead hangs a single tangled lock of hair. She is covered, over her

white robe, with a light veil, from head to foot. Round her neck she wears a chain of shining jewels, from which a light streams forth, as of the dawn of morn. Rose-bushes and willow-trees are her favourite resorts: willow-trees overhanging crystal lakes. Her voice, full of melodious song, enthralls men. Its heavenly strains transport the listener to spheres of unknown bliss; he is drawn along, in rapture, in spite of his will. Wherever she walks, flowers sprout up on her path, and the merry sound of golden bells is heard tinkling. A radiance of ethereal worlds follows her footsteps. In the depth of night, the wanderer who has lost his way, guides his walk after her beneficent apparition. The fields over which she passes, are blessed with fruit.

About Twelfth-night time—that is, at the winter solstice—when the German tribes were accustomed to celebrate one of their sun-worship rites, Freia-Holda visits the households, looking after the industry of the maidens at the spinning-wheel. She is the goddess of amorousness, but also of housewifely accomplishments. She has a virgin-like appearance; in her qualities, however, the two womanly elements are blended. Her residence is beyond the azure skies, in a sunny region behind the clouds; limpid waters divide her reign from the outer world. There she dwells in a garden, where fragrant flowers and luscious fruits grow, and the song of birds never ceases.

On the meadows, and amidst the foliage of that garden, the souls of the Unborn—whose protectress Freia is—are playing their innocent, unconscious games, gathering food from the chalices of flowers, until the heavenly messenger comes who calls them into human birth. In that garden, there is also the Fountain of Rejuvenescence—the *Jungbrunnen* or *Quickborn*, where the sources of life are incessantly renovated, and decrepit age once more changes into blooming youth.

Such, with a few strokes, is the image of the Goddess whose worship was most deeply rooted among our forefathers—so much so, that it was found impossible to overthrow her reign except by a substitution which preserved the substance of her attributes.

Indeed, the German Mariolatry of the middle ages is to a large degree traceable to these previous heathen customs. There are a number of highly coloured hymns to the Virgin, the imagery of which is almost literally taken from similar Freia songs, fragmentary pieces of which latter have come down to us in children's rhymes. Many of these hymns would be perfectly unintelligible if we did not know the poetical surroundings of the pagan goddess. Freia, the Queen of the Heavens, the sorrowing mother of Balder, that god of peace who met with his death through the traitor Loki, was transfused into the *Mater dolorosa*, the "Mother of God" of the Roman Church; but in this transfusion she retained much of her original character. However, in order to create a division-line, a notion was fostered that Freia's day, Friday—originally the favourite marriage-day—was an unlucky day; a superstition which prevails to this moment among large numbers of uneducated people. Nevertheless, there are some

nooks and corners where, even now, Friday is regarded as the proper wedding-day—clearly a remnant of the old religion.

It was "*das ewig Weibliche*," the worship of which the Germanic race tenaciously clung to, though under strange forms of superstition. Out of this frame of mind grew up the chivalric view about womankind, which in Germany had its lyric representation in the poetry of the *minne-singer*. The fervour with which that view was held, often assumed the shape of an abstract principle, leading to the most ardent evolutions of thought and sentiment, quite irrespective of individual passion and amatory reality. It would be an error to suppose that aristocratic chivalry had created this whole world of woman-worship. It was a trait characteristic of the Germanic races as such—even at a time when they were only just emerging into historical light. The early Roman authors mention the veneration in which womankind was held by our forefathers. The ancient Germans ascribed to woman a kind of sacred and prophetic character.—(Tacitus, *Germ.*, cap. viii.) And, no doubt, the institution of monogamy, which was but occasionally broken through by the aristocratic chieftains; the influence exercised not only by the priestesses and prophetesses, such as Aurinia and Veleda, but by the German women in general: an influence of persuasion, of wise counsel, and of heroic, patriotic conduct, not an influence obtained by equality of political rights—all this points to the fact of an early development of more tender sentiments, of which the Freia *cultus* was the religious outcome.

The name of the goddess appears in different forms, as Freia, Fria, Frea, Frigga, Frikka, Frikk. It is traceable to a root meaning "to love." In Gothic, *frijôn* means "to love;" hence the German "*Freund*," friend; hence, perhaps, also "*freien*," to woo, and *Frau*. In Low German, the verb "*friggen*" is still extant, in the sense of "to love." Thus Freia is a loving, befriending divinity; and through the fertilising character, naturally connected with these qualities, as well as through the sunny effulgence which envelops her attractive picture, she easily merges into the form of Ceres. There are indications, at least, that she may have been revered also as a goddess of agriculture, and that healing powers were attributed to her. Her sister was Volla (Fulness), of whom we get a glimpse in the famous incantation song of Merseburg*—a divinity evidently typifying the abundance of Nature.

I have endeavoured, out of a confusing wealth of legends, to draw the form of Freia in clear colours, choosing that type which the goddess must have assumed at a certain period in the early life of the German nation, when vague conceptions about the struggle of elementary forces had been fused into more plastic expression, whilst the process of decay and deterioration had not yet set in, which afterwards reduced the figure of Freia-Holda to that of a mere sorceress, nay, even hag. But how,

* It begins with the words:—

*Phol ende Uodan
Vuoron zi holza.*

it will be asked, was the goddess of love and domestic virtue wrought from the crude idea of a divinity of the clouds who flits along the horizon ?

As the wife of the storm-god Wodan, she is, in the early form of the tale, chased by him, even as the cloud is by the wind. Minor cloud-goddesses, or cloud-women, environ her ; in some myths they are conceived as horses or swans. They are the swift-running, fast-sailing clouds, of sombrero or of more silvery hue. The flight of the goddess from before her consort, and the representation of her companions as mares, remind us of the Hindoo myth, in which a similar female deity flies before the Ruler of the skies in the shape of a mare.

Soon the tale assumes a more poetic form: It is now no longer the Ruler of the skies who chases his stormy spouse ; but, by an inversion not unfrequent in the process of mythological formation, it is henceforth she who wanders, wailing and in tears, over hill and dale in search of her long-lost lover. The lamenting wind and the rain, which were connected with the notion of a tempest-deity, are here converted into the plaints and the weeping of the longing goddess. The howling storm softens into loving grief, and the somewhat dark and dim deity which represented the first, necessarily undergoes a corresponding transfiguration.

The same is the case with her cloudy retinue. The white and silvery specks on the welkin come to the foreground ; from swans, under which form they were at first conceived, they change into swan-virgins. Nor do they career or sail along the sky any more. They now act as the embellishing suite of the loving goddess, who, after having scarcely met with her eagerly-sought friend, loses him once more, and has, Isis-like, to start on a new heart-rending peregrination. It would appear that the ever-repeated change of the junction and the separation of the productive and receptive faculties in nature is here shadowed forth under the guise of loving satisfaction and grief. In this gradual alteration of imagery, the successive humanization of the character of the myth is clearly discernible.

Later on—I will here remark in passing—when the period of mythic decay arrives, the early form and character of the swan-virgins is entirely lost. Of the swan, nothing then remains but the foot, which is tacked on to the body of an elf, or even a gnome. The tales in which swan's feet occur, are very valuable for the attentive inquirer. The imprint of these birds' feet serves as a trace leading back to the sanctuary of the Teutonic Aphrodite, and thus helps to reconstruct our knowledge of the once widespread *cultus*.

To look upon the sky as a "sea of ether," as a "heavenly ocean"—*samudra* in Sanskrit—is an ancient Vedic notion. Freia, who resides beyond the azure sky, at the bottom of a crystal well, is, however, in more than one sense a water-goddess, for she belonged originally to that circle of Vana-deities who in Norse tradition are said to have been engaged in a long and fierce struggle with the Asa-gods, until peace was concluded between the rival and hostile dynasties of gods, when Freia, with

some others, was received into Asgard. Whether this tale refers to two different cosmogonic systems held by different races in pre-historic times, or whether it marks a religious struggle among separate Germanic tribes, it is impossible now to decide. But the original character of Freia-Holda as a water-goddess of the Vana-circle is still apparent in the fairy tale, current to this day among the German peasantry, about "Frau Holle," who is represented as walking up a hill with a golden, bottomless pail, a kind of Danaïdes tub, from which water incessantly flows.

In another tale, Frau Holle is said, when it snows, to have spread and shaken her white mantle. It is the white robe which the Germanic goddess once wore. Again, when white, shimmering cloudlets—called to this day "lamb" (*Lämmer*) in German—make their appearance, Holle is said to drive her flock. The former character of the protectress of agriculture appears in this form of the legend.

The sunny attributes of the original water-goddess linger in another legend, which says that when there has been rain during the whole week, it is expected to cease on Friday—Freia's day—when Frau Holle has to dry her veil, which she spreads for that purpose over rose-bushes and willows, the trees anciently sacred to that northern Venus. In the same way, the conception of Freia as a solar deity lingers in a Low German children's rhyme, which, though slightly deteriorated, describes with wonderful fidelity the heavenly abode of the goddess in all its typical particulars. In that rhyme, the water-carrying goddess, who walks up the hill with the golden bucket, is called "the little sun,"—

Wo dat sönneken den berg herop geit.

In German children's rhymes, tales, plays, and dances, the last shreds and fragments of the old heathen system of religion are wonderfully preserved. The rhymes constitute a sort of poetised mythology for the use of the nursery. They are the traditionary oral catechism of a creed which is no longer understood. The Freia worship; the adoration of the Nornes, the weird Sisters of Fate; the belief in a coming downfall of Asgard;—all these pagan notions have left their vestiges in childish ditties. The quaint Cockchafer ditties, to which I have yet to allude, are among the most important in this respect. It is often difficult to sort out the mere dross which has crept in by the misapprehension of words, leading to new associations of ideas, in which the original meaning of the myth disappears. Yet these infantile songs, often apparently devoid of sense, are a rich mine, from which ancient forms of religious thought may be dug out.

One of these rhymes runs thus :

Mutter Gottes thut Wasser tragen
 Mit goldenen Kannen
 Aus dem goldenen Brünnel.
Da liegen Viel' drinne.
 Sie legt sie auf die Kissen,
 Und thät sie schön wiegen
 Auf der goldenen Stiegen.

The "golden buckets" of Freia are, in this ditty, already carried by the "Mother of God." The mother of Balder, of the transfigured deity who has died, but who will hereafter introduce a millennium of peace, is, under Roman Catholic influence, changed into *Mutter Gottes*. But her heathen paraphernalia still cling to her. She still resides in the golden, or sunlit, well. She is still the water-goddess; and "*the many that are lying*" in her celestial abode, behind the azure waves of the ethereal ocean, are still the Unborn who dwell in Freia's fragrant domain.

If we follow that train of ideas, in which Freia was regarded as a representative of warmth, of light, of fire, we find it fabled that the souls of the Unborn, when awaiting their human embodiment, are carried earthwards in flashes of lightning. The soul, in other words, was considered a heavenly ray or flash. In connection with this idea is the sanctification of many things and beings who, on account of their colour being that of lightning,—namely, red,—are received into the special service of the Goddess of the Unborn. The red-billed and red-legged stork and the red-winged lady-bird must here specially be mentioned. They were once nearly worshipped. A halo of inviolability still protects in Germany the stork. The lady-bird also continues to be held, by children at least, in some sort of friendly reverence.

The lady-bird was supposed to aid in carrying, on its red wings, the souls of children to their terrestrial destination. The very name "lady-bird" points to the former goddess: the "Lady" originally was the Germanic Queen of the Heavens, for whom the Virgin Mary was afterwards substituted. In a Low-German dialect, the lady-bird is called *Mai-Katt* (May-cat), which name points to the time of the year that was sacred to Freia, and to the cat, a team of whom drew the car of the goddess.* Other names are: *Sonnenkalb*, *Sonnenkäfer*, *Sonnenhühnchen*, *Sonnenwend-Käfer*, bringing us back to Freia's sunny domain. The lady-bird is also called *Marien-Käfer*, from the Virgin Mary; or lastly, *Herrgotts-Käfer*, the Lord (*Herrgott*) being, in this case, substituted for the Lady, a transposition frequently observable in mythology, the male and female forms of the ruling spirit of the Universe ("Woden" and "Frau Gaude") often taking each other's place.

There is a Suabian song, in which the lady-bird (*Herrgotts-Moggela*) is called upon to fly into heaven, there to fetch, on a golden basin, a golden baby. In other tales, children are supposed to come from a "hollow tree"—*aus hohlem Baum*, or *aus dem Hollenbaum*. This strange notion of the origin of mankind from the vegetable reign, which appears in

* There is a children's rhyme in the Austrian dialect, representing the cat as going to Hollabrunn,—that is, the well of Holda—where she finds a baby "in the sun." The Freia-Holda worship, in its bearings upon a Neptunic and a solar *cultus*, is in this verse given in a few quaint words:—

*Hop, hop, Heselmann!
Unsa Katz hat Stieferln an,
Rennt damit nach Hollabrunn,
Findt a Kindla in da Sunn!*

various German doggreis, is to be met with also among the ancient Greeks, as the saying shows: "ὄβ γὰρ ἀπὸ δρυός ἐστι παλαιφάτου ὄυδ' ἀπὸ πέτρης." In the "hollow" tree we have, however, unquestionably Holda's, or Holle's, tree, on whose branches the unborn sat.

We shall afterwards see how a similar deterioration of terms led to the idea of Holda as a witch who was charming in the face, but hollow in the back, similar to an excavated stem with gnarly bark. In Hessian trials of witches, long after the middle ages, we read of "Fraw Holt" under such a description; the name of Holda, Holle, or Holt, having, by a double assimilation of sounds, given rise to the comparison of the sorceress with a hollow tree—*holt* or *holz* signifying wood or tree. The corruption of words is, indeed, one of the most frequent sources of new mythical formations.

Even as the lady-bird, so the stork also was in the service of Freia. His red colours, too, made him the representative of lightning, of electricity, of the principle of vivification. He helped in carrying the souls of the unborn earthwards. His mythic name, therefore, was "Adebar" or "Odebar"—carrier of children, bringer of souls. Even now, he has that name in various German dialects; but its meaning is obliterated or obscured in the popular memory.

As the typification of the spark of heaven, the stork was connected with sun-worship. Hence, he was doubly sacred to our forefathers, and is still partly so to our village folk, who frequently place a wheel for him on house-tops and chimneys, that he may the more commodiously build his nest on them. In solar worship, the wheel particularly represents the orb of the sun. It is used as such in the solstice-fires (*Sonnenwend-Feuer*), which German peasants light to this day amidst great jubilation.

When the peasant boys of Upper Bavaria and the Tyrol roll their tarred wheels, which are set on fire, in the dark night down the mountains, making them describe most wonderful gyrations, they sing songs in honour of their loves. There are set rhymes to that effect, which have been handed down through generations, and in which, according to the occasion, the name of the particular sweetheart has only to be inserted. The solar and the Aphroditean *cultus* of Freia were blended in early mythology; the traces of this connection are yet visible in such boorish merry-makings!

So late down as the sixteenth century, the Roman Church thought it advisable to take the heathen myth of Freia's well, within which the unborn are playing, and of Adebar the bringer of children, under its own protection. So-called *Kindlein's-Brunnen*, to which women proceeded, in order to drink the consecrated water, were erected, or changed into holy places of the Catholic Church, in many towns and villages of Germany. Bishop John, of Saalhausen, had a chapel built, in 1512, over one of these old places of Freia worship. Numbers of women congregated there, doing reverence to the "holy and chaste virgin at the Fountain of Life" (*Queckbrunnen*). The weather-vane of the chapel was a stork, who carried

a child in his bill—even as is still to be seen in the toys of German children, who are much given to the notion that a fresh arrival of a brother or sister is due to the obliging stork.

The cockchafer, too, seems to have been a hallowed insect of yore. It is called *Mai-Käfer* in German, from the period of the year when it generally comes first out of the ground; and that period, as said before, was the sacred time of the Goddess of Love. German children have a custom of placing that beetle on their left hand, to which they generally attach it by a thread, and then they sing a verse the meaning of which has long puzzled investigators. Mannhardt has collected quite a variety of such verses, all taken direct from the lips of German boys, in order to prove that they refer to that final catastrophe when the gods and their giant antagonists are warring with each other, and the Asa-world collapses in a fearful tumult and universal conflagration. All the rhymes collected until now make it extremely probable that they refer to the danger which envelops, and finally destroys, Holda's reign. Still, Mannhardt was not able to give any verse in which her name is distinctly traceable.

Now, in the same way, it had formerly been rendered very probable that all the Holda myths were Freia myths; Holda being simply one of the appellatives of the Goddess, which had branched out into a well-nigh identical form. For a while, the hypothesis of the original identity of the two forms seemed unsubstantiated. At last, however, in a Latin manuscript preserved at Madrid, the name of the deity was discovered in the form "*Friga-Holda*," when the substantial unity of the two mythic figures was placed beyond doubt.

Even so, I believe I can supply the missing link in regard to the curious Cockchafer Songs, which are of such high mythological interest. I distinctly remember a ditty sung by children, in which the cockchafer is bidden to fly to his father (presumably Wodan, the consort of Freia-Holda), who is said to be "at war," and to his mother who is "in Hollerland," where a conflagration has broken out, which consumes Hollerland:—

Maikäfer, flieg'!
Dein Vater ist im Krieg!
Deine Mutter ist im Hollerland—
Hollerland ist abgebrannt!
Iuchhe!

The latter joyful exclamation may be supposed to be the Christian "*Io triumphe*," the utterance of joy over the destruction of the heathen Asa-world. I need scarcely remind the reader that the song which is sung in Germany about the cockchafer, is also sung in some parts of this country about the lady-bird. ("Lady-bird, lady-bird, hie thy way home! Thy house is on fire! Thy children all roam!" Or: "Lady-bird, lady-bird, fly away home! Your house is on fire! Your children will burn!" See, for instance, Jamieson's *Northern Antiquities*.)

In the folk-lore still current in Germany, the name of "Freia" is only

preserved yet among the people of the Uckermark and the Altmark. Otherwise, we meet with it in some Suabian, Franconian, Alemannic, and Lower Saxon designations of villages, and different places, where her worship once flourished. Thus there are several Frickenhausen, situated near lakes—quite in keeping with the myth which makes the Goddess haunt the water, even as Aphrodite rose from the waves of the sea. In other parts of Germany the goddess is called Holda; Frau Gode, Gauden, or Gaue (that is, Woden's wife, the "W" being changed into "G"—even as war, in old-German *werra*, becomes, in French, *guerre*); or Frau Hera, or Harke; Mother Rose; Perchta, or Bertha. All these seemingly distinct fairy figures arose from the personification of Freia's attributes and appellatives.

There is a multiform mass of legends, of a mixed heathen and Christian character, in which the image of Freia is recognisable under the oddest masks. As "Mother Rose" she has been received into the legendary circle of the Roman Church. But why, many will wonder, should the Virgin pass under the name of Mother Rose? I forego entering into the etymological explanation, which traces that name to a cognomen of Freia, and will only mention an old pagan sorcery song, clearly referable to that goddess, which says:—

*Kam eine Jungfer aus Engelland;
Eine Rose trug sie in ihrer Hand.*

This "Engelland" is not, as some misunderstand it, England, but the land of the white elves, the fairyland of Freia. The "Jungfer," or Virgin, who reigns over it, became the Virgin Mary; and the favourite flower of the German goddess of love was converted into a symbol of the Madonna.

As Mother Rose, Freia appears in a Christianised garb. But under the names of Holda, Gode, Hera, and Perchta, she preserves, in the tales, her heathen character as a fay—in a good or an evil sense. Most astonishing are the transformations she undergoes under these various appellations. Even as the storm-god Wodan, who led the departed heroes into Walhalla, became changed, after the introduction of Christianity, into a wild huntsman who careers along the sky with his ghostly retinue, so Freia-Holda also becomes a wild huntress, who hurries round at night with the unfortunate souls. Through this same association with hobgoblin devilry, she is converted into a Mother Haule, or *Haule-mutter*, a howling utterer of mournful wails about the dead. By way of direct contrast, the once white-robed goddess with the snow-white body changes, as Hera, into a white dove, a typification of loving innocence. At a first glance, such *quid pro quo's* and metamorphoses into the very opposite would appear incredible; but he who has studied the effect of misapprehended words and sounds upon the untutored mind of man will not be astonished at these changeling substitutions.

The way in which the souls of the unborn were supposed to be called from Freia's garden, is to this day represented in various children's games

in Germany, by words and expressive mimicry. In the Perchta, or Bertha myths, that linger in some secluded valleys, the crowd of the unborn still appear as a suite of elfs, called *Heimchen*, who follow the goddess. The Perchta legends are of a somewhat wild—occasionally Bacchantic and Korybantic—character, in which the gloomy element is, however, not wanting. The goddess, who once typified the purest beauty, assumes in them rather motley and multiform shapes: there are beautiful Perchtas as well as “wild Perchteln,” the latter with a satyr-like appearance, running about with dishevelled hair. The Bacchantic and Korybantic character of the goddess appears even from a passage in Luther’s writings. He calls her, not Perchta, but with her softer name, “Frau Hulda,” makes a Dame Nature of her, who rebels against her God, and describes her as “donning her old rag-tag livery, the straw-harness, and singing and dancing whilst fiddling on the violin” (*hengt um sich iren alten trewdelmarkt, den stroharnss, hebt an und scharret daher mit irer geigen*). The straw-harness may be supposed to symbolize the former character of the Teutonic Cythere as a Ceres, a goddess of productiveness and fertility in every sense.

Representations of the Perchta myth have until lately been going on, at stated times of the year, among the peasantry of Southern Germany; and are, no doubt, still in vogue here and there. Near Salzburg, a “Perchtel” is represented, in such masquerades, with a sky-blue dress, wearing a crown of tinkling bells, and singing in highly jubilant manner. The goddess, or fairy, here shows something of a *vulgivaga* character; a trait cropping up already in the Eddic Hyndlu-Song.

The decay of the Freia myth may be said to have begun when her powers of entrancing men made her to be looked upon as a dangerous sorceress, as the incarnation of witchcraft. Still, before the goddess simply became a hag—an *ole Moder Tärtsche*, that is, Old Mother Sorceress—popular fancy wove some charming legends about her magic qualities. On the banks of the river Main, there are *Hulli-steine*, Holda’s stones, or hollow stones, on which a fairy form sits at night, bewailing the loss of her betrothed one who has left her. There she sits, sunk in sorrow, shedding tears over the rock until it is worn down and becomes hollowed out. In another Franconian tale, the bewitching fay sits on a rock in the moon-light, when the bloom of the vine fills the mountains and the valleys with sweet fragrancancy; she is clad in a white, shining garment, pouring forth heart-enthraling songs. The children, in those parts of the country, are warned not to listen to the seductive voice, but ardently to pray their *pater-noster*, lest they should have to remain with “Holli” in the wood until the Day of Judgment. From this legend, Heine took the subject of his Lorelei song, transplanting it from the Main to the Rhine. Holda appears, in this Franconian version, with faintly-indicated surroundings of a Bacchic nature; and her abode is described as “in the wood,” whither many pagan deities were relegated after Christianity had obtained the upper-hand.

Some myths of later growth convert Freia into a "Venus" who has lost all the attributes of domestic virtue, connected with the earlier image of the goddess; nay, into a sort of grim Lakshmi, half Venus, half infernal deity, who sits in a mountain cave, where there is much groaning of souls suffering damnation. Other legends, though painting her as a she-devil, do not depict the "Venusinne"-grotto as a place of torment, but rather as one of magic attractiveness, from which even the repentant sinner, who has been allowed to leave it for a pilgrimage to Rome, cannot break loose for ever. This view of the abode of Venus we get in the famed Tannhäuser legend, about which we possess various ancient poems, dating from the fifteenth century.

The identity of the German Venus legends with the Freia-Holda cycle is proveable from various facts. There is a "Venus-Berg" in Suabia, situated close to a "Hollenhof." In a Swiss version of the Tannhäuser song, Frau Venus is called "Frau Frene," a name evoking the memory of Freia or Freia. The Hörseel-Berg, near Eisenach, an old place of Freia worship, was especially pointed out as containing the underground abode of Venus. And in the same way as Wodan's wife, when she left the mountain at midnight, as a wild huntress, with her army of souls, was preceded by a grey-bearded man, the trusty Eckhart, who with a white staff warned off all people not to obstruct the path of the goddess; so also Venus, when she leaves the mountain, is preceded by the trusty Eckhart. The identity is therefore fully established.

To complete the picture of strange transformations, I ought to speak of Freia-Bertha becoming the *Ahn-frau* and the *weisse Frau* of German princely families and royal castles. The presiding female deity of the Asa-dynasty is changed into the ancestress of kings who, with the pride of rulers by right divine, trace their pedigree to celestial origin. In the same way, the white-robed goddess, who once exercised a powerful influence, is metamorphosed into a spectral "woman in white," whose appearance foretells the coming of great events, or is even a harbinger of royal death.

I will not treat here of the curious chapter of Berthas, ancestresses of kings, who were represented as swan-footed, flat-footed, large-footed, or club-footed, a characteristic which brings us back to the bevy of swan-damsels who surrounded Freia. I will only, in conclusion, speak of the strange transfiguration of Holda into a Hel, of a goddess of Love into a goddess of Death, whose name afterwards furnished the designation for the infernal region, or hell.

And here it is first to be observed that Hel, the Germanic mistress of the under-world, originally was a mother of life, like Holda, as well as a mother of death. Her name, which comes from *helen* or *hehlen*—in Latin *celare*—indicates that she is a deity who works in darkness and secrecy. Hence, she represents, in the beginning, the forces of nature that are active beneath the hiding soil. Consequently, she is not, properly speaking, destructive; she rather aids in nature's rejuvenation. She typifies the idea of life emerging from death, and of death being only a

transformation of life. In the Edda, Hel is half dark or livid, half of the hue of the human skin (*blá hálf en hálf með hörundur lit*) ; similar to the Hindoo Bhavani or Maha Kali, the mother of nature and life, the goddess who creates and destroys, the representative of love and of death, whose face alternately is radiant with beauty, like that of Aphrodite, or expressive of hideous terrors. In her beneficent quality, Bhavani carries a lotos-flower in her hand, even as Freia the rose ; and the waters of the Ganges murmur her praise, as crystal lakes may have done that of the Germanic deity. In her destroying and avenging character, the Hindoo goddess is Kali the bloodthirsty, who rides a hellish horse. So Holda is converted into a fiendish Hel.

Thus the images of life and death, of creation and destruction, of beauty and of horrors, touch each other in a mysterious twilight. It is an idea which may be followed through many religious systems ; for is not Apollo also, the sunny god, a typification of the pernicious power as well as of ideal beauty ? and does not his very name bear the trace of the destructive force ascribed to him ? The deep meaning contained in these contradictory combinations attaches also to the mythological fancies of our ruder forefathers ; and though it may sometimes be difficult to grasp the sense that is enclosed in the veiling legends, they have, irrespective of the philosophical significance which they struggle to express, a poetical merit of their own, often exhibiting a bold and many-coloured imagery, and a power of fashioning forms, such as we are wont to admire in the products of classic antiquity.

KARL BLIND.
