

ART. VI.—*The lost Romance of Wade*. By T. E. CASSON, B.A., B.Litt.

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SIR WALTER SCOTT, in his introduction to the romance of *Sir Tristram*, which he ascribed to Thomas of Erceldoune, remarks: "The romance of *Wade*, twice alluded to by Chaucer, but now lost, was probably a Border composition. The castle of this hero stood near the Roman Wall, which he is supposed to have surmounted; and it was long inhabited by his real or fancied descendants." It may be of interest to collect such materials as shall elucidate the story of this mythical personage, who apparently dwelt on, or near, the confines of Cumberland.

The poem of *Wade* had been lost before 1804, when Scott edited *Sir Tristram*, but it was still extant at the beginning of the 17th century: it was known to Speight, the editor of Chaucer (1602), but he passed it over with contempt, as trivial and fabulous, "to the great prejudice of posterity" as Sir Walter Scott says, and to the indignation of Speight's successor in the work of Chaucerian commentary in the 18th century, Tyrwhit, who cries out: "Tantamne rem tam negligenter?"—"Who ever treated so great a matter so cavalierly?" But certain fragments of the *Song of Wade* have since been found. They were printed in the *Academy*, 15 February 1896; and W. P. Ker, in his *Epic and Romance*, warns us that *Wade* is a salutary admonition against assuming that extant Middle English literature is a norm to which whatever has perished must necessarily conform.

If we ask, then, what is actually known of this poem, it must be said that there is quite considerable information about the epic cycle to which the legend belongs. Wade was the son of the still more famous Wayland the Smith, references to whom are numerous in medieval literature, and concerning whom a whole epic in Norse is extant: this is the Lay of Völund, which is found in the Codex Regius in the King's Library at Copenhagen, and is usually, but inaccurately, known as the Elder or Poetic Edda. It belongs to the classical period of Norse poetry and may, without exaggeration, be termed a literary masterpiece. It consists of 150 lines (though unfortunately the text has many lacunae), written in irregular epic metre; as it stands, it consists of two parts, which are considered not to be homogeneous in their effect—the first part belongs properly speaking to the region of folk-lore, the second alone being in the tragic heroic tradition.

The story is that three brothers, Slagfinn, Egil and Völund, sons of a Finnish king, were once out hunting, and built themselves a lodge by the lake in Wolfsdale. Here, in the early morning, they found the three Valkyries, Orlun, Alvit and Swanhvit, spinning; they had cast aside their swan plumage, as was their custom on such occasions, and were in consequence easily captured by the brothers. The latter took the swan-maidens to their lodge in the woodland, and there all remained for seven years; but in the eighth year the Valkyries began to weary for their home, and in the ninth they left their lovers. Slagfinn and Egil went in quest of the swan-maidens, but Völund remained where he was and worked at his forge. His bride had left him a ring as a love-token, and he now fashioned 700 exactly similar rings, and bound them together. One day, when he had been absent, he found on his return that the swan-maiden's ring was gone, but

all the others were left; he concluded, therefore, that she still haunted his abode, and hoped that she would one day return. So far the folk-lore strand in the tale.

We pass now to the tragic *motif*. Nithud, king of Sweden, took Völund captive. The smith was imprisoned on an island, ham-strung by order of the Queen, and set to forge treasures for his captors. Among other works of art, he fashioned for the king a labyrinth on the island: in this, as in other respects, he is a northern Daedalus and, like Daedalus, he took his revenge for his wrongs. The king's young sons came to gaze at the wonders of his cave, and Völund cut off their heads, set their skulls in silver and gave them to Nithud for goblets; he also gave their eyes as jewels for the queen's breast. The king's daughter, Bodvild, broke her arm-ring: it is suggested in the Lay that she had bereft Völund of the ring given him by his lover, the swan maiden:—

“ ‘ Now Bodvild wears my bride's red ring; I seek no atonement.’ He sat and slept not, but struck with his hammer.”

Bodvild, however, came secretly to Völund to have her ring repaired. Völund gave her a magic draught, which cast her into a deep sleep; he then violated her and, making himself wings, flew aloft over king Nithud's palace and taunted him with the goblets from which he was drinking, and with the outrage done to his daughter. Nithud, in his rage, called on Völund's brother, Egil the archer, whom he had also made captive, to shoot the smith; but Egil shot wide and Völund was able to escape, returning to Alf-heim, the abode of the Elves.

As to the last point, it is stated in the Lay that Völund is *visir alfa*, the Old Norse for “ prince of the elves ”; but Miss Bertha Phillipotts, in her *Edda and Saga*, supports the view of some earlier writers, that the Norse is a misunderstanding of the Low German *wiso alf*,

“cunning elf,” arguing that the Norse lay, in its present form, had its origin in Germany, on the ground that Völund has no claim to the title “prince of the elves.” When it is remembered, however, that the Swart Elves haunted mines and were peculiarly skilled in metal-work, it will probably be conceded that “prince of the elves” is a very appropriate title for the wise smith.

Another criticism offers itself to the sympathetic imagination of the reader. It is the orthodox view of certain scholars, such as W. P. Ker in his *Epic and Romance*, that the Lay of Völund falls into two distinct and separate parts, which have been insufficiently fused together. A careful survey, however, suggests that the Valkyries of the first half, with their swan plumage, are much in harmony with the flying feats of Völund; moreover, in the Lay Völund misses one of his rings, and concludes that it has been taken by his lover: yet in the second part we read that Bodvild is wearing the arm-ring of Völund's bride. Bodvild, therefore, appears to be one and the same person with the Valkyr, or at least they tend to be fused in the poet's imagination; and that would support the view, sometimes held, that Völund did not outrage Bodvild, but that she was his willing lover. This hypothesis is not without significance when we come to consider the romance of *Wade*.

In the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Lament of Deor*, which dates from the 7th or 8th century, it may be further noted, the sorrows of Beaduhild (Bodvild) are included in the list of great woes, and the story of Völund is re-told; but her grief may originally have been the natural sorrow of a maid for the loss of her lover. The date of the Lay of Völund itself is sometimes taken to be early: the Swedish scholar Dr Nerman maintains that the type of gold ornaments made by Völund points

to a period before A.D. 550. But the consensus of critical opinion brings the Edda down to the 10th century, and the date of the gold ornaments is no criterion of the date of the poem: it could not be long anterior to A.D. 550, but it may have been composed at any subsequent date; the myth itself was no doubt earlier than the Edda. Besides the reference in *Deor's Lament*, and another to be noted in *Beowulf*, King Alfred (849-901) also asks "Where are the bones of Weland smith?"

The story of Völund appears also in the late Icelandic prose *Thidriks saga*; this purports to be the story of Thidrik, who is the historic Theodoric of Verona, famous in romance as Dietrich of Berne; but the saga also contains a mass of loosely connected legends, among them the story of Volent (Völund) and King Nidung (Nithud), and that of Egil the archer, brother of Völund, but the story of the third brother, Slagfinn, is not included.

It must be added that, after his retreat to Alfheim, Völund continued his cunning craft. He made Balm-ing, the sword of Sigurd the Volsung, Joyeuse, the sword of Charlemagne and Miming, the sword of his own son Heime. Miming is mentioned too in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Waldere*: "Thou hast the sword Miming, the work of Weland, that fails not them that trust it; be of good courage, captain of Attila." In the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, moreover (sometimes dated 660-700), we have a striking allusion to Völund, when Beowulf exclaims: "If battle takes me, do thou send Hygelac this best of war-dresses, most excellent of corselets, which protects my breast; it is Hrethel's legacy, the work of Weland, Wyrð goes as it must." Again, in the Middle English poem *Horn Childe* (13th century), the princess Rimenild gives Horn a sword named Bitter-fer, made by Weland:—

Vv. 397-401: þan sche let forth bring  
 A swerd hangand bi aring,  
 To him sche it bitauȝt;  
 " It is þe make of miming,  
 Of al swerdes it is king,  
 & weland it wrouȝt;  
 Bitter-fer þe swerd hiȝt."

" Then she made them bring forth a sword, hanging by a ring. To him she commended it: ' It is the fellow of Miming. Of all swords it is king, and Weland fashioned it; Bitter-fer the sword is named.' " King Rhyderich also gave a sword made by Wayland to Merlin.

An early mention of a son of Völund occurs in *Waldere*, an Anglo-Saxon fragment of 60 lines which has the same hero as the French romance *Walter of Aquitaine*. Here allusions are made to the adventures of Widia, the son of Weland, how he delivered Theodoric from captivity, and of Theodoric's gratitude. Widia or Wudga is the son of Völund and Bodvild, and in the Continental German sources appears as Wittich, one of Dietrich's followers.

In Layamon's *Brut* (c. 1200), vv. 21, 133-4, King Arthur's byrny or corslet is named Wygar (wigheard or " battle-hard "), and is said to have been made by Witiȝa. Witiȝa, according to Professor Kittredge, is a corruption of Widia, the son of Völund; but it is probably rather the Middle English form of the German Wittich. It is said by the same writer that Widia has been substituted for his father Weland, but of this there is no evidence: we shall be within our rights in affirming that Widia, the hero of the romance we seek, assisted in forging King Arthur's panoply, and was endowed with his redoubtable father's hereditary smith-craft.

The romance of this Widia, Wudga or Wade,<sup>1</sup> alluded

<sup>1</sup> Whether Widia, Wudga, and Wade can be etymologically equated, I am not clear; but the identity has only a minor bearing on the main theme.

to by Scott, is unfortunately lost (as we have seen); we know, however, something of what it contained. In Chaucer's *Merchant's Tale* (vv. 179-182) occurs a famous allusion to the story:—

“ And eke this olde widwes god it woote,  
They conne so muchel craft on Wades boot,  
So muchel broken harm, when that hem leste,  
That with hem sholde I never live in reste.”

According to Skeat, this means that “ old widows know too much of the craft of Wade's boat; they fly from place to place in a minute, and if charged with any misdemeanour will swear they were a mile away.” D. Laing Purves, in his edition of Chaucer, remarks that Wade's boat was called Gringelot and, according to the romance now lost, Wade underwent a series of wild adventures in this craft, and performed many strange exploits; he was, in fact, a Northern Ulysses. The same editor thinks that the proverbial phrase, found in the *Remedy of Love*, which he ascribes to Chaucer, “ to bear Watte's pack,” may be a further reference to Wade and signify “ to be duped or beguiled.” It may be added that the magic boat was also called Wingalook (incidentally we note that the French form of the name bears a curious resemblance to Sir Gawayne's steed Gryngolet, in the romance of *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*). Wade's boat was what we should perhaps term a hydroplane, the Norse or Anglo-Saxon prototype of Sir Malcolm Campbell's “ Blue Bird ”; but it was more probably a flying-boat, in which Wade made his flights over the lakes and mountains of Cumbria: in fine, it was what our chief Cumbrian poet proposed for his own delectation in the Prologue to *Peter Bell*:—

“ There's something in a flying horse,  
There's something in a huge balloon;  
But through the clouds I'll never float  
Until I have a little boat  
Shaped like the crescent-moon.”

In this the modern poet sailed amid the planets and the Pleiades, and came finally to earth in Swaledale, where he found Peter Bell belabouring his ass. It is not likely, however, that Wordsworth had the *Song of Wade* in mind, for he disclaims the supernatural as the proper theme of his own verse:—

“ The dragon’s wing, the magic ring,  
I shall not covet for my dower.”

Chaucer’s second reference to the romance of *Wade*, alluded to by Scott, occurs in *Troilus and Criseyde*, iii 615, where Sir Pandarus is represented as entertaining his fair niece and the Trojan prince, her lover:—

“ He sange,<sup>2</sup> he playede, he tolde a tale of Wade.”

Like the wise Ulysses in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, who quoted from Aristotle, Sir Pandarus appears to have been unshackled by any sense of anachronism.

Wade is also mentioned by a translator of Guido de Colonna, in a list of the heroes of romance:—

“ Many spekyn of men that romances rede . . .  
Of Bewys, Gy and Gawayne,  
Of King Richard and Owayne,  
Of Tristram and Percyvayle,  
Of Rowland Ris and Aglavaile,  
Of Acheroun and of Octavian,  
Of Charles and of Cassibellan,  
Of Kevelocke, Horne, and of Wade,  
In romances that of hem be made;  
The gestours does of hem gestes,  
At mangeres and at great feastes,  
Her dedes ben in remembrance  
In many fair romance.”

It is thus evident that the romance of *Wade* was associated with the great medieval romances, both of the Arthurian and of other cycles; it had wide fame and

<sup>2</sup> So Tyrwhit. Skeat has “she.”



was a work of cardinal importance, and if the poem was at all akin in technique to the two romances with which it is here more immediately grouped, *Havelock the Dane* and *Horn*, it may well have been a delightful story of spirit and gallantry. Furthermore, Havelock the Dane is primarily concerned with Grimsby, and Horne Childe with the Yorkshire localities of Cleveland and Pickering: the northern juxtaposition, therefore, would bear out Sir Walter Scott's contention that *Wade* is a border composition.

It still remains to be determined, however, where on the Roman Wall Wade's castle was. Scott has left no further indication than that already quoted, but it is obvious that he must have had definite authority for so positive a statement. In default of a plain direction, one statement from romance may afford a clue. In Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, VII ix, we read: "wert thou as wight as ever was Wade, or Launcelot, Tristram, or the good knight Sir Lamorak, thou shalt not pass a pass here that is called the Pass Perilous." Here Wade is plainly associated with the Arthurian knights, if he is not himself made one of the Table Round; and as tradition has it that Arthur sleeps in a cave under the castle of Sewingshields, it may be that Wade sleeps with him. Yet again, Tarn Wadling or Watling presents itself as an appropriate scene for the exercise of the boat: it is not precisely on the Wall, but is near enough for a machine that could fly; moreover, it was a favourite place for Arthurian exploits, as is evidenced by the romance of *The Awntyrs of Arthur* and several ballads in the Percy Reliques. The late W. T. McIntire suggested that Tarn Wadling is the tarn of Ellen's ford, Tarn-wath-Elayne (to give the old form); but though this may satisfy the modern philologist, it by no means follows that the medieval minstrel thought so: to him it may well have been the tarn of Wade. Similarly, in

Wace's *Roman de Brut*, Lancaster is said to be Vancaster, that is, Thong Castle or the place encompassed by a thong; and Geoffrey of Monmouth for Carlisle gives Kaer-leil, the castle of the British king Leil: needless to say, no etymologist would agree.

So far Tarn Wadling. If it be further asked whether Wade had any connection with the apparently cognate Watling Street, it is not easy to answer. Watling Street was the Early English name for the great road made by the Romans from London past St. Albans to Wroxeter near Shrewsbury: "according to early documents the name was at first Waeclinga (or Waetlinga) street; its derivation is unknown, but an English personal name may be behind it."<sup>3</sup> Was this Wade? The same article continues: "In the Elizabethan period and later, the name Watling Street seems to have been applied to many Roman or reputed Roman roads in various parts of Britain. In particular the Roman 'North Road' which ran from York through Corbridge and over Cheviot to Newstead near Melrose, and thence to the Wall of Pius, was not unfrequently called Watling Street, though there was no old authority for it." Geoffrey of Monmouth, however, and his disciples in the Arthurian History, were little tied by authority or philology; and we may perhaps see in this Watling Street, which crossed Hadrian's Wall near Corbridge, some indication of the Wade who, according to Scott, had his castle on the Wall and "surmounted" it. Indeed, the road which led from Penrith to Carlisle by way of Tarn Wadling or Watling may itself have been deemed a "Watling Street" by the romancers.

It is interesting to observe that Chaucer, in the *House of Fame*, remarks:—

<sup>3</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

“ See yonder, lo, the Galaxye,  
 Which men clepeth the Milky Way,  
 For hit is whyt; and some, parfey,  
 Callen hit Watlinge Street.” (vv. 936-9).

If Wade was the possessor of a magic boat, like Wordsworth's crescent-moon, no place could better have marked its flight amid the stars than the Milky Way. In the *Mabinogion* Gwydion, who figures in the tale of *Math the son of Mathonwy*, gave his name, in Caer Gwyndion, to the Milky Way, just as his sister Arianrod gave hers to the Corona Borealis. Whether Gwydion can be equated with Widia, the alternative form of Wade, will be best determined by those who wield Sir John Rhys's Druidic wand, by which a man becomes a culture-hero, or a mortal maiden the Dawn, at will. Gwydion, it must be confessed, was but a master of enchantment: it was his brother Govannon who was a smith-deity.

But without going to the native Celtic traditions of our island, let me say bluntly that the nearest parallel to “ Wade's boat ” is probably to be found in Skidbladnir, the ship of the Norse gods. This was made by the dwarf Dvalin, in the caverns of Swart-alfaheim; it could float through the clouds, or skim upon the water; it could contain all the gods at once, or be folded up into a napkin. It was given, as his divine prerogative, to Frea, the sun-god; and it has been rationalised into the clouds, through which the sun takes its way in heaven. If we had the aid of Sir John Rhys's gramarye, I have little doubt that Wade himself could be metamorphosed into Frea the Sun or, for that matter, into Bellerophon on Pegasus, or Perseus with the winged sandals and the cloak of invisibility, or Cu-chulain the Hound of Culann the Smith, or Manannan mac Idr, wizard of Man, with his magic canoe, Wave-sweeper, in whose ear men had only to speak to be obeyed. But we must return to earth.

One word of warning requires to be given, though I am almost ashamed to offer it. To revert for a moment to Wade's castle on the Wall, those who are acquainted with the district are well aware that the military road from Newcastle to Carlisle, made in 1751 and the following years, is often known as Wade's Road, after Marshal Wade (1673-1748), whose army failed to relieve Carlisle in the Forty-five for want of a proper road from Newcastle, where it had been stationed; and Dr Richmond has mentioned Wade's Causeway above Wheel-dale in an article in *Transactions*. It is obvious, however, that no confusion can have entangled the Field-Marshal with the hero of romance. George Wade was an Irishman, and could not possibly be a "descendant, real or fancied" (to use Scott's phrase) of the son of Wayland Smith.

To the novel-reader, far the most familiar scene of Wayland's own exploits is the stone circle named after him in the Vale of the White Horse, which figures in *Kenilworth*: here the smith shoes Tressilion's horse, in accordance with Camden's statement that an invisible blacksmith performed the operation for a piece of silver. But this goes only to prove that the legend of the magic smith was of universal provenance; it was known all over Europe and appears, as we have seen, under the form of Daedalus and his son Icarus, and likewise of Hephaestus, with his Latin variant Vulcan at work in his smithy under Etna. The critics have said, indeed, that the place-names of the *Lay of Völund* are merely conventional, e.g. Wolfsdale and Myrkwood; and "such things as the legends of Weland and Offa, of Wade and his magic boat Gringolet, must long have been cherished by the people at large." All that is true: both Wayland and Wade must have been known

<sup>4</sup> CW<sub>2</sub> xxxiii, Art. XVI: *The Tower on Gillalees Beacon, called Robin Hood's Butt.*

throughout England, even as Arthur was; but that does not prevent us from locating Wade in Cumbria, any more than we are precluded from setting King Arthur in Carlisle.

To sum up this rather protracted enquiry: first we have the *Lay of Völund* in the Edda; secondly, we have references to a romance concerning his son, Wade, which is now lost—and lost it will unquestionably remain, unless some happy chance intervenes. As Tyrwhit says, to reconstruct this poem requires “a more particular knowledge of his adventures than we are now likely to attain.” Imagination may play with the theme; but hardly the boldest would venture to put forth a fiction which might pass muster for the medieval *Wade*. One point, however, which has not yet been made in this survey, must be noted. It should always be remembered that several eminent authorities have considered that the Edda itself was composed in Cumbria,<sup>5</sup> here, then, if this theory be established as true, we have the Norse masterpiece of *Völund* and the Middle English sequel of *Wade* comprising a consecutive whole — one portion of the great literary treasures of our native hills. As for the castle of Wade himself, we may fittingly conclude with the words of the *Dream of Maxen Wledig*, from Lady Charlotte Guest’s version of the *Mabinogion*:—

“Valleys he saw, and steeps, and rocks of wondrous height, and rugged precipices. And at the mouth of the river he beheld a castle, the fairest that man ever saw, and the gate of the castle was open, and he went into the castle. And in the castle he saw a fair hall, of which the roof seemed to be all gold, the walls of glittering precious gems. Golden seats he saw in the hall, and silver tables. And on a seat opposite him he beheld two auburn-haired youths playing at chess. And beside a pillar in the hall he saw a hoary-headed man, in a

<sup>5</sup> CW2 xliv, Art. I: *The Holy Wells of Cumberland*.

chair of ivory, with the figures of two eagles of ruddy gold thereon. Bracelets of gold were upon his arms, and many rings were on his hand, and a golden torque about his neck; and his hair was bound with a golden diadem. And he saw a maiden sitting before him in a chair of ruddy gold. Not more easy than to gaze upon the sun when brightest, was it to look upon her by reason of her beauty. The maiden arose from her chair before him, and he threw his arms about the neck of the maiden, and they two sat down together in the chair of gold. And, behold, through the chafing of the dogs at their leashings, and the clashing of the shields as they struck against each other, and the beating together of the shafts of the spears, and the neighing of the horses and their prancing, he awoke."

So may we awaken from the dream.

#### APPENDIX.

By the kindness of Mr Charles Nowell, Chief Librarian of the Manchester Central Library, I have received, since writing my paper, a transcript of the *Academy* article mentioned therein. The article states that Dr M. R. James, while making a catalogue of the MSS. at Peterhouse, discovered a short English quotation in an early 13th century Latin homily on humility, and asked Mr Gollancz to interpret it. Mr Gollancz found that it contained six lines of the lost *Tale of Wade*, and mentioned Wade's father, the giant Hildebrand, who begot him on a mermaid. The preacher was speaking of the Fall of man and the evil that followed it; he said that Adam was turned from a man into a sort of non-man, and not Adam only, but almost all other men too, so that they could say, with Wade, "Some men are elves and some adders; some are sprites that dwell by waters; there is no man but Hildebrand only."—"Adam autem de homine factus est quod non homo, nec tantum Adam sed omnes fere fiunt non homines. Ita quod dicere possunt cum Wade:—

' Summe sende ylues  
and summe sende nadderes:  
Summe sende nikeres  
the (bi den watere) wunden:  
Nister man nenne  
but Hildebrand onne.' "

“The *Tale of Wade*,” continues the *Academy*, “must then be much like Layamon’s *Brut* and date about 1300 A.D. Its alliteration is constant, but not regular . . . It now remains for Dr James and Mr Gollancz to find the rest of the poem, and tell us all about Wade’s magic boat, ‘Guingelot,’ and his wondrous adventures in it, about his mermaid mother, his smith-son Weyland, and his grand-son Withga.”

To this it must be said that *Wade* cannot be dated as late as A.D. 1300. Not only is Layamon’s *Brut* usually dated about 1200, but the *Academy* contradicts its own statement that the six lines of the poem were found in an early 13th century Latin homily: *Wade*, therefore, must be anterior to the early 13th century. Whether the *Academy* is any more accurate in affirming that Wade’s father was Hildebrand, a giant, his mother a mermaid, his son Weland the Smith and his grand-son Withga, I do not know. Other authorities whom I have previously been able to consult state that his *father* was Weyland the Smith. The Edda also says that Völund was the son of a Finnish king, but it is not stated that Wade was that. With these corrections or additions made, it will not, perhaps, be necessary to re-cast my paper, though I would emphasise that it is necessarily highly tentative and conjectural. If, however, Wade’s mother was a mermaid, perhaps his boat was a “flying-boat” in the sense that ships are said by Aeschylus to be winged, i.e. they have sails; and on a first consideration the mermaid seems to bring us into the world of Manx and Irish legend.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See also an additional note, p. 220 below.