

TEUTONIC LEGENDS

IN
THE NIBELUNGEN LIED
AND
THE NIBELUNGEN RING

BY
W. C. SAWYER



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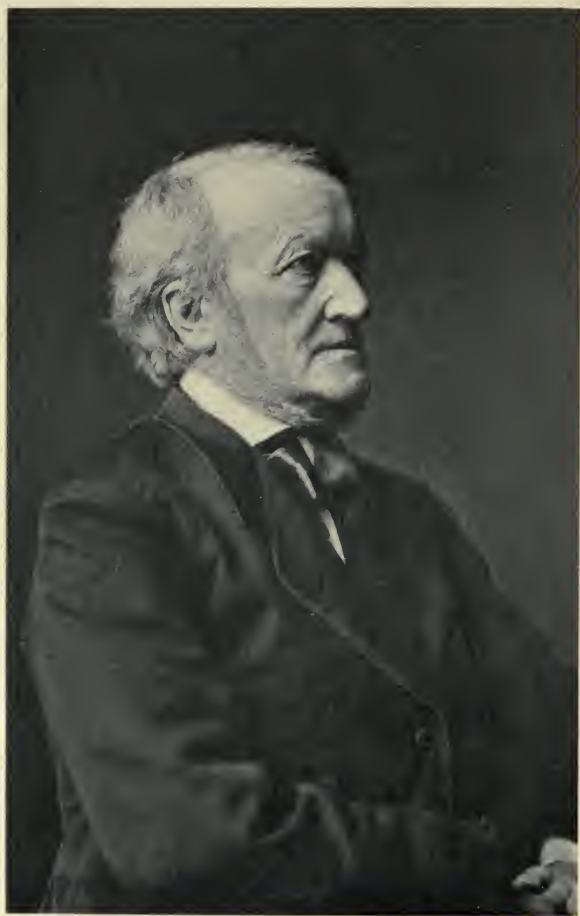
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Richard Wagner

TEUTONIC LEGENDS

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THE NIBELUNGEN LIED

AND

THE NIBELUNGEN RING

BY

W. C. SAWYER, PH.D.

PROFESSOR OF THE GERMAN LANGUAGE AND LECTURER ON TEUTONIC
MYTHOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF THE PACIFIC

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

BY PROFESSOR FRITZ SCHULTZE, PH.D.

OF DRESDEN, GERMANY



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PREFACE

RICHARD WAGNER'S operas, based chiefly on the legends of Northern Europe, are discovering to our English-speaking people how little they know of the mythology of the race from which they are descended. Not only the lovers of music, but the students of folklore and of general literature, are thus stirred to the pursuit of the old myths which so illustrate the peculiarities of our race and the history of our moral development. Accordingly, we begin to feel that we are no more at liberty in our day to be ignorant of Siegfried and Parsifal than of Hercules and the divine Achilles. Moreover, it is very natural that in the era of athletics in education we should take increased interest in the old hero myths and epic songs, which glorify physical strength and moral courage.

Familiarity with the Teutonic languages, even in their oldest forms, may be necessary to the most complete knowledge of the myths brought from the Orient to the shores of the Baltic; yet even our children may gain an approximate

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notion of the character and religious beliefs of the ancestors of Hengist and Horsa from simple versions of ancient tales.

In the present volume it has been the purpose to combine in suitable form such helps as are needful for the English-speaking student in the study of the Nibelung legends, which have Siegfried for their central figure. These are found in their earlier written forms in the *Eddas* and the *Sagas*, as happily preserved for us in Iceland. They appear again in changed forms in the great mediæval epic, the *Nibelungen Lied*, and, in our own day, notably in Wagner's majestic operas of the *Nibelungen Ring*. We invite first attention to these legends as they appear in the epic, which is more readable than the Icelandic versions and more essential to a literary education.

As the best text for our purpose we have adopted and translated Dr. Wilhelm Wägner's excellent prose version of the *Nibelungen Lied*, with added details of the early life of Siegfried, supplied chiefly from the old folksong of *The Horny Siegfried*.

Wagner's version attempts to keep the original motives of action in inoffensive form, even in the quarrel of the queens, and has reproduced

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the essential outlines of the epic with least detail where the detail is least agreeable. We have thought to realize still further adaptation to the tastes and morals of our age and country in occasionally sacrificing something of the literalness or of the fulness of the version without destroying the identity of the narrative. In *Chriemhild's Revenge* the slaughters that appeared protracted beyond sufferance have been much abridged, and the *Klage*, the "Lament," which is of inferior merit and seldom recognized as a part of the *Lied*, we omit altogether.

In the "Retrospect," Dr. Wägner gives a valuable critique upon the *Nibelungen Lied*.

Quaint terms, antiquated usages, and many mythological allusions have been explained in footnotes, so as to satisfy all readily anticipated needs.

The Nibelung legends as presented by Richard Wagner are treated in the "Argument and Sources of the *Nibelungen Ring*." Brief comparison is there made of the drama with the epic and the sagas. This feature of the book must materially assist in making the reader familiar with the varying forms of the myths and of the proper names involved. It should be of service to all students of German legends,

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whether they aim primarily at Wagner's music or at German literature.

Music cannot be fairly criticised or fully appreciated without taking into account its adaptation to the thought that it is designed to convey or impress. The operas of the *Ring* are the translations by a musical genius of the crude imaginings of an infant race into these harmonies which to a more advanced civilization express, if not the same ideas, at least the better development of the same themes.

An Appendix has been added to the above, giving a partial outline of the *Volsunga Saga*. The subordinate place given to this outline is chosen for the purpose of leaving to the less serious student the story of Siegfried unburdened with troublesome conflicts of authority arising from the introduction of another form of the same story.

Professor Fritz Schultze, the eminent German lecturer and author, has written for this volume an essay upon the elevated character of the German works that make us acquainted with the gods and heroes of our heathen forefathers. Every reader will find this essay a helpful introduction to our principal theme.

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THE LEGENDARY
IN
GERMAN LITERATURE

BY
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*AN ESSAY WRITTEN EXPRESSLY FOR
THIS VOLUME*

Translation approved by the Author

THE HISTORY
OF
GERMAN LITERATURE

BY
JOHN GARDNER
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INTRODUCTORY ESSAY



I

THE INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF GER- MANY AS SHOWN IN ITS LITERATURE

ONE must be familiar with the historical and literary development of Germany in order to comprehend fully the unusual interest which the educated German of to-day takes in his mediæval literature, in his early national legends, in his ancient history and its sources. It is the interest of reawakened patriotism, which suns, strengthens, and nourishes itself on its own historical past, on the grand destinies of its early heroes and emperors, on their adventures and deeds, striving not only to equal, but to surpass them. The recurrence to this past has served to rouse from slumber the national consciousness. And now this national consciousness holds these products of earlier days of glory as the precious tonic for the spirit of modern times. Present greatness stands the

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firmer if it rests upon the foundation of a great past.

In the following pages we shall briefly consider the development of Germany from the stand-point of its literature, its political history being noticed only when intimately connected with its intellectual growth.

Among all peoples, the Germans alone are distinguished by the possession of two great classical, literary periods : the first in the Middle Ages, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries ; the second in modern times, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Both nearly coincide with the flood tides of German political development, and the first, regarded from the stand-point of the Middle Ages, is, in its intellectual characteristics, not inferior to the second.

The sacred poetry of that first classic epoch we will not here consider, but confine our attention to that of a secular character. Knights were its representatives. They sang either their own adventures or the deeds of great heroes of olden times ; so they became the authors of epics ; or they gave voice to their own emotions, and sang especially of love and knightly devotion to women ; then they became lyric poets.

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These compositions were seldom read, but almost always recited in circles of knights and ladies, or sung to the music of the harp. Thus was the impression rendered the more vivid and permanent, and hence the secular soon gained ascendancy over the sacred poems.

There are various groups of legends from which the poets of that day drew their material.

The first is the Lower Rhenish or Frankish. The hero is Siegfried, whose home is Santen (Xanten) on the lower Rhine.

The second group is the Burgundian. Its heroes are the three brothers and kings, Gunther, Gernot, and Giselher. Their mother is Ute; their sister, Chriemhild; and Gunther's spouse is Brunhild. Among their retainers, the grim Hagen and the valorous, song-gifted Volker are conspicuous. Their residence is Worms.

The third group of legends is the Ostro-Gothic. Its hero is Theodoric of Verona, the German Dietrich von Bern. The aged Hildebrand, of the race of the "Wolflings," is his master-at-arms. Distinguished among his retainers are Wolfhart, Wolfbrand, Wolfwin, who were likewise "Wolflings," with Sigestab and Helfrich.

The fourth group of legends relates to the

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Hunnish king, Attila, or Etzel. His first spouse is Helche; the chief among his vassals, the Margrave Rüdiger of Bechelaren. Allied with him are the Lotharingian Duke Hawart, his vassal Iring, and the Thuringian prince Irnfried. Etzel's residence is Etzelburg, the present Ofen.

The heroes and their deeds in these groups of legends are in part historical. They are associated with the momentous events in the period of the Migration of the Nations, which stamped themselves ineradicably upon the memory of the Germanic races, and gave, from ancient times until the present day, an impulse to the poetic spirit of the German people. The three Burgundian kings, the Hunnish king, Attila, and his brother Bleda, the destruction of a Burgundian race by the Huns, the brilliant figure of Dietrich von Bern, all belong to the province of history. The legends did not, indeed, confine themselves to fact in dates and exact records of historical events. On the contrary, they frequently linked together that which had no previous connection, as Attila and Theodoric.

It must be especially remarked that the most

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brilliant of all the heroes of German legend, Siegfried, is not a historical personage, but mythological. Siegfried the Volsung is, in old German mythology, the sun-god and the god of springtime. Brunhild is the Valkyr whom the chief god, Wotan, buried in sleep and surrounded with the wall of fire, the *Waberlohe*. Thereupon the sun-god released the virgin, the earth personified, and took her to wife. But he deserted her to devote himself to a new love, as the sun "turns from his first love of budding spring to the second love of glowing summer." This old pagan myth, drawn directly from observation of the forces and phenomena of nature, and of which we have a later echo in the allegory of the Sleeping Beauty wakened by the Prince, has preserved its more primitive form in the *Eddas*; and Richard Wagner, in his music-drama, *The Nibelungen Ring*, has returned to this earlier version of the legend; while in the *Nibelungen Lied* the old heathen character only faintly, yet unquestionably enough, may be discerned.

It is in the *Nibelungen Lied* that the groups of legends have been combined and have produced that powerful epic whose author and

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origin are unknown to us, that epic in which is manifest, despite the mollifying influence of the Christian spirit which permeates it, the whole tremendous power and fearful passion of that ancient period of the Migration of the Nations. Justly the *Nibelungen Lied* has been called the German Iliad, and placed beside the Greek epic as its equal. The *Lied*, as we at present possess it, formed in the Middle Ages the conclusion to a long series of popular versions of the above-mentioned groups of legends; for it had already been preceded by a profusion of ballads extolling these heroes. Charlemagne made a collection of such poems. Unfortunately, his son, Louis the Pious, and the Roman Church held it to be their duty to destroy them, so that only a few fragments, such as the *Song of Hildebrand*, have by happy accident been preserved to us.

The fifth group of legends, the North German or Frisian, also called the Danish-Norman, furnished the material for the Lay of Gudrun, which stands as a German Odyssey side by side with the Nibelungen Lied. In fearful tragic power it cannot, it is true, even distantly compare with the Nibelungen Lied, but it is so re-

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markable for the delicacy of its conceptions, especially in the portraiture of Gudrun, the loving maiden, that it might be said to resemble the gentle moon of the soft spring night, while the other is like the glowing sun of a burning summer day. It depicts the seafaring life of the ancient Germans. The North Sea, its coasts and islands, form the scene of its incidents. Its heroine is Hettel's daughter, Gudrun; its heroes are the Frisian king Hettel and the Stormarnian king Horant, with his vassal and uncle, the aged Wate.

The sixth group of legends is the Lombardian. Its scene is the Lake of Garda, Southern Tyrol, and the Orient. King Rother (Rothari), Ortnit, Hugdietrich, and his son Wolddietrich, are its heroes. It is the youngest group of all. The lesser epics of this division, as well as some others which lie partially within the domain of other groups, were collected in the so-called *Lesser Hero Book* by Caspar von der Rhön, in the early part of the fifteenth century.

The above six groups comprise the really genuine Germanic legends and form the material for the so-called popular epics, like the *Nibelungen Lied* and *Gudrun*: that is, those epic poetical

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works whose parts, originating little by little among the folk, were later rearranged, rather than freshly composed from the beginning, by some poetically gifted man. In distinction from the popular epic was the artistic epic, which invariably owed its origin to a definite, known, and acknowledged single poet. This artistic epic poetry did not, however, content itself with those groups of old Germanic legends, but made use of a foreign group, which, originally Celtic, was worked up by the poets of Northern France of that period, then also, with the greatest latitude it is true, re-rendered, and, above all, deeply impressed upon the German mind by German chivalric poets.

*This seventh group of legends is the Bretonic, in which pagan and Christian elements are commingled in wonderful wise. The legends of King Arthur, of the Holy Grail, of Tristan, of Parsifal, of Lancelot of the Lake, and of the magician Merlin, belong to this series. While Heinrich von Veldeke, the oldest known to us among the German knightly epic poets of this courtly style, reproduced in his *Eneit*, the ancient story of the *Æneid*, Hartman von der Aue borrowed his material on the one side from the*

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church legends (Gregor vom Stein, Der Arme Heinrich), on the other from the Arthur myths (Iwein), and this example was followed by Wirnt von Gravenberg. But the most profound, the most mystically religious, and at the same time the most artistic of these epic poets, was Wolfram von Eschenbach, whose most noteworthy poem, *Parsifal*, availing itself of the Grail legend, treats of the loftiest themes which engage the human soul,—the rise and progress of religious doubt, the falling from grace, and the mysteries of salvation. Their outer garb and richly colored background these religious problems owe to mediæval chivalry, whose full splendor, glittering and glowing, is displayed to us in the adventures of Parsifal and other heroes.

The extraordinary richness and variety of this mediæval poesy is indicated by the fact that it contains the greatest conceivable antitheses; that, side by side with the mystically religious Wolfram, stands the worldly Gottfried von Strassburg, wholly devoted to poetically idealized sensuality, with his epic of *Tristan and Isolde*. This is the song of songs of love's intensest passion, in which the lovers, forgetful of all the world, mindful only of each other, regard their passion

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as their only law, and hence trample under foot every divine command and every moral obligation. Never was such a subject treated more felicitously, brilliantly, sensuously, never with more ardent fire, never in choicer language, never, while displaying the most naïve license, with greater refinement of delicacy.

In addition to these greatest of the epic poets, it is unnecessary to name the numberless lesser lights of that period. Mention must, however, be made of the fact that the circle of lyric poets of that day was no less rich in choice spirits. At the head of these stands Walther von der Vogelweide. The greatness of Germany, the honor and dignity of man, springtime and love, religion and politics, are the themes of his song, whose mellifluous melody, diversity of form, and profundity of thought are not attained by any other minnesinger; for those who succeed him represent the gradual decline of German poetry.

The poesy of chivalry sinks the lower, the more chivalry itself descends from its elevation after the fall of the Hohenstaufen dynasty, during the period of the interregnum and the inanity of the Hapsburg epoch. But while robber knighthood and brutality take possession

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of the castles, the towns and citizens make progress towards freedom and culture, and now it is the citizen meistersingers who, following at first the footsteps of chivalric poetry, begin to cultivate the art of verse. The earliest among these begin in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries with vigorous and natural tones. But soon the art of poetry becomes a trade among them; its substance, of secondary interest; the artificial, external form, the first consideration; and so in Germany the spirit of true poetry is lost to the burgher class also; and for centuries it rings earnest, true, and warm only in the popular ballad, as it breaks, spontaneously and without affectation, from the lips of peasantry and youth.

That the poets of the time of the Reformation are chiefly imbued with the religious, or polemic, or satirical-didactic spirit is a matter of course. The chief of these poets, Hans Sachs of Nuremburg, exhibits in his numberless works all these elements combined.

During the horrors of the Thirty Years' War, and in that fearful period of confusion which followed, German literature sinks to its lowest wane, despite the rise of numerous learned

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poetical societies. Its speedy revival in the eighteenth century is to be regarded as a veritable psychological miracle in national life; for though the year 1700 marks the lowest point of decline, yet the year 1800 is signalized by the attainment of the whole German literature to the pinnacle of its greatest fame, and stars of the first magnitude like Klopstock, Wieland, Lessing, Herder, Schiller, Goethe, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, illumine all at once the hitherto sombre arch of heaven. With this phenomenon, a grand development in music and the other arts goes hand in hand, and science makes progress in a manner previously unknown.

Of supreme importance are the following facts. The Romantic School in Germany, about the year 1800, by excellent translations and reproductions, Germanized for their countrymen the chief productions of the literatures of all peoples of the earth and of all ages, and thus enlarged German literature to a world literature,—namely, to a literature which, in its own language, includes all the principal works of all literatures so perfectly that Homer, or Shakespeare, or Dante, or Calderon, for example, become German poets, and their princi-

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pal ideas permeate the minds of the German people. Also, by unspeakably diligent research, the whole German mediæval classic literature, almost utterly forgotten in the period of its decline, was again brought to light, and flowed anew in its fructifying power into the spirit of the German people. At the same time the science of history reopened the German mediæval historical sources, almost lost to memory in the time of depression, and recorded them in the great compilation, *Monumenta Germaniæ Historica*. Upon this authority German history was now entirely revised, and the veiled past stood again revealed in the clear light of the present. Thus it was made plain that before their time of hopeless depression and humiliation the German people had enjoyed periods of the greatest brilliancy and a position of world-wide dominion.

So, in all silence, this people became, through its literature, imbued with a new spirit. How was it then possible that it should not experience the burning desire again to acquire for itself an outward position which should correspond to this inward spirit? Powerfully the flame of patriotism again burst forth. To be-

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come one was the wish which for a century had ever more intensely engrossed the German heart ; and, lo, finally there arose the external circumstances and the leaders, and, of necessity, the new empire, long inwardly prefigured, rapidly took form and substance before the eyes of the astonished world.

II

THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUE OF THE OLD GERMANIC LEGENDS

DEAR to the heart of the German is the whole mediæval literature and the ancient national Germanic legends; yet it must not be overlooked that this interest is deepened by the extremely high value of a purely human character possessed by these principal literary works of the Middle Ages; indeed, that it is their value to our common humanity which gives them their right to be regarded as belonging not exclusively to German literature, but to that of the world. This value to our common humanity consists in the high moral and religious ideas and views with which all these works are permeated.

If these Middle Age writings are compared with the classic productions of the ancient Grecian world, the latter have, indeed, one advantage—greater beauty of form. It is not, however, to be understood that mediæval German

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literature had not also very many and varied forms of versification at command. In this respect it is hardly inferior to the Grecian. For, aside from the ancient alliteration and the well-known Nibelungen strophe, we find in the epic poems, as well as in the lyric, an abundance of the most artistically perfected forms of verse, which later, and especially among the meistersingers, became still more numerous, finally degenerating, it is true, into mere external artificiality.

The greater beauty of form among the Greeks consisted rather in the whole external fashioning of that which the poet presents to us,—namely, gods, heroes, men, and nature. For these poems are written under a Southern sky and in the midst of a luxuriant nature. The richness of form and brilliancy of color of this outward world was the image which immediately impressed itself upon the Greek poet. He described only what he saw, and this was by its nature splendid and beautiful; and so his poetry became of itself as brilliant as the model whose mirror it was. The Germanic poetic works, on the contrary, were produced in the regions of the North, with its gloomy clouds, its sombre

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forests, its icy winters, its storm-tossed seas. Just as here in the North the forms of the distant mountains indistinctly blend in the mist, instead, as in the South, of striking the eye in sharp outlines leagues away; as, in general, beauty of form in all nature is here inconspicuous, so, too, in poetry it is not the first consideration. The attention of the poet is directed to the inner, intellectual import rather than to the outer mold. If, then, Germanic poetical works attract us less by their outward beauty of form, they charm us the more by that which among the Greeks falls into the background—by their emphatically moral sentiments.

There is a strongly pronounced moral principle pervading all the chief Germanic poetical works and forming the actuating motive in the most important events. This principle is loyalty—loyalty of lovers to one another; loyalty of vassal to lord and lord to vassal; loyalty to promise, oath, and contract; loyalty to deity and religious duty. As good faith lies at the foundation of the might and triumph of the hero, so breach of faith entails misery and ruin. In view of this deep moral tendency the Greek literature cannot compare with the Germanic,

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for even if, in the former, similar traits occasionally appear, yet its strength lies not in an elevated morality, but far more in delineation of the sensual, the worldly, and the natural; while the Germanic poets have ever cultivated the moral, the supernatural, the religious, and the metaphysical. Of course Germanic literature in this respect owes much to Christianity; but even the purely pagan poesy, while yet untouched by the doctrines of Christ, exhibits the traits above referred to, as Tacitus, in his *Germania*, long ago commendably remarked.

The constancy of lovers is the leading motive in the *Gudrun Lay*. Gudrun, the princess, is taken prisoner by the young king, Hartmut. His mother, Gerlinde, insists that this maiden shall marry her son. But Gudrun is already betrothed to the prince, Herwig. All attempts to make her false to him are vain. The greatest indignities are heaped upon her: in the cold of winter, on the sands by the sea, with bare feet and torn garments, she is compelled to wash the linen. But, with unwavering constancy, she bears all. She knows well that her lover also will be true. Many years pass. Then comes the day of deliverance. The lover appears

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with a well-manned fleet, storms the castle, and releases his bride.

In the *Nibelungen Lied*, as well, loyalty is the actuating motive. Siegfried, having wooed for himself Chriemhild, the king's sister, wins Brunhild to wife for King Gunther. But it is accomplished by deceit: and now are fulfilled those words of Schiller, the poet,—

“ That is the curse of evil deeds,
That evil evermore they must engender.”

As soon as Brunhild perceives that it is through a dreadful deception on the part of Siegfried that she has become the wife of the unloved Gunther, the only atonement for the outrage acceptable to her is the death of the offender. And Hagen, from loyalty towards his queen, whose cause he assumes, slays the hero. Now, indeed, Brunhild is avenged, but Chriemhild's happiness has been wrecked and ruined. Only one thought binds her still to life—in undeviating loyalty to her beloved to take vengeance on his murderers. From fidelity to Siegfried, in order to obtain power for revenge, she becomes the wife of Etzel. Through true love itself, the gentle Chriemhild is finally trans-

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formed into that fearful fury, whose mad rage condemns to death her own race and herself. In the terrible struggle that now ensues, the glorious traits of loyalty again and again shine forth. Hagen foreboded that the expedition to the land of the Huns meant death to himself and his kings; therefore he had advised against it. But when, notwithstanding, the journey is determined upon, he faithfully follows his lords to certain death. And when they are to be spared by Chriemhild, if only they deliver Hagen up to her, they reject with indignation such a proposal, and die true to their vassal.

Not only are the whole happiness and the very being of man dependent upon his loyalty, but the gods themselves are subject to the same moral law. They, too, subsist only so long as they are faithful to their covenants, and their downfall is assured if they are false to oath or contract. The violation of the moral law of good faith determines the destruction of the deities in the so-called "twilight of the gods" in the old German mythology, and in that form of the Nibelung myth preserved in the *Eddas*, upon which Richard Wagner has founded his great music-drama, *The Nibelungen Ring*.

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In Wagner's work the giants have built for Wotan, chief of the gods, a castle from whence he should rule the world. In payment, they receive a treasure of gold, of which the Nibelung Alberich had robbed the nymphs of the Rhine, and from which he had forged himself a ring which gave him power over the whole world. Treasure and ring, Wotan, with the help of Loge (the principle of evil, the crafty Satan, whose kingdom is Fire), takes from Alberich by force, and impelled by necessity, surrenders it to the giants. But the plundered Alberich has laid a curse upon the ring, that it should conduce to fatal calamity for its every possessor from this time on; and this curse is fulfilled. Wotan, the bright god of heaven, has now no other thought than to wrest again from the giants the potent magic ring. He himself, however, may not do this by force, for he is bound by a contract concluded with the giants, and his whole divine puissance stands and falls with his loyalty to contracts. But by an artifice he hopes to attain his object. He begets the hero race of the Volsungs, and they, independent of him, and yet virtually his tools, are to recapture the ring and hoard. But also

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Alberich, of the shadowy, lower world, seeks to regain the ring. He, likewise, for this purpose begets a son, Hagen. And so the dark demons of the depths and the bright gods of the heavens are equally consumed by thirst for worldly possession and power, as embodied in the Nibelung hoard. Gods and demons contend for it with wily art, making use of men as their tools. In this contest faith after faith is broken. Death and destruction, therefore, overtake them all, and the gods themselves are doomed to perish because they fail to observe the moral law. They are annihilated by the principle of evil. This is the meaning of the allegoric representation of the gods devoured by Loge, the fiery flame.

It is in the highest degree worthy of note that these sublime moral and religious conceptions, which were utterly foreign to the Greek world, are inherent in Teutonic mythology, apart from any visible influence exerted by Christianity. Under the influences of the Christian religion, then, how much more perfectly must these traits have been developed! Now, this very conformity of innate, natural, moral consciousness with the spirit of Christian-

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ity is exemplified in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parsifal*, the most profoundly thoughtful work of the Middle Ages. Wolfram's *Parsifal* has for mediæval literature the same significance that Goethe's *Faust* has for the literature of to-day. If in *Faust* we possess a psychological drama, in *Parsifal* we have a psychological epic,—that is, the outward events and characters, as far as the latter are veritable people of flesh and blood, serve only to carry and illustrate the profounder thoughts, the development of which engrosses the mind of the poet. If Goethe's *Faust* introduces us into the midst of the world of existing moral and religious sentiment, and into the processes of modern philosophic thought, so, likewise, it is the mediæval world of moral and religious thought, especially the world of Christian sentiment, which lies at the very root of Wolfram's *Parsifal*. Here, too, loyalty is the alpha and omega of the whole. Here, indeed, it is loyalty to the Lord of all, to Christ himself. Parsifal is the man who is false to this allegiance, falls into doubt and degeneracy, but is finally brought back to a new and incorruptible faith in Christ. This deep, religious theme is, however, by no means treated in

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abstract, moralizing fashion, but completely and richly re clothed with the flesh and blood of poesy. The experiences of Parsifal's outward and inner life are, indeed, such as are common to all humanity, and yet again are markedly individual. Mediæval chivalry confronts us in all the pomp and splendor of its externals, in greater splendor, indeed, than in any other poet. But while these other poets remain engrossed with mere externals, in Wolfram we penetrate at the same time into the deepest recesses of the human heart, learn its innermost fancies and strivings, its tremors and fears, its desires, its will, and find the control of the Divine Spirit in man, in the contest with evil, represented in a manner not to be surpassed. The action of the poem centres about the Holy Grail, the vessel of precious stone, which, according to legend, was in the possession of Joseph of Arimathea, and from which our Lord at the Last Supper offered the wine to his disciples, and in which, afterwards, his blood was received when the centurion Longinus pierced his side. In a magnificent temple it is guarded by the noblest, the purest, the most pious, and the bravest knights. Through the forest that extends for

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miles around the temple of the Grail, only he can penetrate who is called thereto by the grace of God. But once arrived at the consecrated spot of highest earthly bliss, he should ask concerning the significance of all that which is there unfolded to his eyes. If he fails to ask, he is expelled, and has thrown away his chance for happiness; just as only he can have veritable part in salvation who, with deepest interest, asks ever and ever again for the Saviour, and just thereby continually proves his intense longing to belong to Christ. So, then, Parsifal, as a still immature youth, who is ordained to become later actually the King of the Grail, arrives in the holy place and beholds all its miracles accomplished; yet at first only with the bodily eye, not as yet with deep, spiritual interest, and hence he does not ask. So he is conducted out again. And now begins his journeying, his wandering, his doubt and despair, until, finally, discipline has made him inwardly ripe for true spiritual understanding, and again he is led back to the temple, now with eagerness to ask the great question, and to be found worthy to be called the King of the Holy Grail.

III

RICHARD WAGNER AND THE GERMAN LEGENDS

IF we consider the abounding richness of the German mediæval poetical literature, with its German national spirit on the one side, and its deep moral and religious sentiment on the other, it is easily explicable why just those German poets of the present day, who, on the one hand, were patriotically inclined, and had, on the other hand, deep moral and religious convictions with philosophic tastes, should feel themselves powerfully moved to ring new changes upon these grand old themes. The active interest of the cultivated German public is also explicable. Moreover, it appears that those new poems were composed in a new spirit, in so far as they rejected any uncouthness, or littleness, in the mediæval original, brought out more clearly the moral sentiment, and endowed persons and transactions with that larger, deeper fullness of thought which, from the whole store of later classic poetry, philosophy,

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and modern life, the poet had at disposal. If, now, an actual genius arose, who had at command the whole available material of mediæval and modern times, in whom sensuous fervor, philosophical profundity, and religious mysticism were combined in wonderful harmony, and in whom the purest German national patriotism was conjoined with the keenest appreciation for whatever pertained to humanity in general, and who was, at the same time, a great dramatic poet, having also in the highest degree the pictorial fancy of the painter, and in addition was one of the greatest musicians of all ages; and if this genius who united in himself all these wonderful gifts should take this material in hand, transform it into powerful, theatrical, and, at the same time, musical works, thus bringing it to the eye and ear of the German public, long since nationally, poetically, philosophically, and religiously prepared for its reception, should it then be called a miracle that this genius, despite the opposition inseparable from all that is new and great, should take the hearts of his countrymen by storm, and that the whole old Germanic and mediæval world of legend and poetry should, in the shortest time, be reawakened to active

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existence in the consciousness of the German people? Such a genius is Richard Wagner. As no one before him, he has developed the interest in that old Germanic world of legend and poetry, until it has become a universal interest, and has reinstated the characters of that day in a popularity greater than was theirs originally, not only in Germany, but throughout the cultivated world.

For the opponents of Wagner, at least, or for those who have not yet come to understand his greatness, it must be especially observed, how all his works are pervaded by a deep moral sentiment, and how he invariably awards to it the victory. That his *Parsifal* is equivalent to a mystery play of the grandest religious type is now well enough known. To the moral truth which forms the central thought of the *Nibelungen Ring* we have already, in a general way, called attention. We would only add a word in regard to the significance of the figure of Siegfried. Siegfried is summer and springtide, youth and strength, beauty and love, the embodiment of all these. Every good falls to him, as in play, without exertion ; thus the Nibelung hoard, and, above all, the ring which gives

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power over the world. He owns them, but, since in his person he already possesses all perfections, and therefore is wholly content in himself, he is indifferent to all these treasures. But nothing is more offensive to this world of wickedness and baseness than such a shining light, and all the demons of darkness are still pledged to destroy such, whenever they let themselves be seen. And so here, too, base greed, deceitful envy, and mortal hatred at once combine for Siegfried's ruin. The hero of light must fall victim to the dark wiles of Hagen, even as still every ideal in the world is attacked by the devices of evil and the envy of that which is base. This eternal truth Wagner has impressively emphasized in his Siegfried of the *Nibelungen Ring*, and just therein lies the overpowering effect of the wonderful funeral march which he introduces after the death of Siegfried, which says in tones all that we have sought to make clear in words, and whose motto should be those lines from Schiller :

“Lo, in the heavens, the gods weep, the goddesses all
are bemoaning,
That the beautiful fades, that what is perfect must
die.”

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The human heart, almost despairing at such a sight, can find consolation and peace only in the assurance that finally the day of retribution comes, and victory over evil abides with the eternal moral law of good.

Let us, further, cast a rapid glance over Wagner's remaining works. *Rienzi*, his only opera not based on a Germanic subject, is a political tragedy of mediæval Italy, in which the central idea is the freedom of the people. The plans of the hero, who appears as champion for the rights of the people, are wrecked by the intrigues of a self-seeking nobility and by the enmity of the church allied with it.

There follow then the four dramas whose theme is love and woman,—Wagner deserving, above all others, to be called the music-poet of woman's emotional life. In all his works he glorifies woman, and exhibits an unswerving faith in the saving power of pure woman's love. The self-sacrificing love of the woman in the *Flying Dutchman* saves the beloved man from everlasting perdition. In *Tannhäuser*, the sensual, sinful love of the man is sharply contrasted with the pure, chaste love of the woman. The curse of the former ruins the man, but the blessing of

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the latter redeems him. In *Lohengrin*, the man nobly appears as the champion of the innocence and honor of woman. The pure happiness of love which follows from this act of devotion is, however, destroyed again by that sorry inheritance of the daughters of Eve, inconsiderate curiosity, here basely provoked by the enemies of Lohengrin. *Tristan and Isolde* depicts the curse of passionate, sensual love, which overrides all lawful limits, and must therefore inevitably end in ruin. On account of this very work, Wagner has been repeatedly attacked, from misapprehension. For, glowingly as he there paints the consuming fire of sensual love, this is not the real aim of the work. The moral lies, far rather, in the tragic guilt which the lovers heap upon themselves, and which, according to the eternal consequences of the immutable moral law, must involve their ruin.

A single word may also be said in regard to *The Meistersingers*. This work occupies a place peculiar to itself, in so far as it lies wholly in the sphere of æsthetics and the history of art. It contains Wagner's æsthetic creed, and has, in certain respects, a polemic spirit. Wagner entered upon new paths in art, and thus had to

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suffer the strongest opposition on the part of the older school. These, his own struggles with the adherents of the old school, he has poetically embodied in *The Meistersingers*. The old fogies, who in their poverty of soul still cherish the hollow form without substance, are the Meistersingers, with their scholastic pedantry; while young Walther, greeted by Hans Sachs with hearty appreciation, represents the genius who enters upon the new path.

Music may be called an international language. No one in modern times has so well understood its utterance as Wagner. Just on this account one can say of him that he had a mission to all peoples; and this mission, again, can be no other than the propagation of the ideas which are exhibited in his works. These ideas are, however, a great part of the best and noblest that German literature has produced, and it will repay other peoples to examine them, and to imbibe the spirit of these works.

The great difference between the literary works of the Latin and Germanic peoples is well known. The works of the Latin races are distinguished, indeed, in general, by greater elegance of form and greater euphony of lan-

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guage. But the works of the Germanic peoples have, in contrast to the careless grace and frivolity of the former, decidedly the advantage of a higher moral earnestness and deeper thoughtfulness. If Latin authors attempt a tone of moral earnestness, they almost invariably fall at once into the narrowness of dogmatism. They do not possess the lofty philosophic, and deeply moral and religious, yet undogmatic spirit of the Germanic literatures. There is therefore no question that the future belongs in larger measure to the latter than to the former. In any case, that which has intrinsic value will ultimately triumph over the mere semblance of worth.

The literatures of the Teutonic peoples are an inexhaustible wellspring of the true, the good, and the beautiful, and among these literatures the German in particular has been declared, by those best acquainted with the subject among the various nations, to possess a store of costly treasures not to be surpassed. That this applies not only to the more modern German literature, but to the mediæval as well, is not at present doubted by any competent critic; and Richard Wagner is the most decided advance champion for the truth of this tenet. It is therefore to be

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regarded as a very commendable undertaking, when, as in the work before us, an opportunity is afforded the American public to better acquaint themselves with this literature. If, through Wagner's music, interest is awakened in this early literature, so, on the other hand, an intelligent re-rendering of the substance of these ancient works will largely contribute to the understanding of the peculiar character of the Wagnerian music.

DR. WILHELM WÄGNER'S

PROSE VERSION OF

THE NIBELUNGEN LIED

TRANSLATED AND ANNOTATED

PART I

SIEGFRIED'S LIFE

I

SIEGFRIED'S YOUTH

THERE was reared in the Netherlands a child called Siegfried. His father, Siegmund, was a noble king, of the famous race of the Volsungs,¹ who trace their ancestry to Wotan² himself. His mother, Sieglinde, was

¹ The Volsungs were the descendants of Volsung (written variously, as Völsung, Wölsung, or Wälse). According to the *Volsunga Saga*, Volsung was a powerful monarch of miraculous birth, the great-grandson of Wotan, and the father of Siegmund. (See p. 309.)

² Wotan, and all German names with the initial *W*, should be pronounced as though that letter were an English *v*, which indeed it often is in the anglicized forms of these words. Wotan, or Woden, is the German equivalent to the Norse Odin, the chief of the twelve gods of the early Teutons. The worship of

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of no less noble descent. Both rejoiced over their son, for he early showed such strength and prowess that it was hoped he would some day win great renown as a hero. However, he soon became conscious of his great physical power, and grew headstrong and uncontrollable. He would brook no opposition; he beat his comrades till the blood flowed,—even those who were far older than he. With his years his unbridled passions grew, so that he was hated and avoided by all other boys, and his parents were greatly concerned about him. Then Siegmund told the queen that he knew one more plan by which the little savage might be controlled. He would give him as apprentice to the smith Mimer,¹ who dwelt in the adjacent

Wotan by our own immediate ancestors, the Anglo-Saxons, is indicated by the names of places in England into which his name enters. The names of our days of the week still remind us of this old mythology: Wednesday being the modern form for Woden's day, Thursday for Thor's day, etc.

¹ In chivalric times no industry was more important than the forging of weapons and armor. Many an invincible hero was thought to owe his success primarily to a wonderful sword, the merits of whose steel and

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forest and forged stout helms, bright breast-plates, shields, swords, and wondrous ornaments. He was a strong, wise man, and would teach the boy how to make the weapons that some day as a knight he should wield. The queen gave her consent, and the father took that course with his unruly son.

When the smith heard the story, he was ready and willing to take the king's son in hand. He thought it would not prove difficult to initiate this powerful youth in his business. The useful work with tongs and hammer would tame the headstrong spirit. In fact, for a time it went as well as could be desired. The young apprentice took delight in the swords, armor, and works of art produced in the fire and under the hammer of the master and his workmen, which, when polished, shone like the sun.

workmanship are sometimes described in terms that suggest feats of magic. The smith, therefore, came to be so important a personage that King Siegmund might well be angry when Mimer was slain (p. 60). In a sense the smiths, elsewhere called now Mimir, now Mime, are doubtless identical with Mimer of our text, though the sagas where they occur differ not less than these spellings.

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He sought himself to produce such artistic equipments. At first he hammered to fragments iron and precious metal; but he learned to control his violence, and showed much skill. One year and another passed tolerably. Meantime the prince attained almost to manhood's stature. Now the labor became tedious, and when the apprentices corrected him, he beat them, threw them down, and once dragged one of them, the best smith, the skilful Wieland,¹ by the hair of the head, to the master.

“That won't do!” said the old man. “Come here; thou shalt forge for thyself a good sword.”

For that, Siegfried was ready at once. He demanded the best iron and the heaviest hammer,

¹ Wieland is renowned in German legends as a skilful smith, and, in the story of his early youth, we read that, at the time when he was apprenticed to Mimer, he received such rough treatment at the hands of his fellow-pupil, young Siegfried, that Wieland's father was obliged to take him away and apprentice him to the dwarfs. Later he forged a famous sword which he called “Mimung,” presumably in memory of his old master. Among the treasures of Henry I. of England was a sword which was said to have been made by Wieland.

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which the apprentices were wont to swing with both hands. Mimer drew the heaviest iron bar red-hot from the fire and laid it on the anvil. Siegfried swung the hammer with one hand like a toy. The blow crashed down like a thunderbolt; the house trembled to its foundations; the iron was shattered into fragments that flew on every side; and the anvil sank a foot deep into the ground.

“That won't do!” said the old man, as before. “We must try another way, my boy, if thou wouldst make for thyself a good weapon. Over there in the pine woods dwells a charcoal-burner who furnishes the best coals; fetch me a good load of them on thy strong shoulders. Meanwhile I will get together iron of the best to forge thee a blade the like of which no knight has ever yet wielded.”

That seemed to the youth so amiable a speech that at once he grasped a powerful axe and strolled away to the wood. The trees stretched towards the youth their fresh, green branches; the birds sang of the cheery spring; there was a merry life in the fragrant dales, where violet and forget-me-not nodded kindly to him, as if they foretold him good fortune. He plucked a

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nosegay of these children of the spring, and stuck it in his leather cap. Going further, he reached a somber grove of firs. There was heard no song of birds, but a muffled sound, a hissing and gurgling and roaring, that might well have alarmed a less intrepid traveller. He soon perceived the cause of this wild tumult. It was a marshy lake in which gigantic turtles, snakes, and dragons wriggled about.

“In all my life I never saw so many horrible reptiles,” said Siegfried to himself; “but I will soon put an end to that nest of spooks.”

Immediately he cut down dead trees and rolled them into the dismal slough, until it was quite hidden under them. Then, leaping over all obstacles, he ran to the charcoal-burner’s hut, which he recognized by the fumes rising from the charcoal pits. Of the sooty coaler he begged fire to burn the reptiles.

“Poor youth!” said the coaler; “it is a pity to shed thy young blood; but, if thou returnest by the same way, the hideous dragon will fall upon thee, from out a cleft in the rock, and make a meal of thee. Smith Mimer is a treacherous fellow. He was here before thee, and told me a wicked story,—how he had in-

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censed the reptile¹ against thee, because thou wert far too unruly."

"Be not distressed, good man," replied Siegfried. "I will slay the dragon, and the tricky smith as well. Only give me fire, that I may first burn up this poisonous brood."

With a sigh for his young blood, the charcoal-burner gave him a panful of glowing coals, and gazed sadly after him as he hurried away.

The swift-footed youth was soon again at the slough. With the coals he set fire to the dried wood at various points; the wind fanned the flames till they leaped high in the air, and

¹ The communication between Mimer and the dragon, here implied, can be better imagined when we consider that the *Thidreks Saga* (see note on p. 306) tells of a brother of the famous smith Mimer who had taken the form of a dragon. This reptile was at enmity with all the world except his brother, and to him alone confided the place of his concealment. We observe marked resemblances and strong contrasts between this dragon story and that of Fafner in the older versions. The dragon that Sigurd (Siegfried) slew, in the *Volsunga Saga*, was also the brother of a smith, Reigin, who instructed Sigurd and urged him to attack the monster (*cf.* pp. 281-288 and 313-316).



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the reptiles simmered and stewed in the lake, filling the air with hideous shrieks. Siegfried meantime hewed for himself a powerful club from a tree-trunk. Gradually it grew stiller in the swamp, and finally the last sound was hushed. The bold youth went around the lake. At a spot where the bank was low, he saw flowing from the seething mass a little stream of melted fat. He thrust his finger into it, and perceived that it became covered with a horny coat.

“Aha!” said he; “that is good in battle.”

So he undressed and bathed his whole body in the liquid fat.¹ But between the shoulders, where a fallen linden leaf adhered, one spot re-

¹ This bath in the fat of reptiles corresponds to the bath in dragon's blood to which allusion is made (pp. 159, 162) in connection with the plans for slaying Siegfried.

In *Der hörnerne Siegfried*, with which Dr. Wägner's first and third chapters for the most part coincide, it is clearly stated (1:10) that the horny covering of the bodies of these burning dragons softened and flowed away from the lake in a little stream. In this, Siegfried dipped his finger, and, finding that the fluid, cooling upon his finger, became horn again, washed (*bestrich*) his whole body with it, and became thereby invulnerable. Unfortunately, however, his hands

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mained untouched by the horny coat, of which only later he became aware. When all was finished, and he had again donned his garment of leather, he proceeded on his way well content, his club upon his shoulder. Then suddenly the dragon, roaring and with open jaws, sprang upon him from out a cleft in the rock. Three powerful blows of the club felled the monster. Head and spine were broken; but long it writhed and lashed with its tail before its life was spent.

"The beast is dead," said the brave youth; "now for the sooty master and his men."

With these words he strode on wrathfully. As the men saw the young hero approaching

failed to reach a spot between his shoulders, and through this, as we shall see further on, the weapon of the assassin finally pierces him. The *Nibelungen Lied* accounts for the unprotected spot by the theory of the linden leaf, and Dr. Wagner has followed the *Lied* here, in the interest of consistency.

Neither the bath nor the horny coat is mentioned in the *Eddas*. There, as in the *Volsunga Saga*, however, we are told that Siegfried *tasted* the blood of the dragon, and thereby acquired the power to interpret the language of birds. In the opera, *Siegfried*, Wagner makes conspicuous use of this feature of the myth (see p. 288).

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thus in anger, they fled in terror to the wood and hid themselves in the thicket. But the master tarried at the door of his smithy, wherein so long he had dwelt in peace. He sought at first to appease his pupil by flattering words, but then he drew his sharp sword. Siegfried, on the other hand, swung his club, and with one blow brake the blade and the head of the smith.

“Hey, Master Mimer!” cried he; “thou wilt set no more dragons on thy pupil.”

Then he settled himself in the smithy, and with patience and diligence forged himself a sword that he tempered in the blood of the dragon. Upon this piece of work he spent several weeks, but then the weapon was polished and sharp and well-tempered. He girded it on and wended his way back to the palace of his father.

Meanwhile the news of these events had spread itself abroad in the land; and when Siegfried entered the paternal halls, he found the king angry and his mother in tears.

“Thou hast done an evil work,” said Siegmund. “Without cause, in thine ungovernable rage, thou hast killed the best master in all the world, a man who was most useful to me.”

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“Thy hand is stained with innocent blood,” cried the queen, and wept still more.

The tears of the mother, the reproaches of the father, brake the untamable, savage spirit of the son. He made no attempt to excuse himself, but knelt before the queen and buried his face in his hands.

“Mother,” he said, “thy tears cut me to the heart. Weep no more; I will submit,—will be an honest, upright knight.”

The troubled parents were comforted again by these words of their penitent child, and the more so when they learned fuller particulars, which the charcoal-burner, moreover, confirmed.

From this time on, Siegfried was completely changed. He appeared kindly and companionable, bore the corrections of intelligent men, listened to their words and advice, and exerted himself to grow wise and prudent. When unbridled passion rose in his heart, he thought of the tears of his mother and the reproaches of his father, and conquered and ruled the wicked spirit which once had robbed him of his discretion. Then he found favor with the nobles of the court; and the women, too, looked kindly

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upon the noble-hearted youth, who, in stature and strength of limb, excelled the stateliest men. The flashing eyes, the lofty brow, the blond locks that waved upon his handsome head, and the nobility of his carriage completed the charm of his external appearance.¹ In martial games, in tournaments, and especially in fencing, no knight could compare with him.

The queen now wept tears of joy when she looked upon her noble son and clasped him in her arms, and his father thought that Siegfried would soon accomplish greater feats than had he himself and all his famous ancestors. Therefore he arranged a great festival, and bestowed sword and armor upon Siegfried and his comrades and upon many native and foreign nobles,

¹ The following description of Siegfried's person is found in the sagas: "His hair was brown and beautiful to look upon, and hung in wavy masses. His beard was thick and short and of the same color. He had a prominent nose and a full, strong-featured face. His eyes were so keen that few could meet their glance or peer beneath the arching brows. His shoulders were as broad as if one saw two men. His body was perfectly proportioned in height and breadth, and so shapen that it could not be better."

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or, as would be said later, he knighted them.¹ A general tournament² terminated the festivities. Now, when Siegfried proved victor in every strife and stood there grand and majestic before the assembled folk, thousands and thousands of voices cried:

“Long live young Siegfried, our king, together with his worthy father.”

But he waved his hand, and said, modestly:

¹ Even before the days of chivalry the bestowal of his first sword upon a young warrior was made the occasion of great ceremonies and festivities. Indeed, Tacitus mentions this Teutonic custom in his *Germania*. In the later Middle Ages the festivities attendant upon this occasion seem to have been more splendid and the honor conferred still more highly esteemed,—one which the sons of kings and emperors thought it not unbecoming their dignity to seek. The celebration of a coronation, royal birth or baptism, the knighting of a prince or his marriage, was made still more imposing by the knighting of many nobles at that time, the latter being proud to receive their arms upon so grand an occasion. Thus, at his coronation, Maximilian I. created two hundred knights; and the three sons of Philip the Fair of France, being knighted, immediately conferred the like honor upon four hundred others.

² See note on p. 88.

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“Of such honor I am not yet worthy. I am minded first to win a kingdom of my own, if the king will give me permission, mounted and armed, to range at will through distant lands.”

In the evening the knights sat at banquet in the royal courts, young Siegfried being seated, not by his father, but below, where the young warriors talked of the deeds they should achieve. They told of far-away Isenland,¹ the home of the beautiful and warlike Brunhild,² who challenged her suitors to combat and had already slain many. They told of the kingdom of the sorcerous Nibelungs;³ of a Dragon-Rock,⁴ where dwelt a hellish winged dragon. Moreover, the young knights knew stories of a charming princess at Worms,⁵ on the Rhine, and of her three

¹ See note on p. 116.

² See note 2, p. 120.

³ See pp. 69-71.

⁴ See Chap. III.

⁵ “This city of Worms, had we a right imagination, ought to be as venerable to us moderns as any Thebes or Troy was to the ancients. Whether founded by the gods or not, it is of quite unknown antiquity and has witnessed the most wonderful things. Within authentic times, the Romans were here; and if tradition may be credited, Attila also. It was the seat of Austrasian kings, and the frequent residence of

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brothers and the mighty Hagen, protectors of the maid.¹

Charlemagne himself. Innumerable festivals, high-tides, tournaments, and imperial diets were held in it, of which latter, one at least, that where Luther appeared in 1521, will be forever remembered by all mankind.

“Nor is Worms more famous in history than it is in romance, whereof many monuments and vestiges remain to this day. A pleasant meadow there, says Von der Hagen, is still called Chriemhild's *Rosengarten*. The name *Worms* itself is derived from the dragon, or *Worm*, which Siegfried slew, the figure of which once formed the city arms. In past times, there was also to be seen here an ancient, strong *Riesen Haus* (Giant's House), and many a memorial of Siegfried: his lance, sixty-six feet long (almost eighty English feet), in the Cathedral; his statue, of gigantic size, on the *Neue Thurm* (New Tower) on the Rhine; the Siegfried's Chapel, in primeval, pre-Gothic architecture, not long since pulled down, etc. In the time of the Mastersingers too, the *Stadtrath* (city council) was bound to give a certain gratuity to every Master who sang without mistake the *Lay of Siegfried* (*Meisterlied von Siegfrieden*), the purport of which is now unknown.”—A. Lubben's *Glossary to the Nibelungen*.

¹ See pp. 77, 78.

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“Ah! that must be sport to see these marvels and encounter adventures,” cried Siegfried; and went to his father and told him how very ignorant he was of foreign parts, how he had no mind to linger longer at home in lazy repose.

The king, who in his own early years had wandered far and wide, promised him, if his mother would consent, to grant his prayer. The following day the queen was made acquainted with the desire of her son, and, after long opposition, yielded to the entreaties of the young knight. He received the best and most splendid suit of armor, the good sword that he himself had forged, and a steed swift as the wind, which he was permitted to choose from the royal stud. So he rode forth into the far-away world, to him unknown, full of courage, as is ever the case with hopeful youth which strives to attain some indefinite good in the distance, despising that which lies at hand.

It was a blissful ride through the fresh fields and green forests. He sought shelter under lowly roofs and in the castles of the nobles, and inquired the way to Isenland. He was directed towards the north, and he followed the road until he reached the sea. He found a boat

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ready to take him across, but the boatmen feared bad weather. Nevertheless, they raised anchor at his command, and he steered the craft with firm hand through the wild, storm-tossed waves, and landed, after a short transit, in a safe harbor. He was well received at the castle. Brunhild, herself, the noble queen, welcomed him in the hall, where many knights were assembled in banquet, all determined to enter the dangerous lists, waging battle for this woman's hand.

The very next day, many knights were entered for the game at arms. Then Brunhild appeared, glittering in helm, cuirass, and shield, fair as Freya,¹ when, with the Valkyrs,² she led

¹ See note on p. 174.

² The Valkyrs were fair daughters of Wotan, of superhuman powers, enlisted in the service of their father, under the leadership of Freya, a favorite goddess of great power and beauty. Their duties were to care for the table appointments and drinking vessels of Valhalla, the home of the gods, and to pass the beaker. But their more important office was to hover over the scene of strife, to decide the fate of battles, and to select the brave from among the fallen, and bear them away to a new life amid the delights of

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the battle of the heroes. Wonderingly Siegfried gazed upon the tall form, which towered far above the maidens who, armed like herself, formed her retinue. But the hero of the Netherlands likewise outshone the other knights by manly grace, by his lofty and powerful stature and glittering armor. Perhaps the wish arose in Brunhild's heart that he might join her suitors and win the victory. But he, as if in sport, threw the stone¹ so far that it flew outside the lists. Then he gracefully saluted the queen, bade her farewell, and sought again his boat.

“My troth I would not wish to plight to this warlike maid,” said he to himself. “Modest and prudent, gentle and kindly, must be the maiden for whose favor an honest knight shall stake life and fortune.”

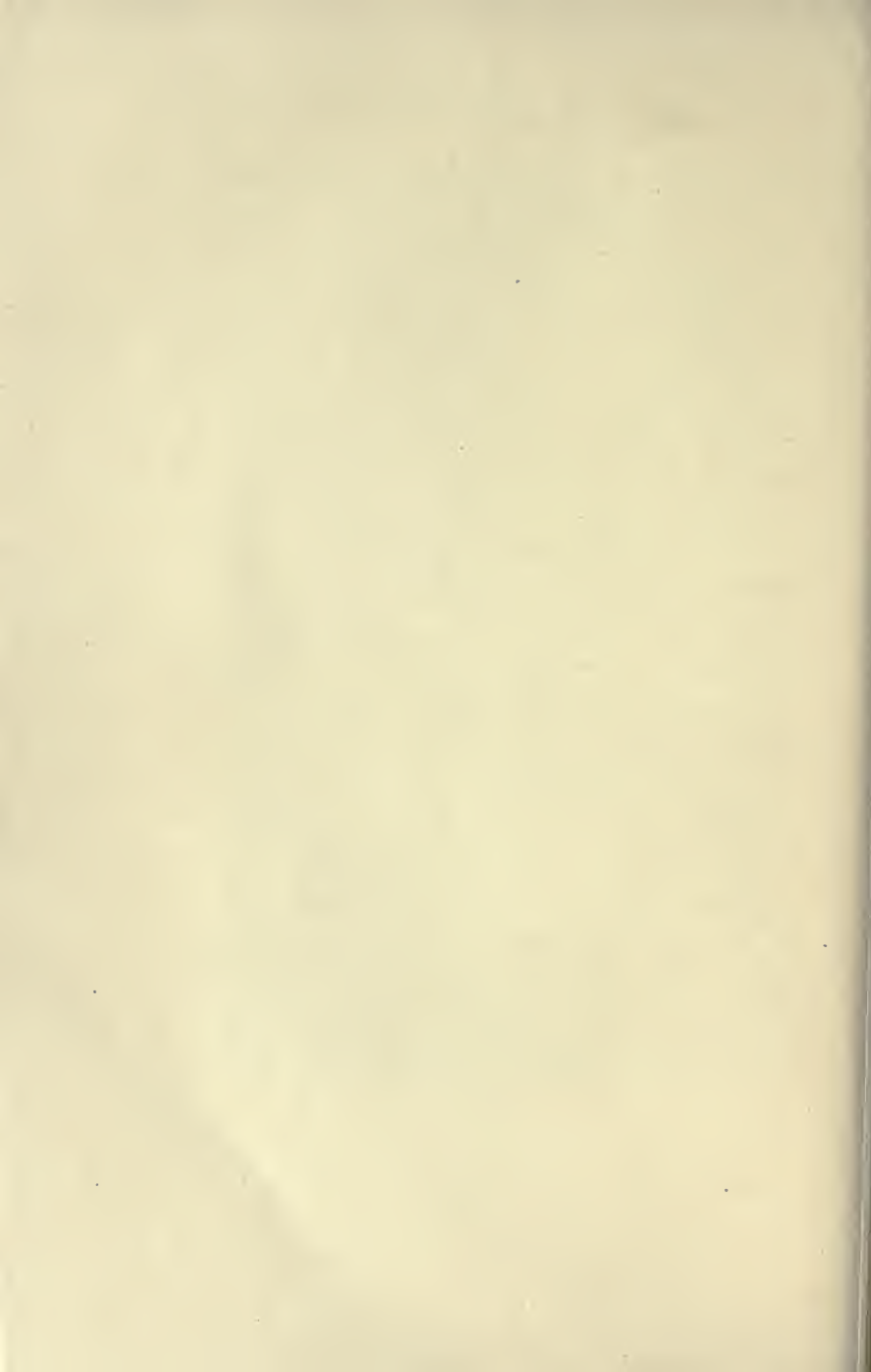
Then he proceeded on his way, now through

Valhalla. Wotan's purpose was not to reward the heroes, but to reinforce his own power, in anticipation of its prophesied overthrow. The Valkyrs are described as possessing great wisdom, and sometimes prophesying future events. Upon occasion they assumed the forms or the clothing of swans.

¹ See pp. 120, 123.



VALKYR



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well-tilled fields, anon through desert tracts where wild beasts and robbers lay in wait for the solitary wayfarer. And there did he often do dangerous battle, and there slew many a giant and monster. His deeds were sung by minstrels in hut and castle, so that far and wide his name was known and extolled. In the land of the Nibelungs,¹ through which his way led, the kings Schilbung and Nibelung summoned him to their court, that he might divide between them the great hoard which their father Nibelung had left them. As guerdon, they gave him the good sword Balmung,² a piece of dwarf

¹ This misty, mythical, underground kingdom cannot be geographically located. Of the Nibelung heroes and their home, Carlyle says: "Though they march to the Rhine or Danube, and we see their strong limbs and shining armor, we could almost fancy them to be children of the air. Far beyond the firm horizon, that wonder-bearing region swims on the infinite waters unseen by bodily eye, or, at most, discerned as a faint streak, hanging in the blue depths, uncertain whether island or cloud."

² This name is derived from the Gothic *balo* (O. H. Ger. *balo*, *palo*; M. H. Ger. *bal*), and denotes ruin, destruction, with evident reference to the deadly effect

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workmanship, and tempered in dragon blood. It cut through steel and stone without marring its edge. Gold and precious stones sparkled on hilt and scabbard, and a rich band with a glittering buckle served to attach it to the girdle. The hero divided impartially the measureless treasure; nevertheless both the brothers were discontented, and called him a stingy dog who wanted to keep the fattest scraps for himself, and bade their twelve giants¹ to seize him and confine him in the caverns of the mountain, where their treasure lay. Then flashed Balmung in Siegfried's hand, felling, like a thunderbolt, again and again a giant warrior. The kings, versed in magic, conjured up a thick mist. A storm arose, and the mountains trembled at the peals of thunder. All in vain! The giants fell beneath the strokes of the terrible sword—finally the two brothers also. And now the mist vanished and the sun poured its

of its blows. It is said to be of dwarf workmanship, because of the wonderful skill attributed to the smiths of this race. Indeed, other legends indicate that King Nibelung was himself a dwarf and dwelt in a hollow mountain.

¹ See notes on pp. 75, 104.

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rays upon the victorious knight. When the Nibelung folk, rushing to the scene, beheld such wonderful deeds, they hailed him as king. Meantime, from the depths of the mountain, there arose an avenger of the fallen. It was Alberich, the powerful dwarf. Well-armed with magic weapons, he attacked the bold knight. Now was he visible, now invisible, according as over his helm he donned or doffed his magic cap.¹ After a long struggle, Siegfried brought him down with a powerful blow. The weight of the sword and the strength of the hand that wielded it laid him low; but the blade did not cut through the magic armor. Siegfried would not deal a second blow to kill the defenceless dwarf, and this magnanimity made Alberich so

¹ The German word *Tarnkappe* (from O. H. Ger. *tarnjan*, to hide), here translated "magic cap," does not always denote a covering for the head only. It is sometimes a "cloak," a "cloud hood," a "mantle," and possesses the magic power of rendering its wearer invisible, or confers great increase of strength. Sometimes, as in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, it enables its owner to take any desired shape, or to be transported in an instant to any spot, however distant, where he may desire to be.

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submissive that he pledged his faith to his conqueror, and broke it nevermore.

And now no more opponents arose against the invincible hero; he was king of the Nibelungs; and the treasures¹ in the hollow mountain, as well as the magic cap of Alberich, belonged to him as captured booty. He was amazed, as he entered the underground world, at the endless quantity of precious metals and costly stones which were heaped up there. No less astonished was he at the sight of the vigorous and active dwarfs,² who all offered pledges of loyalty to him.

¹ A rich hoard comes into the hero's possession, in the Norse legends and in the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf*, by his slaying a dragon, its guardian; while here, and in other South German versions of this story, the slaying of the dragon and the acquisition of the treasure form two independent adventures.

² The dwarfs of German mythology correspond tolerably to the English gnomes. They are represented as small of stature, ugly of countenance, and unamiable in disposition; yet, with this ungracious portrait, earlier descriptions do not always coincide, but make them sometimes beautiful and benevolent, often powerful and skilful. The following myth accounts for their origin:

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After having arranged for the administration of the government, and having appointed competent men to office, the sovereign chose twelve noble knights for his retinue. The treasure afforded them rings, buckles, and chains of silver and gold. The whole company seemed like an assembly of kings under the lead of their chief, who outshone all the others by the nobility bestowed upon him by nature, as well as in the

In the golden age, when the gods were innocent and happy, there came to their abode three women from Jötunheim, the home of the giants. They were the Norns, the goddesses of fate, and with their advent began the reign of time and its evils. The lust for gold then seized upon the gods, and, after taking counsel together, they created the dwarfs, though from pre-existing germs, and condemned them to live in the caverns of the earth and develop the treasures there found. Thus we see that the possession of accumulated wealth by a dwarf, as of the Nibelung hoard by Alberich, is quite in consonance with the purpose for which the race was originally created.

Through the French legends, Simrock, in his *Deutsche Mythologie*, traces the connection between German and English elves, and makes Alberich the equivalent of Oberon, the king of the fairies in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

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richness of his attire. Thus the brave hero rode through many a land, everywhere stared at by multitudes, cordially greeted and hospitably received in cities and castles. The way tended homeward to the beloved father's house. He reached it without further adventure. He embraced father and mother, who only by vague report had received tidings of his contests. And now he rested many a day. Often he sat at the feet of his mother, as in the tender years of his boyhood. Then when he rose and stood before her in his warrior's panoply, her heart swelled with joy that she could call such a hero, son. Nevertheless, not long cared he to rest; his soul, thirsting for achievements, urged him forth into the battle of turbulent life, where a man proves his strength. He would fain wend his way to Worms on the Rhine, the seat of the famous Burgundian¹ knights. He would challenge

¹ Burgundia, or Burgundy, is a country of varying outline. At an early, unknown date, a people called Burgundians seem to have come from the far East and settled on the shores of the Baltic. Early in the fifth century they removed to the territory between the Rhone and the Alps, and there founded a kingdom bearing their name. After many years and many

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them to a game at arms. When he told his desire to his father, and begged his permission to go, a cloud gathered upon his parent's brow.

"My son," he said, "go not to the Burgundians. Among them are found the boldest knights, whom none have yet withstood: there is the grim Hagen, and the strong Ortewin of Metz, and King Gunther, together with his brother Gernot; they all guard the lovely maiden Chriemhild, whom already many a brave man has essayed to woo, and thereby lost his life."

"Ha! what a goodly report is this!" cried the youth. "The undaunted knights shall yield me their kingdom, and, if she pleases me, the lovely maid as well. With my twelve¹ Nibelungs, methinks I can enforce my will."

vicissitudes, the name of this once powerful kingdom disappeared from the map of Europe, save as applied to the comparatively insignificant French duchy.

¹ In legendary lore, hero groups of twelve are conspicuous, reminding us of the sevens in Oriental literature. Dietrich's heroes numbered twelve, and twelve were they who defended the *Rosengarten*. Twelve also were the Court on the Rhine. Twelve knights

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The warnings of the king and the entreaties of the queen were in vain : they were obliged to yield to the demands of their son.

sat at Arthur's Round Table, and twelve kings were slain by him in one battle. An embassy of twelve were sent wooing for King Rother, and twelve giants came to their aid. Many such examples might be added.

II

SIEGFRIED'S VISIT TO THE BURGUNDIAN COURT

IN the land of the Burgundians there dwelt a noble maiden named Chriemhild, the daughter of the rich king Dankrat and his sensible spouse Dame Ute,¹ who watched over her child with motherly care. The father, it is true, had years before gone to his long home, but his three sons, Gunther, Gernot, and Giselher,²—the latter not yet a full-fledged knight

¹ Pronounce, as in German, *oo-tě*. The form of this name found in the MSS. is *Uote*.

² Gunther, Gernot, and Giselher seem all to have borne the title of king, yet sovereign power was apparently the prerogative of Gunther alone. The old German word for *king* signified originally nothing more than a man of noble or royal parentage.

A correspondence is traced by W. Müller between the Gunther of the *Nibelungen Lied* and a Burgundian king of the same name who, in 436-7 A.D., engaged in a disastrous war with the Huns. The brothers of the latter are named in the Burgundian

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and called "the child,"—held their beautiful sister more precious than the costliest gem in their crown. The royal brothers were surrounded by brave knights to whom fear was unknown. At the head of all stood the grim Hagen of Tronje,¹ ugly of countenance and one-eyed,² but whom his campaigns in German

laws as Godomar and Gislahari—the resemblance of the three names to those of the three kings in the *Lied* is rather too close to be merely casual.

¹ Attempts to connect the legendary Hagen with any historical prototype have been few and unsatisfactory; nor has the origin of his patronymic been less troublesome. In various old legends we find other forms than *Tronje*,—as *Tronya*, *Troya*, *Troyn*, *Trong*, and *Troy*. It is generally referred to Tronek, near Treves. According to Lachmann, the South German legend of the thirteenth century has derived this title from the original *Troja* through the form *Tronege*. Simrock, however (*Deutsche Mythologie*, § 90), says: "In Hagen von Troje, the *Troje* signifies the lower world." In keeping with this view, Hagen, in spite of his stature and his kinship with the royal family, is said by Wagner to be the son of Alberich, a dwarf. (See p. 291.)

² Dr. Wägner makes Hagen one-eyed, in accordance with the *Wilkina Saga*, a Norwegian legend, and the Latin poem *Waltharius*, which is a translation from

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and foreign lands had made well-known and feared. He was also greatly honored as the uncle of the kings; no less so his brother, the Marshal Dankwart. Then came Ortewin of Metz, the Margraves Gere and Eckwart, Rumlolt, steward of the kitchen, the faithful minstrel Volker¹ of Alzey,² the cupbearer Sindolt, and the chamberlain Hunolt. These and other brave swordsmen served the kings and protected their kingdom.

The young Chriemhild seldom appeared among the men. As a tender little rose, scarce

the German, of which the original has been lost. The poet of the *Nibelungen Lied* either ignored or lost sight of this feature of the old saga.

¹ Pronounce Volker as though spelled with an initial *F*, since *v* in all German words has the sound of our *f*.

² Alzey (pronounced *äl-tsī*) is an old town of Hesse-Darmstadt, situated on the Selz, and numbering about five thousand five hundred inhabitants.

Carlyle, in his essay upon the *Nibelungen Lied*, refers to the minstrel as "a certain Folker of Alsace," but the propriety of so entitling him is not evident. In the legends, his patronymic is always "Alzey," which town seems to have been a family possession. (See note 2, p. 140.)

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from the bud, droops its head as though ashamed of its beauty and sweet perfume, so the maiden bowed her face abashed when the eyes of the knights rested upon her. She would then slip hurriedly away from the social circle and seek protection from contact with strangers in the solitude of her chamber or in the garden under the shady trees. Therefore, too, she loved not the tournament and the wild chase. Only once her brothers persuaded her to follow the blast of the horn through wood and grove upon a gentle steed; but when a deer, pierced by a hunter's spear, sank dead at her feet, she fled timidly home and hunted no more. The song of the birds in the garden pleased her more than the blast of the horns or the music of the minstrels in the revels. So bloomed the maiden amid the tumult of the court, like a lovely flower in a quiet, solitary valley.

Once Mother Ute came early in the morning to her chamber and found her disturbed and sad. She inquired into the cause of her distress. Then the maiden told her she had dreamed that she had raised a noble falcon and learned to love it dearly; but once, as it was on the wing, two wicked birds of prey, darting

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from a rift in the rock, slew it before her eyes.

“My child,” said the mother, gravely, “the falcon is the noble hero to whom thou wilt some day pledge thy troth; but the birds of prey denote two murderous knights who, with wicked cunning, seek his life. May God vouchsafe thee His help that thou mayest bring to naught the murderous plot.”

“Mother,” said Chriemhild, “do not talk to me of men. I dread to go among them. If there were only no men in the world, then one would hear nothing of quarrels and war and bloodshed.”

“Who knows?” replied Mother Ute, smiling; “women often shed more blood and inflict deeper wounds with their tongues than men with their swords. But for thee, too, the hour will come when to some noble knight thou wilt give thy hand in covenant.”

“Never!” cried the maiden. “Mother, thou dost frighten me more than the worst dreams.”

The two women still talked a good deal together and then went into the garden, where Chriemhild tended her flowers and fed her white doves. Towards mid-day there arose an unusual

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running hither and thither in the palace ; they heard the blare of horns and the clang of horses' hoofs. The queen hurried within to inquire what might be the cause of the commotion. She quickly returned and told her daughter that stranger knights had arrived ; that their garments and armor glittered with gold and precious stones, and even their steeds were royally caparisoned. She bade the maiden follow her, that with her own eyes she might see the gorgeous chieftains. The invitation was in vain, for the quiet garden seemed to the daughter pleasanter than the spectacle of knights in battle array. Then Dame Ute went alone to the balcony, whence she could see the stranger guests. King Gunther, too, who, with his brothers and many a valiant swordsman, sat in the hall drinking fragrant wine, had received the announcement of the arrival of strangers, and looked from the window as they rode into the court of the castle. Especially conspicuous was the leader, with a crown on his helm¹ and mounted on a snow-

¹ The early knights were accustomed to attach to their helms not only crests of flowing horsehair and plumes of feathers, but figures and devices of various

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white steed. No one recognized the new-comers. Then the king commanded to summon his uncle Hagen, for he was acquainted with all lands, and would surely be able now to advise well. Therefore the doughty knight appeared and declared the hero at the head of the troop to be no other than Siegfried of the Netherlands, who, when only a boy, had slain a hideous reptile and the powerful smith Mimer; then, grown to manhood, had, by famous deeds, possessed himself of the kingdom of the Nibelungs. He further advised that the king and the other warriors should go to meet him and receive him with honor, for, could they win him for a friend and ally, there would be no occasion to fear any hostile invasion of the lands of the Burgundians.

The speech of Hagen appeared wise and salutary to Gunther. With all his knights he went to meet the stranger guest, bade him welcome, and offered him shelter in his palace. At a sign from him servants made haste to relieve the

sorts. It finally became customary for individuals, or families, to adopt certain helm ornaments by which they might be distinguished on the field, and to bequeath these from father to son. Crowns were chosen by kings for this purpose.

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guests of weapons and steeds ; but Siegfried declined their services. He came, he said, to the Burgundians, to prove if they were indeed such valiant warriors as on all sides they were famed to be. He would stake the kingdom and the treasure of the Nibelungs as the prize for the victory ; nor would he demur at being twice or thrice outnumbered in the contest, if the kings on their part would stake Burgundia. To this the brave Ortewin objected, saying that was indeed an audacious speech, and that he was ready alone to win from the stranger knight armor and kingdom. In like fashion other Burgundian heroes protested. Instantly Siegfried sprang into his saddle and raised his powerful lance. But King Gunther, with friendly words, interposed between the belligerent knights.

“ Sir Siegfried,” said he, “ we desire from thee nor fortune nor life ; we would receive thee as an honored guest, and be thy faithful allies and comrades in so far as thou wilt pledge us the like.”

At the same time he offered his hand,¹ and

¹ It is said that shaking hands on meeting originated in the days of chivalry, when two friendly knights joined right hands in sign of trust, thus rendering themselves powerless to grasp their swords.

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the Netherlander grasped it, saying as he did so :

“God forbid that I should say ‘No’ to that ! I am your guest and ally, and should ye sometime come to me, no less cordially will I bid ye welcome as worthy comrades.”

Thereupon the guests proceeded with their host and his retainers into the Hall of the Kings, where, with banquet and revel, they cemented more firmly the bond of good-fellowship.

The brave hero of the Netherlands was well content in this garden of roses and grapes on the Rhine, and often he went with his Burgundian comrades, now for pleasure, now to hunt, up and down the river, over the blue-tinted mountains, and into the castles on the bluffs, and emptied many a beaker of noble Rhine-wine.

Tilting and tournament pleased him, for he was always victor. But he carried one wish in his secret soul of which he uttered no syllable. He longed, namely, to see the lovely Chriemhild once face to face, but this felicity was not granted him. He heard of the princess' charms, her virtues, her gentle spirit, and that but in-

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creased his desire for that which was denied him.

The maiden, too, heard much of the stranger guest, of the splendor of his apparel, of his hero's mien, and even his words were reported to her. That waked her woman's curiosity. Timidly she ventured once, when the knights were jousting before the palace, to peep from behind the slightly opened window shutter. There she caught sight of the hero outshining the other knights as the moon in the heavens outshines the stars. He seemed to her to be comparable to Balder,¹ the god of light, of whose beauty and magnificence the fathers had had so much to relate. And now his flashing eyes looked upward. Had he perhaps caught sight of her? She fled affrighted from the window. But, no, he either had not seen the timid maiden or paid no attention to her, for the tilting continued.

She returned to her screened window, and saw now how he deftly shot his spear so that it pierced a thick oaken beam, while the other spears recoiled without effect, or scarcely with

¹ See note 2, p. 181.

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the extreme point penetrated the hard wood. She saw him in wrestling, without effort and smiling, floor two or three combatants. Even the powerful Hagen himself in vain exerted all his strength to overcome the invincible man. He, too, at last, fire-red in the face from his effort and completely exhausted, was compelled to sink in the dust.

“Ah, valiant knight,” cried the victor, “thou hast cost me more labor than the kings of the Nibelungs with their dwarfs and giants. But, look there, good comrade, for thy pains let me offer thee this heavy gold ring, that, bye and bye, when I return to my home, thou mayst hold me in kindly remembrance.”

“Burgundians are rich enough; they need not thy gifts of gold,” answered Hagen, surlily, with a sidelong glance at the donor, and went his way.

Chriemhild was seriously minded to be angry with her uncle for his insolent reply; but still more was she occupied by the thought that the hero was about to return home. She wished that he would stay right along in Worms—nor go away at all. From this time she always stood at the screened window when the knights

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held their tournaments,¹ and Siegfried's form and features and all his motions were soon so vividly present to her eyes that they were even to be recognized in the designs of her needle-work.

A communication from the kingdoms of the Saxons and Danes interrupted the merrymakings at the court of Worms. The kings Lüdegast and Lüdeger sent a menace of war. They threatened to invade Burgundia with a great force of warriors, if tribute were not paid them as aforesaid. In case of refusal they purposed without delay to collect the tax in Worms and lay waste castles and towns. The king commanded that the bearers of the message should

¹ The martial games and exercises of the German heroic age, though often called tournaments, are to be distinguished from those gorgeous pageants of the Middle Ages, more properly known by this name. The earlier games were more varied in character, less splendid in their appointments, governed by laws and ceremonies less strict, and were not exclusively equestrian. The tournament proper is of French origin, and, in its fully developed form, can hardly be traced in Germany to a date earlier than the twelfth century.

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be hospitably entertained, as was ever the custom. Then he took counsel with his men as to what should be done. It was known how great was the might of the hostile chiefs, how ferocious their spirit, and how barbarous their warriors. In so short a respite a force could not be raised sufficient to meet the coming storm. So it came to pass that no decision could be reached. King Gunther, oppressed with care, strode through his well-tilled fields, which, perhaps, would soon be an abiding-place for wolves. There he found Siegfried, his bird on his hand, just returned from hawking. At the question as to what might be troubling him, Gunther gave Siegfried an account of the unwelcome embassy and the threatened devastation.

“Ah, King Gunther,” cried the dauntless knight, “hast thou not friends, and those who have eaten thy bread, ever equipped for war? Am I not myself thy faithful comrade? And if we have but a thousand valiant men under arms we can surely defend ourselves against the ravening wolves. Be of good heart, and say to the messengers that we will spare their lords the long journey to Worms and be their guests in their own country.”

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At this the king was glad, and did as his worthy guest had advised.

The blast of the war-horn was heard throughout Burgundia. The soldiery gathered in throngs. The knights prepared their battle-gear, spears, lances, swords. There, in bright coats of mail, stood Hagen, Dankwart, Volker, Ortewin, Sindolt, Hunolt, and the warlike Rumolt, also King Gernot with his retainers, and many of the folk and menials, in all several thousands; but brilliantly conspicuous among them was the Nibelung hero with his twelve knights. Without tarrying for further aid, the little army took the field, crossing the Rhine and hurrying on to Saxonland, where many a castle was breached and many a farm laid waste, before the powerful forces of the hostile chiefs could check them. When the spies reported that fully forty thousand Saxons and Danes were approaching, a position was taken and the grim Hagen as chief marshal arranged his forces. Meanwhile the bold Siegfried rode towards a lookout from which a Danish knight in glittering armor was observing the camp of the Burgundians. He was immediately attacked by the knight, and the charge of both was so

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powerful that their lances were shivered and their steeds thrown upon their haunches.

The brave knights never reeled in their saddles; but, as the fighting with swords began, the Dane could no longer hold his own. The terrible Balmung smote through shield and helm and coat of mail, and the knight sank bleeding to the ground. Siegfried leaped from his charger to give him the death blow, when the knight cried out that he was King Lüdegast, and would redeem his head with gold. Meantime a great number of his retainers came rushing up to bring succor to their fallen king. The hero of the Netherlands defended himself against them. Steed and rider sank beneath the fury of his blows.

“That is the wicked devil!” cried the surviving men, and they sought their safety in flight.

Siegfried came into camp with his prisoner, where he gave him over to the soldiery to be nursed and guarded. There was, moreover, no time remaining in which to question the knight, for the hostile forces were approaching. Their hosts extended beyond the range of vision. Scarcely had the chief marshal succeeded in

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bringing the Burgundian knights into position, when the attack began.

Cruel spears, stone hammers,¹ lances, flew hither and thither; shields and lances brake; blood flowed in streams; battle-axes and swords dealt mortal blows. But, however desperately the weak army of the Burgundians contended for the glory of victory, yet the outnumbering enemy bore down upon them ever more powerfully. Then the Nibelung hero cut a path for himself; with overpowering force he brake through the hostile ranks. Shattered shields, helmets, coats of mail, and corpses marked the bloody way that he opened for himself. Towards him the fierce King Lüdeger, surrounded by his retainers, turned his war horse. Siegfried tried to reach him, but ever more boldly the dauntless Saxons crowded upon him. His shield was shattered, his steed sank under him, and still he stood unshaken as a rock in the sea

¹ "All the northern nations made occasional use of the dart, the sling, the club with points, the lance, and the dagger; but their more peculiar weapon was the hammer of stone."—Meyrick's *Critical Inquiry into Ancient Armor in Europe*.

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against which the foaming waves break. The grim Hagen first worked his way through the hostile throng; then, too, Volker, Sindolt, Hunolt; and while they covered his rear, Siegfried pressed forward against the Saxon king. The whole fury of the battle concentrated itself about him, but in vain; already he stood before Lüdeger and brandished his sword. Then the king cried:

“Ha, Siegfried of Netherland, the devil hath led thee here! I must be thy prisoner!”

The battle was over. Horses and armor, many prisoners, and the camp of the enemy with rich treasures, were the booty of the victors. At once they turned homeward towards the Rhine. In gala array they marched into Worms, where they were received with great jubilee. Through all the land were their deeds extolled, but Siegfried's name went from mouth to mouth, and the singers sang his praise, and the women told their children of the wonderful hero from the Netherlands. King Gunther ordered a great triumphal festival to be celebrated, but not till some weeks later, so that the wounded warriors—as many as had up to that time recovered—might participate. It was done accord-

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ing to the king's command, and he also had rich gifts distributed among the brave warriors, since all had not secured for themselves a share of the booty. Likewise negotiations were entered into with Lüdeger and Lüdegast, the latter having recovered from his wounds. They offered a large sum as ransom. But, as many declared that a king's head might well be ransomed at a higher price, Siegfried cried :

“A king's head may be nor bought nor ransomed for gold, silver, or precious stones ; yet in chivalry it may well be won by a noble deed. Let the captive kings go free and unharmed, if they promise help to the Burgundians in the perils of war.”

When the days of rejoicing were over, the guests, richly favored with gifts, took their leave, and the Nibelung hero, too, proposed returning home. But, upon Ortewin's advice, the king begged him to tarry, because the women also desired to express to him their thanks. Gunther, therefore, summoned them for the following day to the king's court. His sister Chriemhild especially, he said to Siegfried, would reward the services he had rendered with a pressure of the hand, since one might not offer him gold.

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Joy flashed like a ray of light over the face of the hero as he said :

“ Then, certainly I will remain your guest for a time.”

When the king went to the women to inform them what he had promised, he feared opposition on the part of his sister. Instead, although indeed she blushed, she complied with his wish. At the appointed hour, most richly attired, she appeared with Dame Ute in the festive hall, where the knights were assembled ; which, in the *Nibelungen Lied*, is expressed as follows :

“ And now approached the fair one, e'en as the
morning glow
From out the veiling cloudland. There parted
from his woe
He who in pain had borne it for many a day
and night.
Grief fled the heart of all those who gazed upon
this sight.

There gleamed from her corselet gems, many,
rich and rare ;
Upon her cheek the rose flush was to the eye
most fair.

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And whoso saw her standing, he must confess,
I ween,
That in the world he ne'er had more wondrous
beauty seen.

The hero thought within him: 'What folly doth
this seem,
That I should woo and win thee! it was an
idle dream.
Yet, must I ever leave thee, ah! better were
I dead!'
And, at the thought, his cheek paled, and
flushed again to red.

And when the haughty knight stood before the
lovely maid,
A ruddy flame his cheek dyed; but then the
maiden said:
'Be welcome, royal Siegfried, knight ever brave
and true.'
Whereat he felt his spirit and courage rise
anew.

He bowed himself before her: in hers she took
his hand,
As he with knightly grace did before the damsel
stand.

U	Ez ist in alten mæren wunders vil geseit	
	von helden lobebæren von grozer chrihtit.	
	von friden hochgezitat von weanen von vilgen	
	von chiner ræchen strite myget u no wund hove saget	
	Ez wuhs in Burgonden ein schone magetin.	
D	at in allen landen niht schœner mohte sin.	
E	hrembilt was si geheizen unde was ein schone kint.	
D	amunbe mæren degene vil vertiesen den lip.	

FAC-SIMILE FROM AN OLD MANUSCRIPT OF THE LIED

To show the form of the verse in the Nibelungen Lied, as well as the style of the manuscript in the thirteenth century, a few lines are here given in fac-simile from one of the oldest manuscripts of the Lied in existence, viz., the "Hohenems-Münchenen Manuscript," preserved in the Royal Library of Munich since A.D. 1810. This MS. dates from the second half of the thirteenth century, and only one MS. of the Lied is older, that being commonly supposed to date from "the first half of the thirteenth century."

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With tender gaze, they looked then into each
 other's eyes,
The knight and too the maiden— 'twas done
 in seemly wise." ¹

The greeting, the pressure of the hand, the lover-look from eye to eye,—these were the tokens that two noble human hearts had found each other, that they had entered into covenant with each other for life and death. And no one in the brilliant assembly perceived the secret save Dame Ute, to whom it gave great joy; for she loved the two like a mother. She contrived also that, at the banquet, the hero should have a seat beside her whom he long had carried in his heart; that afterwards also, when the

¹ These stanzas approximate the form of the original passage in the *Nibelungen Lied*, the prevailing verse of the *Lied* being hexameter, and the rhymes falling in pairs. A seventh foot in each fourth line completes the normal *Nibelungen strophe*. This feature and the others mentioned were often sacrificed, perhaps to favor the peculiar demands of epic poetry. Many editions of the *Lied* mark the cæsural pause, as here, by leaving a space in the middle of the line, or sometimes by breaking the line into two parts, as in Volker's short song on p. 140.

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drinking bout began, he should take a pleasure stroll with her in the garden, and look at her flowers, whose names and significance she explained in words freighted with meaning. She said:

“ A soul is in the flowers, and oft it speaks to me,
And tells me of a heaven that mortal eyes may
see.”

He answered:

“ In love is found that heaven, in love's sweet joy
and pain.
It dies in true hearts never: eternal is its reign.”

In blissful mood Siegfried sought his couch, and that night had happy dreams. Early in the morning he rode out into the forest to hunt; but his thoughts were in the king's palace with the wondrous maiden. He allowed stag and deer to pass him in peace without making use of his weapons. In the afternoon, returning without prey, he found the castle and town in a great disturbance. Knights and tenants, vassals and folk, screamed and ran about confusedly. On the terrace stood Dame Ute, weeping and wringing her hands. No one explained to

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Siegfried. He heard detached, incomprehensible exclamations that filled him with too sore anxiety—

“He came from thence!”

“He has flown to the wild mountain!”

“Whither can he have carried her?”

“Ah! the sweet princess!”

None gave answer to the hero until he came to Hagen, who, silent and gloomy, tarried alone in the great hall.

III

CHRIEMHILD'S RESCUE FROM THE DRAGON

SIEGFRIED went up to Hagen and asked what had occurred. He gave answer:

“Ah! these are evil tidings; but that which is must be. As they said in our fathers' time, what the Norns¹ have ordained, that is ever for

¹ The Norns were the three goddesses of fate, Urd, Verdandi, and Skuld, presiding respectively over the past, the present, and the future. To their decrees even the inhabitants of Valhalla were subject. They were older than the gods themselves, and in the beginning had their abode among the most ancient race of giants. Afterwards they came to dwell by the holy spring, Urdar, past which, towards Midgard, the home of man, extended one of the roots of the great ash, Ygdrasil, the tree of life, which they faithfully watered, thus preserving the world. To the spring the gods came daily to hold council, travelling over a rainbow bridge. The Norns spun and wove their webs of fate, and cast its threads, or strands, as they are called, far and wide. A frequent, though less exact, use of the word

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the best. See, Siegfried, we were jousting, when there arose a whistling and roaring in the air like that of a thunderstorm; the sun withheld his light, as if he were strangled by the wolf Sköll.¹ The horror was a winged dragon to which hell never spawned a mate. He swept over us and away. We hurled javelins at him, but they rebounded like reeds from his horny scales. We heard a loud shriek, and saw how the monster had seized in the garden the lovely Chriemhild, whom he was carrying with him through the air, ever farther and farther heavenward, until he disappeared from our sight."

"Norns" includes women who prophesy and exercise magic. Jacob Grimm finds in the "Weird Sisters" of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* an echo of the tradition of the Norns,—“weird” being derived from “Wurdh,” another form of “Urd,” the name of the oldest Norn.

¹ In the *Younger Edda* it is related that the sun is tormented by two wolves, one, Hati, running in advance, the other, Sköll, chasing behind the glorious orb, which hastens its pace through the sky, in fear of being overtaken and devoured. The wolf in advance is really in pursuit of the moon, which it is prophesied he will capture. The mother of Hati and Sköll is a giantess, all of whose numerous progeny have the form of wolves.

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“And did you not give chase?” cried the Nibelung hero. “Wretched cowards! Children! Away to the nursery under the rod of the master!”

“Thou art mad indeed, young friend,” said Hagen, unmoved. “Art thou a griffin or a bat, that thou canst give chase through wind and cloud?”

“I'll seek him out, the monster, the whole world through, and in hell itself, if there he has his nest. In my chase I will find the maiden—or death.”

He hurried away, mounted his stallion, and rode forth by unknown ways, he wist not whither. A ferryman transported the dauntless hero over the Rhine. The man was in despondent mood, for he too was grieved by the fate of the maiden whom the dragon had seized, and, as he said, carried off over the river far into the wild Oden Forest,¹ to the Dragon-Rock. He

¹ This forest still exists and bears the same name as that given in the *Nibelungen Lied*, although it may now be more limited in extent. It lies between Darmstadt and Heidelberg, and is about forty miles long by twenty-five or thirty miles broad.

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could give no further information in reply to the hero's questions; but the latter had at least learned the direction towards which he must turn his steps.

So he roamed through the inhospitable mountains, sought and found shelter and food among kindly people, but no tidings of the Dragon-Rock. He came at last into a gloomy pine forest, where was to be found no road, nor path, nor house where he could lodge. On account of the obstructing branches, he was obliged to lead his horse by the bridle. As night came on, he threw himself exhausted under a tree, and allowed the horse to graze. At midnight he heard the sound of hoofs and saw a shimmer of light, which advanced towards him. He soon perceived a dwarf, who, on a spirited horse, rode through the pines. Upon his head he wore a golden crown surmounted by a glittering carbuncle. The hero accosted the dwarf to inquire about the way.

"It is well that we have met," said the little man. "I am the dwarf-king, Eugel, and live with my brothers and thousands of subject dwarfs here in the caves of the mountains. But thou art Siegfried of Netherland, whom I have

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often seen when with my magic cap I wandered invisibly among men. Now I will show thee the way out of this wilderness of pines, for thou wouldst never find it, but rather a grave there on the Dragon-Rock, where the invincible giant,¹ Kuperan, and the horrid dragon dwell."

When Siegfried heard this, he shouted for joy, so that the woods rang.

"Thou shalt receive a rich guerdon, the whole Nibelung treasure, noble dwarf-king," cried he, "if thou wilt guide me to the Dragon-Rock."

"That will never be, good hero," answered Eugel; "it would be to thy harm; for thou wouldst at once be felled by the iron rod of the giant or devoured by the monster."

¹ In Teutonic mythology, giants as a race are older than the gods. Their remotest ancestor was Ymir, a mystical being in human form, personating the elements and forces of nature, as yet undefined and inseparable. The gods also owed their origin to Ymir; but they represented warmth and light and beauty, while the giants were the personification of the sterner, darker powers of nature. The latter were the implacable enemies of the gods and the cause of the catastrophe which overtook them. Both these races are found in occasional communication with each other, as also with dwarfs and men.

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“Ha, lying dwarf!” cried the hero; “if thou wilt not direct me to the rock, thou shalt die by my hand.”

Already he had seized the little wight with a firm grasp, and shook him so that the crown fell from his head. Eugel, full of terror, promised to obey the powerful man, and, replacing the crown upon his head, rode in advance through the sombre pines. The morning was already breaking when they reached the object of their search.

“Knock there at the fast portal of that rock,” said the wee king, “for there Kuperan dwells. Art thou a hero so powerful that thou shouldst subdue the unconquerable giant, then will I, with all my companions, place myself at thy service; for the grim Long Legs lords it over us, and has forced us to hard labor.”

When he had spoken thus, he donned his magic cap and was lost to sight. Siegfried knocked at the portal, at first gently, then ever louder and louder until the mountain rang, while he shouted:

“Open, noble Kuperan! Give me the keys to the Dragon-Rock!”

The door suddenly flew open, and the giant

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almost ran over the hero, as, in angry mood, he rushed out. He carried a staff that fairly overtopped the trees, and at every stroke rang like a tocsin.

“Ho, chit! why dost thou wake me out of my morning nap?”

With these words, he aimed a blow at the knight, which, had it not missed, would have crushed him. The good knight sprang to one side, and the staff, whose edges cut like a razor, cleft a tree to the roots. The giant labored on until trees and rocks tumbled about; but his dexterous antagonist he could not touch. Then he dealt a blow with both hands, and his fearful weapon sank three fathoms deep in the ground. As he stooped to pull it out, the hero, with one leap, was near enough to reach him with his sword. Bleeding from three wounds and loudly bellowing, the giant rushed into his cave and shut the door behind him. The bold knight rattled and thundered at the iron gate, but it was fast as if by magic. Now he attempted with his good sword to force an opening, and soon there were holes and cracks. He spied into the interior, and saw how the giant was binding up his wounds and arming himself; how his helm

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and his coat of mail shone like the sun when it mirrors itself in the sea. Now the indomitable Kuperan came out and began the fight anew, and with greater caution, but not more successfully; for he had to do with the most adroit adversary.

“Ha, thou morsel of a man!” cried he, redoubling his blows; “here must thou lose thy life!”

Nevertheless, Siegfried inflicted upon him several wounds, and finally felled him to the ground. He begged for his life, promising that he would be a faithful friend and ally against the dragon, whom, without his help, Siegfried could not withstand. Upon this assurance the dauntless knight gave him his hand in reconciliation, bound up his wounds, and pledged him, in turn, faithful fellowship. As, however, he was going in advance into the cell, the treacherous giant dealt him a blow from behind on the helm, so that he fell senseless to the ground. Now, the dwarf, Eugel, was in the vicinity, unseen, and concealed Siegfried with his magic cap. While the indomitable giant, believing that he had escaped by magic, was groping around for him outside, Siegfried re-

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gained his strength, sprang up, tore off the cap, and, as the giant came storming up, felled him with the first blow. Once more he pardoned the traitor, but compelled him, however, to walk in advance.

At the entrance to the Dragon-Rock the faithless Kuperan sought again to murder the brave man; and now the knight would have spared him no longer had he not stood in need of his help to reach the maiden. The giant immediately fetched the keys hidden in a cleft of the rock, opened the portal, and led the hero through various corridors into a high, dome-like vault, in which a pleasant twilight reigned. Siegfried glanced about him, and there, pale and in bitter distress, sat she whom he sought, for whom he was ready to encounter battle and death—the royal maiden Chriemhild—beautiful as in her happy days, so now in her pain. He called her by name, hastened to her, ventured to clasp her in his arms. He felt that she returned his kiss, and this feeling gave him courage and strength to enter into combat with hell itself. But Chriemhild continued to weep; she implored him to fly with all speed, for the fiendish dragon was wont to come at this hour. Siegf-

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fried, on the contrary, desired nothing better than to hew the monster in pieces, that the precious maiden might not again be seized and carried away. Then the giant said that above, on the Dragon-Rock, there was a sword hidden, whose blade would cut through even the horny scales of the dragon. Following the giant, the intrepid knight, with the maiden, climbed up to the height. There, on the edge of the abrupt precipice, he perceived the hilt of a sword. As, however, he stooped for it, the treacherous fiend grasped him with intent to pitch him down. A frightful struggle began, but the wounds of the giant broke open afresh, his blood streamed, his strength failed, and the knight plunged him headlong into the abyss. A loud, merry laugh was heard, and the victor saw the faithful King Eugel, who then expressed his gratitude because Siegfried had freed the dwarfs from a cruel master. Immediately, at a sign from the dwarf, a number of little men appeared with food and wine, that the valiant knight might refresh himself after his hard fight. And he was, indeed, in need of such cheer, which he had lacked for two days; and the food which the maiden spread before him and the beakers which she

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offered him tasted better to him than all the viands of the royal tables.

A whizzing and whistling in the air, like a thunderstorm, through which was heard a hideous howl, startled the hero and the maiden, as well as the dwarfs, from their security. The latter fled to their hollow mountain, and Chriemhild begged, implored her hero to look to his own safety; but he was inaccessible to fear. And now the monster was seen approaching like a storm-cloud from which lightning flashes. It was his fiery breath, which, like raging flames, preceded him. The horror drew nearer, dark, hideous; the whole mountain trembled, so that the dwarfs feared it would cave in upon them. At Siegfried's entreaty Chriemhild withdrew into the cave; but even he could not stand his ground for heat, as the monster approached. Peering through a rent in the rock he saw that the flames gradually subsided, and now again he boldly climbed the hill. The dragon rushed upon him; with his claws he tore away his shield, tried to lay hold of him with his bristling teeth, and, as the marvellously brave man eluded his yawning jaws, his fire-breath blazed out again, so that the knight was once more

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obliged to fly. As soon as the heat subsided, the champion was again on the rock, and attacked the monster, now on the right, now on the left, carefully avoiding his jaws; but Balmung inflicted never a wound.

He defended himself from the claws by incredible leaps, and tried to strike the animal in the soft part of the belly. Then the dragon wound the coils of his tail so closely about him that he could not escape. In this extremity he seized Balmung with both hands and dealt a fearful blow, from which the rocks quaked. The knot was loosened; the cloven coils squirmed and turned and rolled down the precipice, where they were dashed to pieces. A second blow cleft the trunk of the monster in twain. The jaws, indeed, still snapped at the hero; but he pitched the pieces into the abyss, then himself sank as if dead upon the bloody ground, exhausted and almost suffocated by the poisonous fumes. When he regained consciousness he felt Chriemhild's arms about him, and found himself surrounded by the helpful dwarfs, who, by the burning of sweet herbs, had banished the noxious vapors.

The wee men guided the hero and the rescued

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maiden into their subterranean kingdom, where a luscious feast was prepared. Then Eugel related that the monster was once a man, beautiful in form and feature. A powerful sorceress, to whom he had proved faithless in love, cursed him to live henceforth as a reptile, unless, at the expiration of six years, a pure virgin should choose to espouse him.

The dwarfs, who had been liberated from their oppression, placed all their treasures at the service of the brave knight. He accepted indeed a lading of them, yet so that the beloved maiden should still have room upon the steed; then, accompanied by Eugel, he walked sturdily by her side. When they came to the end of the dismal forest, the dwarf gazed sadly upon him.

“Know, valiant knight,” said he, “that thy life will be short, but full of glory; thou wilt fall treacherously through envy of thy relatives; but thy fame will abide, and thy name will be extolled by minstrels¹ of the folk so long as the children of men people the earth.”

¹ The profession of the minstrel in the Middle Ages included knights and henchmen in its ranks, and, as

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With this, Eugel took his leave, and retreated into the pines.

When Siegfried returned with the maiden to the Rhine, he took the treasure from his steed, and sank it in deep water.

“What is gold to me,” said he, “since my life is to be short, but glorious? Bury it in thy bosom, mighty stream, roll thy waves over it, that they gleam the brighter. In the hands of the children of men, it is the wages of hell, for which the devil’s vassals strive; in the festive cup it mixes deadly poison; it sharpens the traitor’s dagger, that it may slay,—soon perhaps

we see in the case of Volker, its practice was not inconsistent with more martial duties. Sometimes the minstrel was a household retainer, and sometimes a strolling bard who visited castle and cabin, and, to the accompaniment of some stringed instrument, extemporized songs, or repeated the well-known favorites of the people. In an age and among a people where books and reading were unknown, these minstrel songs were the repository of the history of the nation, and embodied much of the religious beliefs of the people. Later, these songs became less gravely heroic in character and more exclusively devoted to the service of love and romance, as lyric song gradually succeeded the epic.

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myself. But still is the bright day mine ; still will I rejoice in fame and in the precious love which blooms for me in the heart of the fairest of maidens."

He called to the ferryman to take himself and his companion across.

The mourning in Worms for the princess and for the hero, whom they regarded as lost, was changed to rejoicing when the travellers arrived and told of their incredible adventures. Dame Ute clasped in her motherly arms the brave man and her rescued daughter, and called them both her children ; for she did not doubt that the king too would joyfully consent to the union of the noble pair.

"So be it, then, friend, well beloved," said Gunther ; "if thou wilt render me thine aid to win a high-born wife, then do I promise thee that, at the same time, thou shalt lead my sister home. I intend to pay my court to Brunhild, the proud queen of Isenland, whose powerful hand has sent many a suitor to his death."

"I know her well,"¹ answered the knight, "and I have seen, too, her fatal games ; but I

¹ See p. 68.

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doubt not that we shall be the victors. Make ready for the journey, that we may return home before the summer passes."

Pleased at the promised assistance, Gunther bade the women prepare fine garments, glittering with gold and precious stones, for he wished to appear before the proud maiden in regal state. Mother and sister trembled for the good man, but Siegfried bade them be of good cheer. He promised to stand by Gunther faithfully, and die or live with him. He thought the proud queen of Isenland was not so formidable as the monster on the Dragon-Rock. She might greet them perhaps with disagreeable speech, but not with flaring flames.

When the king proposed to summon a thousand knights as retinue, Siegfried dissuaded him from this, because Brunhild could easily oppose to them tenfold the number of valiant men. He thought that Gunther, the grim Hagen, Dankwart, and himself would amply suffice for the games, and for more serious conflicts as well.

IV

THE CONQUEST OF BRUNHILD AND A DOUBLE WEDDING

PROFUSELY decked with flags and with purple sails, the boat, on board which were the brave knights, made its way down the Rhine, and onward into the open sea towards Isenland.¹ When the wind fell, then Siegfried seized the oar, and their craft flew more swiftly

¹ In regard to the location of the mythical kingdom of Isenland authorities differ. Von der Hagen would refer it to Iceland; but the twelve days allowed the heroes, in some accounts, to reach their destination from Worms, would scarcely be sufficient for a journey even to one of the Danish islands. In common with Rassman, Simrock believes it more probable that the tradition of the worship of Isis on the Rhine, and at the mouth of the Scheldt, lies at the foundation of the legend of Gunther's journey to Isenland. He makes Brunhild equivalent to Isis, since, in the old sagas, both are sometimes called wives of Odin. He also mentions philological grounds in support of his theory. (See Simrock's *Deutsche Mythologie*, § 110.)

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than before through the foaming waves. At length the battlements of Isenstein¹ rose from the sea, and soon the castle towered aloft before the knights. They landed. Their rich attire glistened in the sunshine and proclaimed that royal honors were due. From the windows of the castle and from the balcony, women and fair maidens looked down upon them. King Gunther recognized the queen whom he sought, by her lofty stature and rich adornments. Brunhild fixed her gaze only upon the Nibelung hero, who was already known to her, and of whose wonderful battles and adventures the wandering minstrels had sung even in Isenland.

“Does he come as a bold suitor? Will he be victorious in the games?” So questioned her throbbing heart. “For him alone I desire the great prize,” said she, half aloud, “for he is the most valiant hero to be found among the peoples of the earth.”

The knights had meantime ridden into the court of the castle. Menials hurried to relieve

¹ In accordance with the foregoing note, Isenstein could be interpreted as the castle of Isis.

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them of their armor and steeds. Hagen indeed objected, but when Siegfried said that such was the law and custom at Isenstein, he yielded his armor, though unwillingly, to the patiently waiting attendants.

The valiant knights entered the hall, where Brunhild in regal attire awaited them. She greeted the guests according to the custom, distinguishing particularly the Nibelung hero. She said to him that she was delighted to see him again, that she had been told much of his wonderful deeds, and that she supposed he had returned to Isenland to take part in the contests. The hero assured her, on the contrary, that he was there only in attendance on King Gunther, his lord, who wished to join in the games, and who was indeed worthy of the high prize.

“That seems to me a strange story,” said the queen. “I weened thou wert thine own man, and not another’s.”

Thereupon she turned to Gunther with the words :

“Nor of the King of the Burgundians am I ignorant, for many a guest from foreign lands has told me of thy brave deeds. But who are

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the other knights,—this one here, sullen and grim of feature, and that young hero there, proud as if a kingdom were his?"

"Thy greeting rejoices me, most noble queen," said Gunther; "and I am ready to serve thee. The older knight is my uncle, the powerful Hagen of Tronje, and the younger his brother Dankwart, a no less valiant warrior."

"So would ye all three together do battle for the one maid?" said Brunhild, laughing. "That is not the fashion of the land."

"I alone am the contestant," replied the king; "I alone seek the costly prize."

"So be it!" said the woman. "The lists are open: prepare for the games!"

The knights were conducted to the court of the castle, where a large space was enclosed within the boundaries. Around it stood the retainers of the queen, all well armed. One of them announced with a loud voice:

"If any noble-born contestant ventures the threefold game with the queen, and wins the victory, she, together with the kingdom of Isenland, will become his own. Should he, however, in either contest, fail of victory, his fortune and his head are forfeited."

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Four men now with difficulty dragged into the enclosed space the stone¹ which the players should throw. It was large and heavy as a millstone. Three other men bore the ponderous lance which the maiden was wont to hurl.

“If the fiendish woman² plays with such

¹ In Munich there formerly lay a huge stone bearing an inscription which stated that in the year 1490 Duke Christopher, a Bavarian, had lifted this weight of three hundred and sixty-four pounds from the earth and thrown it a great distance. Another inscription, found in the same place, affirmed that Duke Christopher had made a leap of twelve feet from the ground.

We find frequent allusion to similar trials of strength and skill throughout the Middle Ages, and even in modern times in some parts of Switzerland and Germany, although unaccompanied by such extravagance of statement in regard to weight and measure.

² Brunhild, as we know her in the *Nibelungen Lied*, is gifted with qualities evidently superhuman, but yet inferior to those attributed to her in the older sagas,—belief in the supernatural having declined between the earlier compositions and the later. The *Eddas* represent Brunhild as a Valkyr, possessing all the power and wisdom of these favored daughters of Odin.

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toys," said Hagen, "she is the Devil's bride, and will never pledge her troth to child of man."

"Had we but our weapons," cried Dankwart, "neither the king nor we should perish here."

"We shall all escape," said Siegfried; "only be of good courage, King Gunther. I will fetch my hiding-cap from the boat, and, without being perceived, will stand by thee in good faith as a friend."

He hurried away, while all the people gazed at the queen, who, surrounded by fair women and courtiers, strode by in glittering armor. Her helm sparkled with gems, so too her cuirass and the conspicuous iron shield which, as certain of victory, she gayly carried on her arm.

"Is it then fair, Madame Queen," said Hagen, "that thy men are armed and we are without weapon?"

"Let the armor of the knights be brought," commanded Brunhild; "nevertheless, they must here lose their lives. Behold the man who will behead ye when, as ever, I am victorious in the contest."

The heroes looked in the direction which she indicated and perceived a man in blood-red gar-

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ments, who carried in his hand a glittering, keen-edged axe. They shuddered; but when their accoutrements were brought, and they stood under arms, they were reassured, and the dauntless Dankwart called to the man in the red garments:

“Thou must sharpen well thine axe, so that it will cut through steel rings,¹ else will I cut off thine own head with my sword.”

The king, too, now demanded in loud, firm tones the opening of the game, for he perceived that his comrade Siegfried stood invisible beside him.

The blast of trumpets and the roll of drums announced the beginning of the life-and-death

¹ During the Crusades various forms of chain mail came into use, which were succeeded, in the fourteenth century, by plates or scales of iron. We are assured by Anna Comnena, daughter of Emperor Alexis of Constantinople, that the coat of chain mail in the eleventh century was known only in the north of Europe. The poet of the *Lied*, therefore, has clothed the Burgundian heroes with the armor of his own day rather than that in actual use in the ancient capital of our three kings. In such anachronisms poets and painters abound—Shakespeare not less than any.

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contest. Brunhild advanced to the stone, grasped and raised it with both hands, and threw it so powerfully that it flew six fathoms away. Then she bounded after it lightly as a bird flies, with a single leap, so that the tip of her foot touched the stone. Loud applause from the crowd greeted the royal competitor. Then followed unbroken silence as Gunther advanced. Backed by Siegfried's strength, he raised the stone, swung it back and forth with one hand, and hurled it even a fathom beyond the cast of the queen. It is true that his hand was guided by a far stronger man. The same bore him up, too, in the leap, just as the strong eagle bears his prey, even beyond the stone he had cast, to where he now stood as victor before the astonished multitude.

"Hail to King Gunther!" shouted Dankwart, the young knight; but no one joined in the joyous cry, for Brunhild rose with angrily flashing glance and seized the mighty lance with the sharp steel tip.

"Now guard thy life, proud king!" cried she, and hurled the shaft so vigorously that, with a crash, it broke through the rim of the shield, and would have felled the man despite his coat

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of mail had not the wondrously valiant Siegfried proved his savior by turning the rim sideward, so that the deadly tip glanced off harmless. He then tore the shaft out of the broken shield, turned it about so that the blunt end¹ was towards his antagonist, and, guiding Gunther's hand, hurled it with force at the warlike maid. The queen tottered backward and fell heavily, making her armor ring.

The game was over, the victory won. Brunhild rose. She stood with quiet bearing before the people. But whoever could have looked into her secret heart would have seen how shame, rage, and fierce thirst for revenge, like poisonous vipers, reared their heads there ready to break forth with destructive fury. She summoned her retainers, and called upon them to pay homage to King Gunther, who was now her king as well. She dispatched special couriers through all Isenland to the burgraves and their

¹ This delicate gallantry belongs not to the king, but to Siegfried, who is usually marked by generosity and a fine sense of honor. Yet he had not hesitated to win his own bride by the help of a confessed *ruse de guerre* in this contest that should, at the same time, win the athletic queen for his friend Gunther.

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men, that within three days they should journey to Isenstein and take oath to their liege lord. She begged the knights to accept as guests the hospitality of the castle for this space of time. Further, she inquired after the Nibelung hero, and, as he just came up and remarked that he had been looking to the boat and the crew, she thought him an unfaithful vassal because he esteemed it of small importance to be present at the contest of his lord.

“I would not have believed,” added she, “that in any land there were a man so valiant as the hero of the Netherlands—unless some trick of magic has played a part in the games. Of that I shall doubtless shortly be aware.”

A banquet was prepared in the hall. There the guests sat and drank rare wines with the valiant men of the castle, while fair women filled and passed the beakers; yet was the queen not at the feast of the heroes. Gunther seemed now elated, now depressed in spirit. He was ashamed of the victory by a strange hand, and again he rejoiced at the maiden he had won. Hagen drained many a beaker, yet he talked little and looked on often right grimly when the junketing, drinking knights laughed

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and made merry together. Late in the night the heroes from the Rhine were conducted to their common apartment. As without misgivings they betook themselves to rest, the Tronjan warned them to look to their arms, because it appeared to him that the queen had an evil counsel in mind; she had sent for the burgraves with their men that they might capture them, the knights from the Rhine, and deliver them over to the red man with the axe. It was ill done that they had not mustered a thousand well-armed Burgundians for the journey. At this speech the knights were troubled. Then the valiant Siegfried cried that he would soon enough bring together a host of brave Nibelungs; and went while it was still night to the boat on the strand. The cables were loosed: the boat, aided by a fair wind and the powerful strokes of Siegfried's oar, flew through the dancing waves towards Nibelung Land. The hero reached one of its bays the very next night and hurried immediately to the castle. He found it well guarded, for the porter, an invincible giant, attacked him with his spear when he demanded admittance. His vigorous blows awakened the dwarf Alberich, the keeper

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of the treasure, who likewise immediately fell upon the knight. Siegfried overcame both without harming them. Only then did he make himself known. He rejoiced over their faithfulness and bade them furnish a thousand well-armed men from the castle to go with him to Isenland. The loyal servitors did according to his command. In a short time the well-appointed troops were embarked on the hastily-rigged boats and sailed over the swelling sea.

The third morning Gunther and Hagen stood anxiously on the watch, for many of the burgraves who were summoned had already arrived with their men, while sinister looks and covert whispering suggested to the king suspicions of no agreeable character. To his relief he now saw the boats skimming along the strand, the knights in shining armor disembarking and in multitudes taking their way to the castle. Hagen spied out the brave Siegfried at the head of the valiant men, and thought:

“Now, though all Isenland rise in arms, yet shall we survive.”

The queen, on the contrary, began to be concerned lest a hostile host contemplated making conquest of her kingdom. Then Gunther com-

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forted her, calling her attention to the Netherland hero, and said:

“He has only brought my royal retainers¹ over the sea that they may attend upon my state.”

If the high-born lady were pleased with the guests and their errand, is not known to us; however, she received the folk readily, had quarters prepared for them, and, with courteous manner, offered her hand to the brave hero who led the warriors. Then they had a deal of jousting and merrymaking, with song and revel, and wine flowed freely.

In the course of the following days arrangements were made for the administration of the government. Brunhild distributed many gifts, garments, suits of armor, steeds, and ornaments among those who had need of them. When, at last, she took leave of her country and people, and appointed a worthy man, her mother's brother, as her regent, there was much weeping among the people, and she herself was not light

¹ Another piece of deception to support the first, in which Siegfried was represented as Gunther's vassal.



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of heart, for she held that she should never again see her beloved home. Howbeit, Gunther urged their departure, for he would fain celebrate his happy nuptials in Worms.

After a fair voyage, how the knights greeted the noble Rhine, its Elysian Fields,¹ its courts and proud castles, its vineyards and shady groves! They weened there could be no better land in the wide world than the Rhine land. Slowly, on account of their numerous train, they rode along the river. Therefore it seemed good to the king to send in advance a knight who should bear comfortable tidings to women and kinsmen, and prepare a festive reception for the honored guests. For this he turned to Hagen, but he excused himself, because he understood not dainty speech seemly for high-born ladies. He rather referred him to Siegfried, who would

¹ This name was applied in Greek mythology to the paradise in which the souls of the virtuous after death were rewarded by the enjoyment of perfect bliss. Homer describes it as blessed with another sun and other stars, enjoying an everlasting summer, refreshed by gentle zephyrs,—exhibiting, in fact, as implied in this passage, all that is most lovely in earthly conditions.

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be versed in such matters. Gladly the Nibelung hero accepted the commission, for he had long found the journey too lagging, and he had gladly ridden day and night to see again the lovely maid of Worms. He therefore took his leave and rode rapidly away without resting longer by the way than was necessary for his noble steed.

At first his arrival excited much alarm, for it was feared that all his comrades had been killed in the distant country. But when he reported the happy results of his journey, there was great rejoicing. The young Giselher, whom he first encountered, rushed in advance to the women.

“Mother! dear Sister!” he cried, “give the herald rich guerdon! He brings tidings that the knights are all safe and of glad heart; that they bring with them the proud Brunhild, who, by and by, will be Queen of Burgundia.”

Scarcely had he finished this speech, when Siegfried entered. Glowing with joy and love, Chriemhild came towards him.

“Welcome, Sir Siegfried!” said she. “What shall I offer thee as recompense, since thou thyself art rich?”

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“ Ah, Sister,” cried Giselher, “ give him a kiss ! that will seem to him a rich present.”

Then the maiden blushed still more, but she did not refuse to do as her brother bade.

When the first delirium of joy was over, they began to prepare for the reception of the distinguished guests. The women selected their finest attire and richest ornaments for the following day, on which Gunther with his royal bride¹ was expected. Watchmen were stationed in the towers to proclaim the news, when they should perceive the imposing train. The whole day they waited ; at last, just as the evening sun mirrored itself in the Rhine, the horns of the watchmen sounded from all the towers. Immediately, the noble knights, together with their retainers, put themselves in motion. In their midst, upon proud, richly caparisoned steeds, rode Dame Ute and her blooming daughter, with their female attendants, and the heroes, Ortewin, Gere, and others. But, by the side of Chriemhild, rode the val-

¹ The words “ bride ” (*Braut*) and “ bridegroom ” (*Bräutigam*) are applied in this text, as in the German, to the betrothed.

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liant knight of the Netherlands, easily recognized by his glittering armor and flashing eyes, which gleamed like stars beneath his helm.

Many boats lay on the other side of the river, in readiness to transport the king and his train. As they disembarked, there was no end to the greetings and kisses. Dame Ute immediately recognized Queen Brunhild by her lofty stature and imperious carriage. She embraced her as her honored daughter; and Chriemhild, too, kissed her cordially, and promised to be a true sister to her. Brunhild looked with delight upon the modest, lovely maiden, returned her kiss, and also pledged her friendship and tender love. So the two women stood together, arm in arm, the one grand and beautiful, unfathomable as a starry night; the other bright, blooming, needing and bestowing love, like a bright May morning. One could not tell to whom to give the preference. But Siegfried knew well; and, on the return, remained ever at the side of the maid of his choice, exchanging with her, now merry and now serious speech.

The Kings' Hall was decked gayly, like a garden of flowers, with branches and with fragrant blossoms. Wreaths and garlands encir-

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pled the supporting pillars, showing between the decorations gleams of the gilded capitals and marble shafts. Already the guests were assembled there, and servants were bringing viands. Then King Gunther came forward.

“Beloved comrade Siegfried,” said he, “the time is at hand when I am to fulfil to thee my promise, since thou hast redeemed in good faith thy pledge to me. Come hither to me, that the worthy guests may hear what we say. And thou, too, Sister Chriemhild, do not decline to stand before me.”

When they had both done according to his words, he proceeded:

“Dost thou desire, beloved comrade, my sister for thy spouse, and wilt thou honor and cherish her as such?”

The hero answered with a loud and joyful “Yes.” Thereupon the king spake in similar wise to Chriemhild. A glowing red mantled her cheeks; she dropped her eyes, and murmured a low “Yes.”

“Then, shall ye to-morrow,” said Gunther, “celebrate your nuptials with me and my royal bride, Brunhild, provided that Mother Ute raises no objection.”

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In lieu of reply, Dame Ute embraced each of the bridal pair and invoked heaven's blessing upon this union.

At the banquet Brunhild sat, cold as marble, by Gunther's side. Chriemhild, talking pleasantly, sat by her bridegroom, often returning a pressure of the hand.

"Lord of the Burgundians," said Brunhild to Gunther, "I wonder that thou art willing to give thy sister to one of thy men, a vassal, when she were worthy of the richest king."

"Speak not so," replied the chieftain. "Siegfried is as much a king as myself; he is the king of the Nibelungs; and some time, after the death of his father, all the Netherlands will be subject to him."

"That is verily a marvellous story," she continued. "Why, he acknowledged himself a vassal!"

"I will tell thee all about this later," concluded he; "but now speak no more about it."

The following day the double wedding was celebrated.¹ Dame Ute conducted her daughter-

¹ The offices of the Church were not in general requisition on the occasion of marriages until the end of

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in-law through the halls of the palace, showed her the rich treasures she could now call her own, and the apartments which, for the future, she was to occupy. There were mirrors of Venetian glass, crystal vases, couches soft as velvet, curtains of red and blue silk, and many other costly articles.

“That is all thine own,” said the aged queen, “and thou canst control it according to thy pleasure.”

“Yes, Mother Ute,” answered the young wife, “the Burgundians are rich in treasure and great in power; but they are poor in wise counsel and weak in action, else were King Gunther never come to Isenland.” Without awaiting a reply she passed on.

The banquet was over. Long after nightfall the guests sought their apartments. So did Gunther also, with his queen. When they

the twelfth century. Publicity was, however, essential to the legality of the bond; and weddings were celebrated with greater or less splendor, according to the wealth and rank of the contracting parties. Sometimes the festivities lasted for three or four weeks, and the numerous guests received, together with the usual hospitalities, many costly gifts.

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came to her chamber, she stepped before him so as to bar the way, saying :

“This is not thine apartment. Thou canst doubtless find a better in the palace.”

Nevertheless he did not allow himself to be repelled by words. On the contrary, he grew more insistent, and sought by force to obtain admittance to the room. A violent struggle began ; yet in a short time she vanquished him, bound him hand and foot with her girdle,¹ a stout strap, and left him lying so before the portal. There, indeed, the livelong night he had a sorry chamber.

In the morning, when the servants were already stirring, the proud queen loosed the fet-

¹ In a description of mediæval costume, Professor Büsching gives the following: “The girdle deserves special mention, in that it was common through all the Middle Ages, and was found among laity and clergy, noblemen and folk, knights and squires, women and men. The whole dress of the Middle Ages made the girdle a necessity, since loose, full garments were commonly worn, which required confinement about the hips. The women, skilful in weaving and embroidery in mediæval times, wove and ornamented these girdles, and worked figures upon them.”

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ters of her lord, bade him now betake himself to rest, and never again attempt to invade her apartment.

Throughout the whole day King Gunther was not in happy mood like Siegfried and the other guests. He looked almost with horror upon his wedded queen, and oftentimes forsook the revels to wander alone in the garden. There the hero of the Netherlands encountered him, and sought to know why he was so discomforted. When he had heard the singular story, he cried:

“Be of good heart, dear comrade! Since we have vanquished the haughty woman in the games, I ween we can also burst the barred portal, that thou mayst gain admittance. At night, when thou dost accompany the queen to her chamber, I will follow after, shrouded in my hiding-cap. Extinguish then the candle, that I may take thy place, and then shall she try her great strength on me.”

“Ah, good comrade,” said Günther, “I have fears for thy life! We have done ill to bring her from Isenland to the fair Rhine,—the bride of hell, as Hagen says, who derived her great strength from evil spirits.”

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“And if a demon, in fact, has taken up his abode within her,” quoth Siegfried, “verily I will combat him, and ween I’ll prove his master. This night I shall be near thee in my invisible cap.”

The kings returned to the banquet, Siegfried as ever, light of heart, Gunther oppressed by many cares. The latter, when midnight invited to rest, went with Brunhild, as the night before, to her chamber, extinguished the candle as preconcerted, and perceived immediately that the helpful knight took his place. Siegfried, without regarding the threats of the woman, pressed boldly towards the entrance. She seized him with great force, and attempted, as before with Gunther, to bind him with her girdle. She crushed his hands so that blood spurted from beneath the nails. Such scuffling and wrestling twixt a knight and a maid was never known. Nathless, he put forth all his hero’s strength. He crowded her into a corner, so that all her bones threatened to break. Gasping and groaning, she begged him only to spare her life, and she would henceforth, in good faith, do according to his will. As soon as the hero of the Netherlands heard this, with soft steps he slipped

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away, and left to Gunther the semblance of a victory.¹

The festival lasted eight days longer. Then the guests took leave and departed, richly laden with gifts. Siegfried, too, made ready for departure with his wife. As the young Giselher proposed, and Chriemhild wished, it was designed that he should share the royal treasures with his brothers-in-law; but he declined, because the inexhaustible Nibelung hoard was his. On setting out, the three kings accompanied him a long way with many knights and mounted men, so that one verily thought it meant the invasion of an enemy's country. At the place where they were to part, the whole army encamped. There the friends ate and drank once more together, and Volker, with other minstrels, to the sound of stringed instruments, sang of the Rhine and its mountains and its vine-clad hills.

“Ha, how they cry like children and kiss

¹ If the queen depended upon this trial of strength to satisfy herself that no “trick of magic” had played a part in the games at Isenstein (see p. 125), she is now doubly deceived, notwithstanding her triumph of the previous night.

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and fall upon each other's necks!" muttered Hagen to himself, as he saw how the friends took leave of each other.

"Look thee, Volker," he said to his comrade, "it is but child's play;¹ for let them once get in a passion of rage and hate, and they would kill each other like poisonous snakes; and we should do likewise, should the Norns so ordain, as they used to say in olden time."

Volker struck the chords boldly and sang:

"Once swore unto his comrade
A fiddler² wise and brave,
'Not treachery, but troth, lad,
I pledge thee till the grave.'"

"Of such fiddlers, indeed, there are not many in the world," said Hagen.

¹ The envious spirit of Hagen here manifests itself; and to the minstrel Volker, with a better sense of honor, it suggests possible treachery, as he indicates in the song.

² Volker's native town of Alzey has preserved an interesting reminiscence of the art for which at least one of her sons was famous. A viol is conspicuous in the armorial insignia of the town, and, on this account, the inhabitants of this region bear the nickname of "the fiddlers."

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Trombones and trumpets interrupted their talk together, announcing the leave-taking.

“Joy go with thee,” cried Gunther, once more giving his hand to his sister. “Two-and-thirty noble maids of Burgundia go with thee, who will ever mind thee of thine old home. I will send with thee also a hundred mounted men as fitting escort, and our uncle Hagen will command them.”

That grim knight heard these words, and rose in displeasure.

“The Tronjans have never been the slaves of women,” said he. “If Gunther have need of such, let him seek them elsewhere. The Tronjans are prepared to serve only the King of Burgundia and his queen; and this office will also the last of his race fulfil in good faith, with sword and lance, however, wherever, and whenever the chieftain will; other service he declines.”¹

¹ This refusal is ventured upon, partly because of the high rank of Hagen and partly because he is a far stronger character than the king. However, his refusal does not seem so unreasonable, since we find later (see p. 178) that Eckwart, who takes his place, remains permanently a retainer of the court of the Netherlands.

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The king, in perplexed amazement, kept silence ; therefore Siegfried spake, and said :

“Keep thee snugly at home, good comrade ; there, in junket and drink, take thy comfort ; out in the strange world couldst thou be hurt. In thy place the valiant knight Eckwart will doubtless be ready to take service with the sister of his lord.”

The knight called upon joyfully accepted the office conferred, and thereupon the guests parted from their hosts and went their way.

It was a beautiful day when the travellers arrived at Santen,¹ not far from the Lower Rhine. Heralds, sent in advance, had announced their coming ; therefore the whole town, many of the country-folk, and, above all King Siegmund, the hoary hero, and the good Dame Sieglinde, were prepared for the reception of the distinguished guests. How the old people embraced their son and the beautiful daughter ! How they rejoiced that all anxiety for their darling was over ; that he had now returned covered with glory ! The king summoned at once the vassals of

¹ The home of Siegmund, in the Netherlands. (Written also *Xanten*.)

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the kingdom, and, amidst great jubilee on the part of the folk, placed the crown upon the head of his worthy son. Likewise, also, did the queen to Chriemhild, and the courtiers and castle retainers shouted loudly :

“ Hail to our young and glorious king and his queen ! May they, like their ancestors, reign long and happily ! ”

Time seemed to be fulfilling the wish of all the people, for many a year flew by without the occurrence of a mishap. Dame Sieglinde had also the happiness to cradle in her arms a grandson, to whom his father gave the name Gunther, in honor of his brother-in-law on the Rhine, even as the Burgundian king had called by the name Siegfried a little boy whom Brunhild had presented him. Not long did the aged queen enjoy this happiness. She fell ill and died, occasioning great mourning in the house. But peace reigned continually in the kingdom ; for no hostile neighbor, nor robber-folk, nor evil-minded vassal ventured to raise the lance against the lord of the Nibelungs, the vanquisher of the fiendish dragon.

Eight years may perhaps have passed, when a message came from Burgundia, inviting the

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kings and all their kinsmen to the festival of the summer solstice.¹ The messengers declared

¹ The days of the summer and the winter solstices (June 21 and December 21) were seasons of festivity among the pagan Teutons. Upon the advent of Christianity, the priests, finding it impossible wholly to suppress observances hallowed by time and association, endeavored to reconstruct certain of them, so that where they were continued it should be under Christian names, or, at least, in commemoration of Christian events. Thus, to this day, we find pagan customs and Christian sentiments commingled in the celebration of church holidays corresponding to heathen fêtes. In place of that of the summer solstice, we have St. John's Day, and even at the present time the heathen custom still obtains, in some parts of Germany, of building fires upon the hill tops in the celebrations of this day. About these danced youths and maidens, singing ancient rhymes, and, as a final, indispensable ceremony, leaping over the glowing embers.

At the winter solstice, the time of the re-birth of the sun, in place of the festival of Balder, god of light, we celebrate the nativity of Christ, the "Light of the World." The Christmas tree and the Yule log antedate Christianity. The heathen Yuletide festivities did not, it is true, include the lighted tree with its gifts; yet fire was an important feature in the celebrations; and, in other connections, we learn of

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that the Burgundians intended to celebrate the festival with great magnificence, and desired that the dear friends and relatives, who so long had tarried far away, might be present.

“Ye have earned rich guerdon, ye men from the Rhine,” spake Siegfried, when he heard the story. “We ourselves, my wife Chriemhild and I, ofttimes have thought to journey to the Burgundians; that shall now surely be done.”

Father Siegmund, too, was at hand, and said that he also would go, and hoped to find at Worms still many a doughty knight with whom he could talk of old times and battles fought. After all this had been talked over, preparations were made for the journey to the Rhine.

trees whereon were hung propitiatory offerings and lights, in return for which the gods were expected to dispense favors. In German, the very name for Christmas (*Weihnachten*) is of heathen origin.

V

TREACHERY AND MURDER

“**K**ING GUNTHER,” spake Brunhild one day to her spouse, “why comes not thy brother-in-law Siegfried, like other subject princes, to our court? I would gladly see him here, and also his consort Chriemhild, thy sister. Bid them that they come to court.”

“I have already told thee,” replied the chieftain, “that my brother-in-law was, like myself, a powerful sovereign, being king of the Nibelung Land and now also of the Netherlands.”

“Did I not,” said she, “in Isenland hear him declare he was your vassal? Wilt thou deny this?”

“That was only for appearance sake, to further my wooing,” replied he, with ill humor.

“And thou dost deny it,” returned she, “only to exalt thy sister’s station.¹ But I would see them both again at our court.”

¹ Among the early Germans, the distinction between bond and free was such that marriage was rarely con-

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“Very well,” said he, soothingly, “I will send messengers to summon our dear kinsmen to the festival of the summer solstice, which bidding they will not decline.”

He went and did as he had said. Brunhild stayed behind alone, and thought of many things :

“There he goes, the husband of the once so powerful maiden, who weened she could decide the fate of battles, like the Valkyrs¹ in the time of the fathers ; and he, a weak reed, that a breath of air sways hither and thither. How

tracted across the caste line. Indeed, among the Lombards such marriage was a capital offence. Later, when kings, to secure a great retinue and military service, had heaped honors and wealth upon their vassals, and they upon similar terms had obtained a lesser following, the powerful vassal became the rival of his lord and the superior of the poor freeman. The latter often bartered his freedom for the protection of some powerful bondman. Thus they who at first were literally servants of the crown became its nobles, to the final exclusion of those whose pretensions rested upon birth alone.

¹ This simile was doubtless suggested by the older versions of the myth, where Brunhild was a Valkyr in fact.

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Siegfried towers above him! a hero to whom the world belongs, but a bondman! Truly he could never, never raise his eyes to the Queen of Isenland, and she would have scorned him, and would scorn him still in this very hour."

The distinguished guests from the Netherlands came to the festival of the summer solstice, and were received with rejoicing. Of banquets and tournaments and gala processions, and of the music of the stringed instruments, there was no end. The hoary Siegmund grew young again, as he said, when he recounted his battles, and sociably gossiped about the good old times, with Dame Ute, whom he had known as a little maiden. The young queens were seen always together. They went arm in arm to the temple, or to the banquet, or to look on when the valiant knights tried their strength at tilting. Only to the chase Chriemhild did not accompany her sister-in-law. She did not like to see the shy game run down by the dogs and finished by the knights with their spears.

Once she was looking down from the balcony, with Brunhild, upon the knightly games, where Siegfried, in the throwing of the stone, in the hurling of the lance, and in leaping and

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running, far excelled the other men. In the joy of her heart, she spake :

“Ha ! how superb my *Friedel*¹ looks among the knights, like the moon among the pale stars ! His eyes beam like sunlight ; his noble head, his powerful form betray the royal hero.”

“He well deserves thy praise,” returned Brunhild ; “yet must he yield the palm to my husband.”

“By my faith !” replied Chriemhild, “my brother is a valiant knight, and yet, in such games he cannot compare with my husband.”

“What !” said Brunhild. “Did he not win the prize at Isenstein, when Siegfried preferred to go and look after the boat ?”

“Wilt thou accuse the Nibelung hero, the vanquisher of the fiendish dragon, of cowardice ?” cried the young wife, offended.

“He is far inferior to the king of the Burgundians,” answered Brunhild : “for he is a bondman,² and the vassal of my wedded lord.”

¹ A German word for “beloved.”

² Brunhild insists upon this depreciating appellation, however often it is disputed. Is she prompted by love or by hate ?

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“Thou liest, haughty woman!” exclaimed Chriemhild, glowing with anger; “thou liest for very arrogance! How could my brother have given me to a bondman? Siegfried is independent king of Nibelung Land and the Netherlands. The one kingdom he won with his own hand, the other he inherited; and I, his queen, may carry my head as high as thou thyself.”

“Only venture it, prating wife of a vassal! I will go before thee into the temple!”

With these words, Brunhild left the balcony.

“Vassal! my beloved husband, honored in all lands, a vassal! She has insulted him and she shall suffer for it,” said Chriemhild to herself.

It was the first trouble that had met the hitherto happy, innocent woman. She could not forget it. She went to her apartments, donned her costliest attire, added to it sparkling jewels taken from the Nibelung hoard, and betook herself, with a numerous suite of women, maidens, and retainers, to the temple. There, already awaiting her, stood Brunhild with her suite. She would have passed the proud woman in silence, but Brunhild called to her:

“Wait here, wife of the vassal, until thy queen has entered.”

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“Hadst thou kept silence,” said Chriemhild, “it would have been better for thee: for a king’s wife has certainly precedence of a paramour.”

“Art thou bereft of thy senses?” returned Brunhild. “To whom here wilt thou offer this indignity? That shalt thou avow.”

“That will I do,” said Chriemhild, “and I will prove its truth too, when I have returned from the temple.”

Passing her deadly enemy, she entered the house of God. The proud queen remained weeping before the portal. Shame and rage warred in her bosom, so that she could scarce await the end of the choral service. At last the portal opened and Chriemhild appeared.

“Speak, wife of a slave,” cried Brunhild, “to justify the insult that, with poisonous tongue, thou hast thrust upon me!”

“Wife of a slave!” repeated Chriemhild, as if she had not heard the other words. “Knowest thou this little gold ring¹ on my hand here, coiled like a serpent?”

¹ In the history of this finger-ring we see an unmistakable reflection, imperfect as it is, of the magic ring in the *Volsunga Saga*, made so prominent in

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“Ha, my gold ring that I have long missed!” said Brunhild. “Now I know who stole it from me.”

“Very well,” continued the former; “thou wilt also remember the girdle that I have about me—silk of Nineveh with golden buckles and precious stones. Ring and girdle were torn from thee by my husband, and not Gunther, as, in that night struggle, he proved his prowess greater than thine own.”

Like a victorious hero, Chriemhild passed on her away.

The proud queen remained standing with bowed head, as if rooted to the spot where she had received the insult.

“Let the Lord of the Rhine be summoned,” she commanded, “that he may learn what has happened and punish this audacity.”

Gunther came at once, and inquired why she was in such trouble. When he learned of the occurrence, he said to the distressed woman that

Wagner's operas, which Sigurd (Siegfried) once bestowed upon Brynhild and afterwards took from her again, in the guise of Gunnar (Gunther). (See pp. 317-319.)

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he would send for Siegfried, to hear from him if he had given occasion for the insult. In the Kings' Hall, in the presence of many valiant knights, he received the hero, and informed him of what had taken place. Immediately the knight declared, in good faith, that he had never said anything to the discredit of the queen, and one should not put an evil interpretation upon that which was spoken by women's tongues. He offered to confirm his statement by solemn oath. Already, standing by the ring,¹ he raised his hand to swear, when Gunther said he would spare him the oath, since his spoken word was ever true and sincere.

¹ In museums of antiquities there are still preserved iron rings, somewhat larger than a bracelet and with an opening on one side, which were once in use in Germany in the taking of oaths. The ring was chained to a wall, or post, and when a man would solemnly confirm a statement he grasped this ring so that his hand covered the opening, and, holding it thus, took the oath. Siegfried was doubtless lifting his hand to such a ring when interrupted.

For details of the old Scandinavian method of administering oaths with a ring, see *Encyclopedia Britannica*, under "Oath."

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“So hear, then, men of Burgundia,” said the hero, “that I have no part in the insult which your queen has suffered; that I have ever been impressed with her virtue and found her without fault. But thou, good comrade Gunther, train thy wife, as I will train mine,¹ that nevermore

¹ Even while reverencing womanhood, the ancient Germans held their female relatives in subjection, and a man might even sell his wife or daughter. Later, the chivalric knights of the Middle Ages made woman almost an object of worship, and prodigies of valor were performed to win her favor; yet the idolized fair one was usually removed from the prosaic details of her adorer's daily life, and in their domestic relations these romantic knights were not free from the reproach of tyranny; indeed they often treated their wives and daughters more as slaves than as queens.

The following passages from an old song quoted by M. Saintine in his *Myths of the Rhine*, translated by Prof. Schele de Vere, gently acquaint us with some old Teutonic and Celtic usages:

“Two young people have just had their union blessed by the priests under the sacred oak. On the right of the bride a Druid intones a chant, in which he enumerates, in solemn rhythm, all the troubles and all the anxieties which await her in wedded life:

“‘From this day, young wife, you alone will have to bear all the burden of your united household.

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with gossiping tongues they disturb our peace." So spake the valiant knight, and left the hall.

Yet many a Burgundian was of the opinion that a great wrong to their queen had been perpetrated.

"You will have to attend to the baking oven, to provide fuel, and to go in search of food; you will have to prepare the resinous torch and the lamp.

"You will wash the linen at the fountain, and you will make up all the clothing.

"You will attend to the cow, and even to the horse if your husband requires it.

"Always full of respect, you will wait upon him, standing behind him at his meals.

"If he chooses to take more wives, you will receive your new companions with sweetness.

"If needs be, you will even offer to nurse the children of these favorites, and all from obedience to your master.

"If he is angry against you and strikes you, you will pray to Esus, the only God, but you will never blame your husband, who cannot do wrong.

"If he expresses a wish to take you with him to war, you will accompany him to carry his baggage, to keep his arms in good condition, and to nurse him if he should be sick or wounded.

"Happiness consists in the fulfilment of duty. Be happy, my child."

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The following day Brunhild called together her maids and men from Isenland. She bade them make ready for a journey to their native land, for which they were speedily prepared. These events were reported to the king. He, with his brothers and Hagen and the other knights, repaired to the woman, who, in her distress, uttered no word. He told her how the king of the Netherlands had justified himself, and how the slander of his wife had been proved untrue. He spake much of her fame, which was spread through all lands; the other knights also sought to console her. They all deemed it would be a disgrace to Burgundia should the queen forsake the kingdom where many a year she had lived in happiness and reigned together with the king. She sat there, her eyes fixed, unmoved, speechless, like a stone image upon which the faithful call for help.

“We will not let thee go hence,” cried the king; “we offer thee any price in atonement for the thoughtless speech of my sister. Speak! what dost thou demand?”

She rose, gazed over the circle, and said, with hollow, unnatural voice:



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"Blood!"

The Burgundians looked from one to another confounded, and none dared interpret the word. She continued, undismayed:

"Not the flood of the Rhine, should I sink myself beneath it, could wash this stain from mine honor; that can be done only by the lifeblood of a man."

The agitation, the consternation among the knights was ever increasing. Then Hagen came forward, and said:

"Have the bold Burgundians grown decrepit? have they become children again? Then will I interpret the speech. Our queen demands Siegfried's lifeblood. Ha! how ye start! how ye flinch at the word!"

"No one in all the world can stand against the Nibelung hero."

"Whoso challenges him, goes hand in hand with death."

"He is not guilty of the thing with which they would charge him."

So the Burgundians talked among themselves. Then the grim Hagen confronted Brunhild.

"Woman," said he, "it pleased me not that

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Gunther went wooing to Isenland; but now that thou art our queen, thou shalt be held in honor, and I will accomplish for thee that which thou demandest."

To him the young Giselher replied:

"Evil for good? Is that the custom in Burgundia? Did not Siegfried serve us faithfully in war's distress, and bring us victory and fame? I have no part in such counsels."

"I shall accomplish the deed secretly," said Hagen, "that he cannot swing Balmung against me; and thou, Volker, wilt be my helpmate."

"Thy helpmate in all things right," said the minstrel; "that did I swear when, shield to shield, we fought in the land of the Moors; for felon's work get to thyself another mate."

"That will I myself be," spake Ortewin, the knight. "Siegfried gave ring and girdle to his wife; of that he is guilty, and therewith was an indignity put upon our queen."

"I think to do the deed without assistance," said the Tronjan.

"To all that I would object," interposed Gunther; "such murder is a dishonor for all Burgundia. That must the king avert."

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“Lord of the Rhineland,” cried Brunhild, “three days’ grace I give thee; then I depart for Isenland, or thou dost avenge me.”

She left the assembled knights, who took further counsel together.

“Neither lance nor sword harms the hero,” remarked the Margrave Gere. “He has bathed himself in dragon’s blood, and only in one spot, which was covered by a linden leaf, can he be wounded.”

“Should he become aware of the treacherous plot,” added Sindolt, the chamberlain, “he would take possession of our whole kingdom, with his thousand Nibelungs.”

“I think to accomplish it by cunning, so that we shall remain unhurt, and our queen be avenged,” spake the grim Hagen.

But the king was unsettled in his mind; he fain would, and also he fain would not. The knights parted without coming to a decision.

Brunhild remained locked in her chamber. In vain Gunther knocked at the portal. In vain Chriemhild with tears implored that she would grant her admittance; she would confess herself in the wrong before all the people. Only

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the grim Hagen received admittance, and talked long with the queen. Thereupon he betook himself to Gunther.

“Lord of the Rhine,” said he, “there is no other way, if thy queen is to be preserved to us, than that thou shouldest consent to my plan. ‘He or I,’ so spake she to me, and she has so daring a spirit that she ever doth what seemeth to her good.”

The king wavered still. But when on the third day he learned that Brunhild made ready for departure, then he consented to the evil counsel of his uncle.

Emissaries from Lüdegast and Lüdeger now appeared at the court of Worms, announcing a new feud.

Both kings purposed, with an invincible army, to at once invade Burgundia and take revenge for their last defeat. The emissaries wore Danish and Saxon armor, and no one doubted that they came from the kingdoms of the Danes and Saxons. It was immediately decided to summon the vassals of the kingdom; yet Siegfried was of the opinion that, with the knights at court and his Nibelungs, he could alone resist the hostile power. The women

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were bidden to prepare the war apparel¹ of the heroes, which the noble Chriemhild did with greatest care. She sat heavy-hearted at her work,² when Hagen came to her and to her

¹ Over the armor was worn a loose garment of fine cloth or silk, confined at the waist by a girdle or scarf. This costume was not exclusively German, but was common to all European knights. The color of the scarf often indicated nationality, the English wearing red, and the French, white. Some of the French nobles added their family colors to their scarfs and to those of their vassals, and called these latter *livrée* (Eng., *livery*). Philip Augustus of France, Richard I. of England, and two English parliaments have forbidden extravagant costliness in these trappings.

² In the Middle Ages, division of labor was but little appreciated or practised, and whatever was needed for home consumption was prepared, so far as possible, by each family for itself. The care of the wardrobe for both men and women was undertaken by women of the household; and, in the apartments reserved for their use, each housewife was accustomed to superintend her maids in their spinning, weaving, and needle-work, whatever her rank, taking upon herself a fair share of the manual labor. We know that the wife and daughters of Charlemagne were diligent in spinning and weaving; and a silver

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maids and bade them be comforted; for, since Siegfried's powerful body had been bathed in dragon's blood, it could not be harmed by weapons.

"Good hero," said she, "my *Friedel* is so daring that he rushes through the midst of the foe. In the storm of battle a spear might easily strike him on the one spot where he is vulnerable."

He bade her mark Siegfried's garment at this spot with a cross; then he, with his shield, would faithfully protect his fellow-warrior. She promised to do according to his word, and immediately embroidered with silver thread a little cross upon the garment. However, her trouble was in vain, for the very next day other emissaries appeared, who stated that the kings would fain keep the promised peace, if it were permitted them. So the warlike preparations became unnecessary, and Gunther commanded that the knights, instead of taking the field, should be invited to a great hunt over the Rhine

spindle ornamented the tomb of Luitgarde, daughter of Otto the Great, first Emperor of Germany, indicating the industrious habits of that princess.

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in the Spessart Forest,¹ where many beasts of prey and deer also found shelter.

Glowing red the sun rose from behind the mountains and tinged the waves of the Rhine till they flowed like blood. Chriemhild waked suddenly from sleep. She had had troubled dreams. By her couch stood Siegfried, gay and unconcerned as ever. He was going to the chase. Below in the court neighed the spirited stallions.

“Siegfried,” she exclaimed, “go not to the chase,—just not to-day. I dreamed that two ferocious wild boars had followed thee; then I saw thee no more, but, instead, a stream of blood that flowed over the heath. Horror seized upon me, so that I shook as in a fever and awoke. When I heard thee breathing quietly I tried to sleep again. But scarcely did this happen when I saw thee once again,—for only of thee do I think by day and by night. Thou didst ride through a pass between two mountains; then the earth trembled, and the mountains fell upon thee, and piled themselves in a funeral pyre. Thou knowest how I started

¹ See note 2, p. 167.

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up and trembled, until I saw thee before me, safe as the heavens above us."

"So, too, from the chase shall I return to thee, my precious love," said Siegfried, as he clasped his dear one lovingly in his arms.

She disengaged herself from his embrace, looked with anxiety and tenderness into his sunny eyes, and continued:

"The dreams indicate a great misfortune which will overtake thee, and thou art mine only treasure, for whom I would resign all the kingdoms of the world, the Nibelung hoard, and all riches. If only thou art spared me I will follow thee into far and desert lands, even were I reduced to beggary. Go not to the chase; stay just this day with me."

Again the hero lovingly embraced and kissed her, and she clung to him, as if she would never lose her hold of the husband so dear to her.

"Be comforted, dear wife," said he; "why, I am among good comrades and friends, where no evil can befall me. Then, I carry Balmung with me and a sharp lance. Ha! I should like to look upon him who would dare to pit himself against me!"

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The hunting-horns summoned to the merry chase.¹

"Dost thou hear," cried he, "how the horns call? My comrades would mock me if they were told that for a dream's sake I stayed away from the hunt."

He kissed his loving wife once more, and hurried away. She watched him from the window; she waved her hand; and he, with ringing tones, returned her greeting, as, in advance of the huntsmen, he rode through the portal.

"The horns call," said she; "they call to death."

She was shocked at her own words.

It was a joyous ride through the blooming fields and sombre pine woods and farther into the depths of the green mountains, to the quar-

¹ From the earliest times the Germans seem to have been devoted to the pleasures of hunting—indeed, to have once regarded arms and the chase as the only two occupations worthy of a hero. When the vast forests of Europe harbored innumerable wild beasts, inimical to human life and property, and when the supply of meat for food was obtainable chiefly from this source, obedience to the horn of the huntsman may well have been regarded a duty as well as a pleasure.

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ter where the hunt should begin. The hunters distributed themselves; the setters and powerful bloodhounds were uncoupled; the timid game was started. Siegfried was now in thicket, now in glade. His arrow and his spear brought down, at incredible distance, stags and deer, likewise wolves and grim bears. Many a wolf he slew with the sword. An aurochs, rushing upon him, he felled to the ground with powerful fist. The huntsmen thought he would exterminate all the game. Nevertheless, the other knights found abundant prey.

In the afternoon, as they came together for their repast, another bear ran by. The hero started in pursuit, overcame him, bound him, and brought the beast to the assembled knights. Here he loosed his bands and set the hounds on the black-coat, to afford diversion for his friends. But Master Bruin struck about so vigorously with his paws that the dogs retreated howling. He, however, got among the cooking utensils, threw into confusion pots, kettles, and pans, and then made desperately for the depths of the forest. There Siegfried overtook him and slew him with his sword.

The knights sat at their repast. Roasted and

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stewed game, delicately prepared trout,¹ pike, and carp were served; but the cup-bearers brought no wine; they said that Hagen had had it carried across into the distant deep valley.

“Ah, faithless comrade!” cried Siegfried; “wilt thou let us perish of thirst? Had we but tarried on the Rhine, that, after the heat of the hunt, would have given us to drink in abundance.”

“That happened by no fault of mine,” said Hagen. “I thought that we should rest over there, on the other side of the mountain, and had the wine taken there. But, hard by, I know a spring² of delicious water, there in the meadow-

¹ This is a free rendering of *blaugesottene Forellen*, which are much esteemed in Germany at the present day. The fish is carefully washed, so as not to break its outer shiny coat, and then boiling vinegar is poured over it and allowed to stand about fifteen minutes to give it the desirable bluish shade. After this it is boiled in the usual manner.

² Over fifty years ago the Hessian minister of state, Knapp, discovered in the Oden Forest a “Siegfried Spring,” which Dr. Wägner thus describes:

“It is a freely-gushing fountain, surrounded by

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land, where the lindens rear their heads above the thicket, and where the flowers bloom freshest. I should like to try if in a race I should not reach it sooner than the swift Siegfried."

"Thou art a valiant knight," said the hero of the Netherlands, "yet I ween thou couldst not well outrun me; and I will carry sword, quiver, and lance, but thou mayest run unburdened."

Both knights raced up the meadow towards the lindens. The field flowers sought to stay the bold Siegfried, and the branches of the trees waved him back, and the birds in the lindens sang mournfully, as if they would say: "Turn thee back, noble hero, thy betrayer is behind thee."

Siegfried understood not the speech of the

lofty trees, near Gras Ellenbach, not far from Lindenfels. Among the country people of the vicinity the legend was current that near this spring a famous man of noble birth had once been murdered. This part of the forest, moreover, is called Spessart, and, from Worms, it can easily be reached in one day on horseback." All this agrees with the statements of our song, which makes explicit mention of Spessart Forest (p. 163).

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flowers, the trees, and the birds.¹ He put his trust in his friends and in himself.

“Oh, how slowly thou creepst,—like a snail!” cried he to the panting Hagen, who followed; “but, by my troth, thou art a lusty runner, and none other in Burgundia will overtake thee. Here, now, is the bright spring that willingly bestows its clear waters upon the wayworn knight. Howbeit, the prince of the land shall take the first draught; meantime we will devote ourselves to resting in the cool shade of the lindens.”

He laid sword, quiver, and lance aside, and threw himself carelessly upon the flowery green-sward.

“Art to-day a grouty comrade!” continued

¹ It is a little singular that the *Lied* should strip Siegfried of this power attributed to him in the old legends. The *Eddas* not only make him understand the speech of birds, but render this fact important to the plot (see note on p. 59). We observe here the tendency of the twelfth century, whether on account of the advance of civilization or of the direct teachings of Christianity, to reject the extravagant elements of the Teutonic mythology and make it more human, linking it with the historic.

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he, turning to Hagen; "and yet the sun shines brightly and heaven and earth smile upon us, as if even they took pleasure in our merry sport. We have made great havoc among the troublesome beasts that spoil the herds and the harvest of the husbandman. Here they come, at last, the gallant comrades. Now then, Gunther, good brother, thou shalt have the first draught from this bright spring that gushes from the mountain side."

Gunther stooped down and drank of the cool water. Then Siegfried came up.

"I think to drink a deeper draught," said he; "but do not be troubled, noble knights: the spring will flow none the less freely; water in abundance is always running in. It is like the world of men: a part is ever disappearing in the earth, a part ever coming to the light of day. Of this there is no end."¹

"So it is," said Hagen. "Of what account is the life of a man?"

Meantime, the Nibelung hero had bowed himself over the spring, and was thirstily drinking

¹ This simile suggests Tennyson's *Brook*: "For men may come and men may go, But I go on forever."

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in deep draughts. Thereupon Hagen hurriedly put out of reach Siegfried's sword and quiver, seized also his lance, took aim, and pierced him just through the cross which Chriemhild had so carefully embroidered upon his mantle, between the shoulders, so that the spearhead, thrust through back and breast, protruded cruelly. The mortally wounded man sprang to his feet, looked for his sword, and, not finding it, took the shield, and with it felled the assassin to the ground. More he could not do. His face was blanched; the shaft of death cut keen. The royal hero sank down among the fragrant flowers, dyed rose-red from his streaming blood; red, too, was the spring that had flowed so silver clear, and red were the heavens from the setting sun. It was as if they blushed for the treacherous deed.

Yet once again the hero raised his noble, weary head, and, glancing about the circle, said:

“Blood-thirsty dogs! what wrong have I done ye? Had I perceived your treachery, ye would all now be lying there slain by my hand. A demon moved ye to this perfidy; for ye ventured not to meet me face to face in open fight; and Hagen, the cowardly wolf, must execute

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the vile scheme. In the far future your names will be the ones recalled when the talk is of cowardly traitors. Purblind King Gunther! thou who art dishonored by treacherous crime, hear the words of the dying: Protect my wife, for she is thy sister; protect my unhappy wife from Hagen." These were the last words of the royal hero.

Around the body, in a circle, the knights stood speechless. The evil deed, the words of the dying man, came home to their hearts and burned like tongues of flame. Gunther at last broke the silence:

"We will say to the folk, who loved him who has been slain, that robbers have murdered him. Then, too, Chriemhild will hold us blameless."

"I would advise against that," said the Tronjan. "I conceal nothing that my cunning and my hand have wrought. Now has our queen the revenge for which she thirsted, and which is her due, and in Burgundia we are safe from all enemies; for there neither has been born in the world, nor ever will be, a knight who could be like unto Siegfried, and stand against us. What care I for the clamor of the

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people or the wailing of a woman! Make a bier from the branches of trees, that the dead knight may be borne to Worms. Ha! there is Balmung, his good sword; that can here render its last service to its old master and its first to its new one."

And, since no other hand was raised, the knight energetically hewed branches from the trees and interwove them for a bier; undismayed, too, he laid the body upon it. Then the funeral train began its march.

Late in the night the huntsmen reached the city and the palace. It seemed as if horror emanated from the dead hero; nor knight, nor menial dared touch him. Hagen railed at them for cowardly knaves, lifted alone the body to his shoulders, carried it into the palace, and laid it before Chriemhild's door. Early in the morning she was about to go to the temple; she called a chamberlain, and as he saw a dead man, whom in the dim light he did not recognize, lying at the entrance, he reported it to the anxious woman.

"It is Siegfried!" she shrieked. "Brunhild has instigated and Hagen done this murder!"

Lights were brought, and they saw that she

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had spoken truly. The grief and pain of the unhappy woman were inexpressible. She threw herself upon the body of her husband, and her tears flowed so profusely, that with them she washed his face free from its stains of blood. Now he lay there before her, the light-hearted valiant hero, cold, stiff, white, motionless. He who was wont to clasp her in his arms, he would smile upon her never, nevermore. "Nevermore"—the terrible word came ever again to mind. How gladly had she died with him! how gladly gone with him to the tomb! or, according to the belief of the fathers, to the halls of Freya!¹

The hoary Siegmund, too, received tidings of the horrible event. He came and looked upon

¹ The goddess Freya, as leader of the Valkyrs, welcomed to the abodes of the blest, heroes of stainless courage whose career on earth was finished. As a wife of Wotan, she had an equal claim with him upon the warriors slain. Half were Freya's, half Wotan's. A death by violence was necessary to insure admission to the halls of Valhalla, while those dying of disease or under suspicion of cowardice were condemned to descend to the realms of the goddess Hel. (See note 2, p. 190.)

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his only son,—disfigured, slain. Not in the storm of battle; no! but by a murderer's hand. He uttered no moan, but his heart was like to break. He uncovered the gaping wounds, and kissed them as if he hoped to wake the dead. Then he raised himself upright; the old spirit stirred within him.

“Murder! Revenge!” he cried. “Rise, Nibelungs! rise to avenge your hero!”

With these words he hurried to the court, and the Nibelungs, hearing his call, made haste to follow, and gathered in arms about the aged man, who demanded sword and armor. But the weapon fell from his trembling hands. He himself, overcome by pain and exertion, sank fainting to the ground. Round about, weapons bristled in the hands of the Burgundians, and the grim Hagen brought up multitudes more. The Nibelungs, gnashing their teeth, retreated to their quarters.

On the third day the precious body was brought into the temple to be blessed by the hand of the priest. The folk crowded to the scene; each desired to see the hero in death, who in life had fought for Burgundia, who had rescued the princess from the dragon, and who had dis-

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pensed such rich gifts. Chriemhild stood by the coffin, which was uncovered and ornamented with gold and precious stones. She wept no more: only her reddened eyes, her blanched cheeks, and the trembling of her limbs betrayed the inward pain. Through the crowd there passed a closely-veiled woman. None knew who she was,—only Chriemhild recognized her.

“Back, murderess!” cried she to her; “back! that the dead rise not against thee!”

The unknown woman disappeared in the throng. And now the Burgundian knights, according to custom, marched around the bier.

As Hagen approached the bier, the wounds of the dead broke open afresh,¹ and the blood

¹ It was a popular superstition, not only in Germany, but also in England, and yet more especially in Scotland, that the wounds of one who had been murdered would bleed afresh at the approach of the murderer. As late as 1688, in a case tried in the High Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh, there was an express statement in the indictment that the wounds of the corpse had thus miraculously bled at the touch of the accused; and in the charge to the jury special stress was laid upon this evidence.

In the literature of all northern nations there are



CHRIEMHILD AND HAGEN AT SIGGFRIED'S BIER



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streamed from them, warm as the hour of the murder.

“Venture not to stand here, assassin!” said Chriemhild; “see how the dead accuses thee!”

The knight stood still, but replied:

“I hide not what my hand has done. It was performed in good faith towards my liege lord and his queen.”

Could Chriemhild have had a sword and the strength of a man, she would have slain the knight in the temple.

In honor of the murdered king, many gifts, in gold, silver, and garments, were dispensed among those who were needy. On the fourth day the earth received that which was its own. With grand ceremony the body of the royal hero was

allusions to this belief. In Shakespeare's *Richard III.*, Act I., Scene 2, where Lady Anne, at the bier of Henry VI., encounters his murderer, she exclaims:

“O gentlemen, see, see! dead Henry's wounds
Open their congeal'd mouths, and bleed afresh!”

Scott introduces this appeal to the judgment of Heaven, in the funeral ceremonies for Oliver Proud-fute, in the *Fair Maid of Perth*. Many other instances might be cited, but probably none of date prior to the *Nibelungen Lied*.

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laid in the tomb. It was a richly adorned vault, over which rose a high mound. Chriemhild followed into the still chamber. There, once more, at her command, the coffin was opened. She kissed the pale face of her loved one, she flooded it with her tears. Her women were obliged to carry her away, for she would have stayed with him forever. Without stood the Tronjan, unmoved as ever, grimly staring in. He gave utterance to his favorite saying:

“That which is, must be; so have the Norns ordained.”

The queen heard him not, nor saw she Gunther, nor Gernot, nor the many knights who were vainly seeking to conceal their distress and remorse: her thoughts were with the dead.

Siegmund and the Nibelungs made ready for the journey home. They wished to take the mourning widow with them, that she might not suffer further harm at the hands of the faithless Burgundians; but she was unwilling to depart from the spot where Siegfried's body rested. She bade the aged king and the Margrave Eckwart faithfully to care for her little son in the Netherlands, that he might grow in likeness to

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his father. He was, she said, an orphan,—fatherless; perhaps, too, motherless; for she herself had but one wish,—she whispered it low in the ear of the old man,—that of revenge. Only of Dame Ute, who, like her daughter, mourned for the slain hero, and of Giselher, the youth, did Siegmund take leave. Then, with his followers, he entered upon the journey to the Netherlands.

The heron of oblivion, as the Norse song says, sweeps over the children of mortal men and bears away on its pinions many a grief. So Chriemhild seemed gradually more tranquil, and even reconciled to her brother. Only the grim Hagen she looked upon with horror, and avoided his presence. Even so did she shun Brunhild, and, when once she encountered her at the tomb of her husband, she drove her away with cutting words. She expressed to her brother the wish to bring the Nibelung treasure to Worms, since it was her rightful heritage. Gunther, pleased that she again placed confidence in him, consented gladly. Great numbers of men and valiant knights were sent with a message from her to the Nibelungs; and Alberich, without hesitation, delivered up the immeasurable hoard.

For several days twelve carts were bringing

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out the treasures from the hollow mountain; and many beasts of burden were needed to transport them to Burgundia.

The queen was lavish with her wealth to the people, and whereso a good knight she found, there she bestowed gold, armor, weapons, and even daily stipend; whereby she gradually gathered a small army about her, which day by day increased.

Hagen spake to the kings concerning this conduct. He said the woman was thinking of revenge. It was not that he prized his life, but she would finally gain all Burgundia. This they must prevent, and hence, betimes, put the hoarded treasure in safe-keeping. The brothers would not consent. Gernot said that wrong enough had been done to his own sister; and of her inheritance he would not permit her to be robbed. But once, when the chieftains were away, the bold knight, with his men, broke open the treasure-house, brought out the whole hoard, and sunk it in the Rhine.¹ The kings, indeed,

¹ There between Worms and Lorsch, according to popular tradition, it lies to the present day.—Richter's *Heldensagen des Mittelalters*.

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upon their return, learned of the evil act; and Chriemhild preferred complaint against the robbers; albeit, the deed was done.

“Wert thou not our uncle,” said Gunther and Gernot, “thou wouldst pay this with thy life.”

Afterwards, Hagen led the chieftains to the spot where the gold, the rings, and the mass of precious stones lay on the river bed, and he had them swear that neither would betray the spot so long as another of them should still be living.

“In the depths of the stream,” said the knight, “there the rings gleam fairer and more harmless¹ than in the hands of the queen thirsting for vengeance.”

But Chriemhild grew again as silent and melancholy as aforetime. She now remained always with her mother. There she embroidered rugs and pictured Balder's death;² how

¹ Reference is here probably made to the large rings worn in ancient times, mostly on the arms, and constituting the most costly and most honorable presents. Hagen feared they might be employed by Chriemhild to purchase or reward service against himself.

² The myth here alluded to may be found, in fragments at least, in both the *Eddas*; but the *Younger*

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Höder¹ casts the spear at his brother; how the body of the god is brought to the funeral pyre;

(Gylfaginning, 49) gives connectedly the substance of the following outline:

Balder the Good, the god of light, son of Wotan and Frigg, dreamed that his life was in danger. His mother, alarmed, asked and received pledges from fire and water, iron and all ores, stones and earth, from trees, diseases, and poisons, from all fourfooted animals, birds, and worms that they would spare her son. But the mistletoe she thought too young to take the oath. Loki, the spirit of evil, learning this, persuaded the blind god, Höder, to hurl the fatal branch at his half-brother, Balder, and thus he was slain. Then Frigg sent to Hel, the goddess of death, to ask on what terms she would release her son, whom this sore mischance had delivered to her realm. Hel, incredulous that Balder could be so universally beloved, demanded that all creatures and things should weep for him. All complied except one ill-natured hag; and her ungracious refusal prevented the ransom of the god.

¹ Höder's responsibility for the death of Balder does not compare with Hagen's for that of Siegfried; for Hagen was at once both the Loki and the Höder of his tragedy, while Höder had hurled the mistletoe in ignorance that it could harm a being against whom all evil seemed powerless; nevertheless, Wali, son of

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how Nanna¹ weeps, dies of a broken heart, and shares with her beloved his last resting-place upon the pyre. But in Balder could be recognized her hero; in Nanna, herself; Höder had the features, the attire, and the murderous lance of the grim Hagen. Oft did she let her needle rest, and sat dreaming before the picture. When Dame Ute asked:

“Of what are you thinking, my child?” she would answer:

“I am thinking of Hagen.”

“Of Hagen!” repeated the aged queen. “Forget not that he is our uncle, a faithful servant of his king and queen,—by his strength a shield and protection for our land, and ready for any service.”

“Yes; even for murder!” concluded Chriemhild, and left the room.

Odin and Rinda, skilled in the use of the bow, avenged his half-brother's death by shooting Höder.

¹ The flower goddess, Nanna, was the wife of Balder, god of light; and, according to the Sagas, she died of grief when he ceased to live, signifying, as Uhland suggests, that with the loss of light the richness and fragrance of flower life passes away.

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To the king's court in Worms came a welcome guest. It was Margrave Rüdiger of Bechelaren,¹ the good and gentle, well known to the Burgundians, and on friendly terms with them. With Gunther, Gernot, and Hagen he had in his youth shared many an adventure. He had tossed on his knee the young Giselher; he had delighted himself in Volker's notes; and now he brought his joyousness of heart into the house of grief, so that Chriemhild herself sometimes followed her mother into the hall, and at the talk oftentimes smiled kindly, which had not

¹ The identity of this noble hero with any historical person has never been satisfactorily traced. His name occurs in several old songs, which dwell upon the amiability and beauty of his character more than upon his martial deeds.

An ancient town of Pochlarn still exists at the junction of the Erlaf with the Danube. In the tenth century it is said to have been in possession of the Margraves Rüdiger, and some attempts have been made to trace to this family the Rüdiger of the *Nibelungen Lied*.

For the argument in favor of the identity of Rüdiger and Robin Hood, see *Der Mythos vom Markgrafen Rüdiger*, by Richard v. Muth.

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happened since the death of the never-to-be-forgotten hero.

But when Brunhild, or, above all, Hagen, entered, she started as at a poisonous serpent and hastily withdrew.

PART II
CHRIEMHILD'S REVENGE

“DER NIBELUNGEN NOT”¹

VI

KING ETZEL'S WOOING

DAYS and weeks passed; then once, over the brimming beaker, Gunther said to his esteemed guest, Rüdiger, that it seemed as if he had some secret, to which he was loth to give utterance. He should be of good heart. Whatsoever he had to demand, that should be accorded him, so far as the king himself had it in his power to fulfil the request.

“So be it, then, King Gunther,” spake the margrave. “I will declare to thee what I have to solicit. Thou knowest that the good Queen

¹ This is the German title of the Second Part of the *Nibelungen Lied*, meaning *The Nibelungs' Distress*. The name *Nibelungs* is applied to the Burgundians in the Second Part.

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Helche, the spouse of my liege lord, King Etzel,¹ has been dead many years; that his sons, too, through the treachery of Wittich,² have been slain. And now the sovereign of the Huns feels solitary in the vast halls of

¹ Etzel is the Hunnish form of the name of which Attila is the diminutive, and signifies "father." Though famous for barbarity and fondness of war, and known as the "Scourge of God," history nevertheless records some gentler traits of this king, such as are ascribed to Etzel in our text, and more in keeping with the paternal significance of his name. His hospitality was boundless, and, though himself of severely simple habits, his court was one of almost fabulous luxury. He was gracious towards those who sought his help, and permitted the people whom he conquered to retain their customs, languages, and laws, demanding only military service and tribute, which at the date of his reign (434-453 A.D.) was accounted great clemency. The legendary Etzel is not only hospitable, magnificent, and kindly, but pitifully weak in character, being, in this respect, by no means true to the original.

² In German legends Wittich was the son of the famous smith Wieland, and received from his father the sword Mimung. He became a powerful knight, and was closely connected with Dietrich, Ermenrich, and other heroes in their adventures.

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Etzelburg.¹ He thought to take to himself again a noble and worthy consort, and concerning this asked my counsel. I knew no fairer nor nobler woman to propose than Chriemhild, thy sister, the widow of the powerful hero Siegfried. Givest thou thy consent, so will she become queen of the Huns."

"She is no longer under my guardianship," was the reply; "she is queen of the Nibelung Land and of the Netherlands, and I fear me she will not be disposed to compliance."

"I will bring her the good tidings," said Giseler, "and Mother Ute will lend me her aid."

The young knight made ready at once to go to the women. He found his sister, as usual, busied with her needlework. He urged her to desist from her excessive mourning, and, since she was still young, to open her heart to the joys of life. Then he told what Rüdiger had related of Etzel's court, of his treasures, and the

¹ Etzelburg (MS., *Ezelen burc*) was evidently the residence of King Etzel at the time of his marriage with Chriemhild, but it is not quite clear whether this place was Gran, as Zarncke believes, or Ofen, which is shown to have been the residence of the kings of the Huns (Hungary) in the eleventh century.

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great superabundance of goods and possessions in the land of the Huns, and finally came to speak of the suit for her hand. Chriemhild replied firmly and solemnly that she would not go far away from the tomb that inclosed her only, her dearest treasure. Immediately Mother Ute began to speak, and described Etzel's great power; relating how supreme he was among the Huns, the Wilkinen,¹ and the Russians; how, in his younger years, he, with a great army, had forced the kings of the Franks, Goths, and even the Burgundians, to pay tribute and furnish hostages; and showing how it were well that his suit should not be rejected, lest he might harm the land by an invasion.

“Shouldst thou become his queen, my child,” said she, “thou wilt be powerful above all women, as was the good Helche.”

“Powerful above all women,” repeated the daughter, musing. “Look thou, Giselher,” she continued, pointing to her embroidery, “dost know whom this hero is meant to represent?”

¹ An ancient Slavonic people formerly inhabiting the northeast part of Germany, and who disappeared after the conquest of Brandenburg by the Germans.—Meyer's *Lexicon*.

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He replied in the negative, and she added :
“ It is Wali,¹ the avenger, of whom the fathers said that he had avenged Balder, and sent to Hel² the black-hearted Höder.”

¹ See note 1, p. 182.

² Hel, written also *Helle*, is the goddess of death and the lower world, whose name has passed to her dominions. That the god Balder, preëminently “ the Good,” should at his death descend to the lower world, is one among many indications in Teutonic traditions that this realm was not reserved exclusively for the vicious, but was regarded simply as the abode of departed spirits, where indeed punishment was inflicted upon such as deserved it.

Of the Scandinavian hell, M. Saintaine writes as follows: “ This was a hell of ice; it froze here hard enough to split iron, and the damned shivered with cold. Dante mentions something of the kind in his great work, but between the Florentine and the Scandinavian, there can be no doubt who borrowed from the other. It was quite natural, after all, that in these wintry regions of Scandinavia, where cold is the greatest evil to be dreaded, intense, continued, eternal cold should have become the terror and the punishment of the criminal. The idea of a hell of fire, so far from keeping them from the fatal slope, might well have tempted some chilly scoundrel to commit a great crime.”

Of Hel, who reigned over this “ frightful iceberg,”

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“Those are worn-out fables, about which one knows but little,” answered Giselher. “But speak of that which the good Rüdiger comes to seek.”

“Yes, if it could be fulfilled,” said she,—“perhaps. Beg the margrave to come to me, that I myself may receive his suit.”

That was a joyous word to the young knight. He betook himself at once to the hall, and Dame Ute, too, at the request of her daughter, left the room.

“Siegfried,” spake the young queen, “for thy sake I depart from the mound wherein thou dwellest, where so oft thou dost appear to me, in waking and in dream, and dost show me thy wounds. They gape—they bleed still; they will close—they will bleed no more, if it be granted me to send to Hel the black-hearted Höder.”

Rüdiger appeared, and in well-chosen words presented his suit.

She spake :

“Thou shalt give me sound counsel, noble

the same author adds, in language resembling a passage in the *Younger Edda*: “Her palace is called Misery; her gate, the Precipice; her reception-room, Grief; her bed, Disease; her table, Famine; and her throne, Malediction.”

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margrave. How shall I fare, since I know not the king and his people? Would they not disdain and scorn the stranger woman? Wilt thou be my helper if I come to need?"

"Etzel is a rich potentate and valiant knight," replied he, "who will pay to thee great honors, even as aforetime to the good Dame Helche, so that thou wilt have more of wealth and power than in the days when the strong Siegfried still lived. I myself am ready for thy every service."

"Wilt thou take solemn oath," said Chriemhild, "that thou, with thy liegemen, at my command wilt take up arms whensoever and against whomsoever it may be?"

"Only not against my liege lord," replied the knight.

"Swear to me," said the woman, "at my command and that of thy liege lord, to fight, with lance and sword, against every foe who has wronged me."

"That I pledge thee, by my troth and solemn oath, so truly as Irmin¹ shall help me in my hour of need."

¹ Irmin is supposed by Widekind and Vollmer to have been the god of battles among the ancient Saxons.

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“So be it, then, most noble margrave,” said she, in clear tones; “I will journey with thee to the land of the wild Huns, and will be to thy liege lord a faithful wife, my life long, since I may depend upon thy support.”

There was great joy among the knights when Rüdiger brought the good news. The three royal brothers talked about how their sister would now be rid of her grief; how she would be glad again, and would create a firm bond between the Huns and Burgundians. Then came Hagen to them, saying:

“Will ye call down lightning, that it fall upon our heads? Give not your sister to the king of the Huns. Between the widow of Siegfried and ourselves only such friendship can obtain as that between water and fire; either the former will disappear in vapor, or it will quench the latter. It is a childish man who offers to his foe the sword wherewith his own head shall be cleft.”

He is often identified with Thor and, by Grimm, even with Odin.

Simrock thinks, as Leibnitz had already suspected, that the name German is in some way derived from Irmin.

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“Uncle, thou dost cherish in thine heart ill-will and envy,” said Giselher, “therefore art thou ever grouty and grim. But thou shalt not have thy will; thou shalt not grieve nor distress our sister. With all honors will she become queen of the Huns.”

In like manner, spake Gunther and Gernot, defying the warning knight.

And now preparations were made for the journey to Etzelburg, that the queen might make her appearance among the Huns with regal state. Emissaries were sent to Nibelung Land and to the Netherlands, and returned with a numerous retinue of knights and liegemen. All these men, likewise the women who should accompany their queen, received rich apparel and noble steeds for their journey. The kings gave their sister their escort as far as the Danube, where they bade her farewell. Margrave Rüdiger took the lead through Bavaria, where they found good accommodation in castles and towns, because the valiant knight was a friend of Gelfrat, the lord of the land. Without let or hindrance, the travellers reached Rüdiger's hospitable mansion in Bechelaren. Dame Gotelinde and her lovely daughter received the esteemed

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guests with great delight, and not until the fourth day permitted them to continue their journey.

The tidings that the noble queen of the Huns was coming had already spread throughout the land, and princes and knights came forth to meet her. But, on the confines of his territory, King Etzel tarried with his great retinue. At sight of the pale, but still beautiful woman, his heart was filled with such joy as aforetime, when, by the help of the bold Rüdiger, he won the lovely Helche. He said to Chriemhild that she should rule over his treasures and his kingdoms, and be crowned even as himself. She answered that she would be to him a faithful and obedient housewife, but that her love was buried with Siegfried in the tomb. The king heeded not the last words ; he thought that by devotion and true love he could win her affection ; and at her side, surrounded by kings, princes, and nobles of his empire, he proceeded towards Etzelburg. And there, fourteen days long, the wedding was celebrated with great splendor. There were all sorts of amusements : daily one saw tilting by the knights ; then followed banquet, wassail, song, and the music of

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the harp from minstrels, especially from the two principal ones among them, Wörbelin and Swemmelin; moreover, in song and dance the Hunnish damsels extolled the deeds of the king, his knights, and ancestors.

Chriemhild took little part in the festivities. She received and greeted the guests, filled her place in the palace as housewifely hostess; but no ray of joy illumed her features, while in her soul a world of thoughts revolved about one centre,—about Siegfried. There was, however, among the knights also a man for whom song and music, game and wassail, had little charm; who only in the tournament gave proof of his rare heroic strength; and this hero was the brave Dietrich of Bern.¹ His thoughts lingered

¹ Although Theodoric the Great, King of the Ostrogoths, was not contemporaneous with Attila, yet authorities generally agree in identifying him with the Dietrich of Bern described in the *Nibelungen Lied* as sojourning at the court of the Hunnish monarch, Etzel. If this monarch is Attila, as we are also assured, then it is evident that either our chronology is at fault or the search for historic counterparts for mythological characters leaps all barriers to historic possibility.

It was in his victory at Verona (Bern) that Theo-

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in the fair land of the Amelungs,¹ of which his uncle, Ermenrich,² had by craft and force dispossessed him. Thither he desired to make his way with his knights, if Etzel would lend his aid; but the king hesitated, because in the first expedition both his sons had fallen. When the sound of merrymaking among the guests rang through the broad halls, then Dietrich, in troubled mood, left the tempting drink in the golden beaker to waste its foam. Then, oftentimes, the queen came to him and talked of the injury she had received through Hagen, and of how the murder was still unatoned,—Siegfried still unavenged. He well understood that she sought to win him to a scheme of vengeance; but he kept silence, for he neither would nor could draw the sword against Burgundian knights,

doric won the title of Dietrich of Bern, by which he was afterwards known in many legends.

In his legendary character he rests under some suspicion of having been ushered into the world, and removed from it, by the offices of evil spirits.

¹ Descendants of Amelung, an ancestor of Dietrich.

² Ermenrich is semihistorical, and appears in some of the legends as a Roman emperor, perhaps equivalent to Odoacer.

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who, in many a hard-fought battle, as faithful comrades, shield to shield, had given him their aid.

The season of rejoicing was spent; peacefully passed moons and years; a son was born to the royal pair, the image of his mother, to whom the name Ortlieb was given. The sovereign of the Huns celebrated the birth of the child, who some day should inherit all his kingdoms, with a festive banquet, on which occasion many subject princes, kings, and thousands of noble knights found a place in the spacious, high-arched palace halls. But not alone in the palace was there merrymaking. The whole Hunnish folk took part in the celebration with feasting, song, and dance,—for a future ruler was born. Now would the kingdom not be orphaned by Etzel's death and given as a prey to external and internal foes, but would be faithfully protected by its rightful chieftain. The king, for his son's sake, loved his spouse more than before, and had gladly laid at her feet all the treasures of the world, only she desired nothing. She remained always the same,—serious, of few words, yet careful in her duties as royal housewife. Even the little boy, who

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sturdily throve and was the father's delight, devotedly as she cherished him, never won from her a smile. The wounds which the death of her first consort had inflicted healed not; they still bled, and the spirit of revenge, from out the depths, ceased not to demand blood for blood, murder for murder—and for this she was ready.

VII

THE EXPEDITION TO THE HUNS

ONCE upon a time the king, caressing the little Ortlieb, said kindly to the mother that he hoped the child would sometime become a hero like Siegfried. She would fain have cried out at the mention of the name, for it was as if she saw him, pale and disfigured by wounds, lying before her. She controlled herself, remained to all appearance quite composed, and only begged her spouse to invite her brothers and kinsfolk to visit him in the land of the Huns.

It was the first request that she had proffered, and Etzel fulfilled it with delight. He immediately commanded that the most distinguished minstrels,¹ Swemmelin and Wörbelin, should, with four-and-twenty noble knights, start for the Rhine, to invite the Burgundian kings, with all

¹ "Minstrels were often employed by their lords as emissaries to foreign lands. Ancient law forbade their molestation, and hence they were the safest messengers."—Richter's *Heldensagen*.

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their kinsfolk, to the festival of the summer solstice. Chriemhild cautioned the messengers especially that they should kindly greet Dame Ute, and beg her to come with them, that she might see for herself what good estate and honor her daughter enjoyed. The messengers should also have a care that Hagen should accompany the kings.

The minstrels were well received in Worms, for they brought good tidings of the noble queen and the powerful ruler of the Huns. They were furnished with the best accommodations and many rich gifts. Nevertheless, Gunther delayed the reply, because he would first take counsel with his knights. When they assembled about him, and were informed of the affair, they all favored the expedition. They said that they might well expect a cordial reception and days of festivity, since the rich king was kindly disposed towards them. Hagen, on the contrary, advised against it, because, without preparations for war, great harm might befall them in that strange and distant land. Giselher opposed him, saying that his uncle feared for his own life; that he called to mind what he had done to Siegfried, and deemed that the queen

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would retaliate with like treachery. At this speech the knight became furious.

“When did I ever lower my shield for the sake of life or limb?” cried he. “Would ye go to the Huns, then will I lead ye thither, for to me the way is known. I take no care for myself, but for the name and fame of Burgundia; for you, ye kings, whose vassal I am.”

And so the journey was decided upon, and the minstrels, richly laden with gifts, returned with the message to their own land.

Hagen took charge of the preparations for the journey, and it seemed verily as if he were making ready for a campaign. A thousand and threescore knights, all in rich apparel and well armed, together with nine thousand men at arms, were summoned, and were directed to bear sharp spears, and swords, and shields, and helmets hard as steel.

“The Nibelungs journey to the Huns; may they return in safety!” was said among the folk, as the troops passed over the Rhine. For since the Nibelung hoard had been brought into the land, the kings, with their kinsmen and retainers were called by the name of that shadowy kingdom of the Nibelungs. Gladly would Dame

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Ute have folded her daughter again in her arms, but her age did not permit her the long journey. Brunhild, too, remained behind, since she had no desire to behold her mortal foe in the enjoyment of happiness. In general, she avoided festive assemblies, and lingered rather by the mound where Siegfried's body lay.¹

The Nibelungs crossed the Rhine in boats, and rode then for twelve days under the leadership of Hagen, who knew the way through the Black Forest and many a wild tract, until, on the borders of Bavaria, unmolested, they reached the Danube. But neither accommodation nor a boatman was there to be found. While the hosts encamped, Hagen went farther into the interior of the inhospitable country, and came to a spring that emptied its waters into a lake. There he saw some women bathing in the clear water, and at once perceived that they were

¹ This is another intimation that Brunhild loved the hero whose murder she had procured. The original Brunhild (Brynchild) loved Sigurd, the original Siegfried, and preferred to have him slain rather than see him in the embrace of another. But, like Dido, she mounted the funeral pyre in the frenzy of love. (See p. 320.)

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swan-nymphs. Swimming, they took to flight at sight of him; but he discovered and took possession of their swan garments,¹ which compelled them to grant him speech.

“Give us our garments,” cried one of the nymphs, “and I will prophesy for thee.”

He promised to comply with her demand if she would make known to him the issue of the journey. She declared that he, with all his companions, would enjoy great honors in Etzel’s land and return home unharmed. But, as the hero gave back the garments, another nymph said that her sister had so prophesied from cunning. On the contrary, of all the army the priest alone would be saved and again behold the Rhine; all the others would fall by the sword in a foreign land, unless, heeding the warning, they should at once turn their steeds homeward.

“Ye are then versed in lying?” spake the doughty knight. “Methinks, with my sword

¹ Although not expressly stated in this connection, the swan garments and the prophetic power are sufficient indication that the water-nymphs whom Hagen accosts are Valkyrs. (See note 2, p. 67.)

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and my shield, I shall protect my lords and myself. I ask of ye but counsel as to how we may pass this stream?"

They said that keeping to the valley of the river he would find a little inn. Opposite lived a boatman, a rich and valiant hero. He should call to him and pretend to be Amelrich,¹ the friend of the boatman. But he must deal with the proud knight gallantly and offer him rich reward, otherwise he would be exposed to danger. As the nymphs spake thus they were wafted by their swan pinions over the glistening waters and disappeared in the distance.

Hagen followed their advice. He found the inn and asked courteously for transport, and, when that was in vain, called loudly till the mountains rang:

"Boatman, fetch across thy friend Amelrich: time presses."

Immediately he heard powerful oar-strokes, and soon the boatman, with his skiffs, was on the hither bank. The Tronjan offered him a

¹ With the exception of the above incident in the *Nibelungen Lied*, there is apparently no mention of this Amelrich in either history or legend.

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heavy ring of red gold for the ferriage, but the boatman, vexed to see before him a stranger in place of his good friend Amelrich, gave him a blow upon the head with his powerful oar, so that it would have been his death, had not his stout helm protected him. Hagen returned the blow with his sword so lustily that the ferryman, fatally wounded, fell overboard. Thereupon, the hero himself seized the oar, and forced, too, the terrified oarsmen into his service. Although wind and weather were against him, the strong arm of the Tronjan overcame all obstacles, and he landed there where the troops were encamped. The transport was now rapidly effected. Again and again must the wild waters be crossed, but the doughty knight wearied not until the whole body of horsemen had been carried over. Among the last was found the priest. With a stroke of the oar Hagen pitched him overboard.

“If we must all fall by the sword, as these water-nymphs have said,” cried he, angrily, “then shall the priest, instead of drinking wine with the Huns, have water here, and see the Rhine no more.”

He spake not truly. His flowing robes

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buoyed up the priest in the water, and wind and wave bore him back to the shore.

“Now the Devil may have his way,” said the bold knight; “little care I for him; for that which is must be: such is the word of the Norns.”

Thereupon he ordered the march to be continued. He himself remained with the rear guard; Volker led the advance, as he knew the way.

Already had Night spread over the earth her mantle of peace, and the stars looked down from the dark heavens upon the wayworn knights, when Hagen heard the tramp of horses' hoofs behind him. He turned about, but, before he could put his lance in rest, he was charged upon and thrown from the saddle.

It was Margrave Gelfrat who greeted the knight so ungraciously. To avenge the murdered boatman, he, with his brother Else and seven hundred warlike Bavarians, had followed the trail of the Burgundian, and now, like a thunderstorm, fell upon him. Hagen, indeed, after his fall, sprang up at once and drew the sword; but he was surrounded, and the sturdy margrave shattered his shield. In the time of

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direst need, his brother Dankwart came to his aid. He, with his men, boldly attacked the foe. By his sword fell Gelfrat; but Else, though wounded, escaped after over one hundred of his troopers had been slain.

After this affray, the Burgundians continued their march unhindered. Nowhere on the way did they find good accommodation, until they came to Passau, where they were hospitably received. They made there a day's halt, and then proceeded along the valley of the river. There they saw a knight peacefully resting upon the flowery greensward. He slept so soundly that he woke not until Hagen plucked his sword from his side. Then, indeed, he sprang up, and bitterly complained that the good Rüdiger would reproach him as an unfaithful watchman should he present himself before him without a weapon. The hero of Tronje returned his sword, adding to it ornaments of red gold, and bade him take to the margrave without delay the tidings that the kings of Burgundia, with their retainers, would claim his hospitality. The man returned thanks for the gift.

“But, valiant knight,” added he, “I know thee well: thou art the grim Hagen, and I

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counsel thee, journey not to the Huns,—the queen bears thee deadly hatred.”

“For that care I little,” spake the Tronjan. “Fail not to bring the message to the margrave.”

The knight mounted his steed, which was grazing hard by, and speeded towards Bechelaren.

That was happy news for the noble Rüdiger, when he learned that the dear friends from Burgundia thought to bide with him for a season. He summoned his liegemen ; he bade his housewife, Gotelinde, and his fair daughter, Dietelinde, prepare for the reception. He said that they should, with beseeming respect, receive with kisses, according to custom, the kings, their kinsman Dankwart, the minstrel Volker, and especially his old comrade Hagen. The whole house was in a state of joyous commotion. The noble ladies brought out their richest apparel, which glistened with gold and costly gems. As soon as the guests were perceived from the battlements, Rüdiger, with many knights, rode to meet them, and said that he would cordially entertain them and their attendants, however numerous they might be.

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Before the house stood the margravine with her daughter and six-and-thirty noble women and damsels, all in gorgeous array, with fillets of gold round hair and brow. The housewife gave to the kings and their kinsmen greeting and kiss; likewise also did her daughter, according to custom; but as, without misgiving, she drew near to the hero of Tronje, she started back affrighted,—an odor of blood seemed wafted towards her. She would not, she could not kiss him. Then the mother chided her, because she would refuse a greeting to her father's esteemed comrade; and the margrave with severity commanded her compliance. She yielded it reluctantly, and then fled, deathly pale, to the side of her mother, as if she would seek protection from the inexplicably terrifying presence. The maiden knew nothing of the guilt that rested upon Hagen; it was a vague misgiving which arose in her pure soul and repelled her from her father's friend.

The noble Gotelinde escorted King Gunther to the festive hall; the host followed with Gernot; and the young Giselher accompanied the daughter of the house. Soon the guests sat at the deliciously furnished banquet, and with

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them, to the joy of the knights, the noble women and maids¹ who formed the retinue of the margravine. The henchmen camped in tents and huts which had been hastily set up, and refreshed themselves with food and wine, which the rich margrave dispensed in superabundance. When the meal was ended, and the beaker began its rounds, the young Dietelinde, who had sat by Giselher, retired with the female attendants; but the housewife, according to custom, remained with the guests, and had a care that of wine there should be no lack.

On the following day the margrave would still not allow the guests to depart; nor were they unhappy on this account, for everything was done which could make their stay agree-

¹ "It has been supposed that it was only towards the tenth century that the women of the household gained the right of sitting at table with the men."—Wright's *Womankind in Western Europe*.

But, in accounts of mediæval banquets, we frequently read that the wife of the host, assisted by maidens, served at table, rendering the guests such services as are now left to hired servants, thus adding, according to the notions of those days, to the splendor of the occasion.

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able. Giselher, in particular, was not backward in maintaining his place by the side of Dietelinde, and the knights whispered among themselves that the two young people—he a valorous, manly, handsome knight ; she the loveliest of maidens—seemed, indeed, made for each other.

At her father's bidding, Dietelinde sang, to the accompaniment of the harp, a lay of a noble maiden who by song and music freed her father from the bonds of a giant. And, as she evoked these sweet tones, she seemed to the guests fairer than before, and many a knight said that she could subdue the whole world of giants with song and music ; others said among themselves that they would welcome a life-and-death combat with all giants could they win the favor of the gentle maid. So talked the happy guests, and gazed with delight upon the fair one, as the mariners upon the polar star when with sharp keel they cleave the waves. But when the singer found so many eyes turned upon her, abashed she descended from her dais, and, with her maidens, left the hall. It was to the guests as had a heavenly apparition vanished from their midst.

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Silence fell upon the knights. Then Volker, the brave minstrel, raised his voice and spake :

“ Were I a rich prince and wore a crown, I would lay it at the feet of the adorable maiden, and say, ‘ Thou shalt be my queen.’ ”

“ And beneath a crown should she stand,” spake Gernot the knight, “ could I place it upon her fair brow.”

“ Ye know nothing and comprehend nothing,” cried Hagen the Tronjan. “ See ye not how our King Giselher carries this maid in his heart ? Pray speak, King Gunther, and inquire if our host, the most noble margrave, have aught to gainsay.”

“ That right willingly,” replied the king, extending his hand to Rüdiger.

With joy the latter grasped it, yet added :

“ Reflect, my honored guests, that I have nor land nor folk to place at the disposal of another. Castles and towns belong to my lord, the king of the Huns.”

“ We would not take with us castles and towns to the Rhine,” said Gernot ; “ we desire only the lovely maiden. If she will follow us, we opine that we receive a rich treasure from our esteemed host.”

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“Besides, the daughter of the margrave will not come to ye destitute,” spake Rüdiger. “A hundred beasts of burden, heavily laded, will take her dowry¹ in garments and precious jewels to Worms over the Rhine.”

“Close the ring, noble knights,” cried Volker; “let our King Giselher and the noble Dietelinde be summoned, that we may ask them if this be the will of both.”

The knights closed the ring about the young people, as they in obedience to the summons came into the hall. And now, according to the

¹ Although among the ancient and mediæval Germans marriage was a tax upon the purse of the bridegroom, rather than upon that of the bride or her relatives, yet her legal guardians, if belonging to the well-to-do classes, were accustomed to furnish the bride liberally with ornaments and valuables, so that the portion which she received in this form from her family may often have been at least the equivalent of the price which the husband paid for his wife. In very early times gifts of cattle, horses, and weapons were bestowed by the bridegroom upon the family of the bride; and she brought with her to her new home similar treasures; yet his gifts were in fulfilment of a contract, the price exacted for his wife, while hers were free-will offerings.

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old custom, the questions were addressed to them, if they would devote themselves to each other in good faith. The royal knight replied joyfully, "Yes;" but the maiden, blushing deeply under the gaze of so many men, hesitated, bashfully dropped her eyes, and only upon repetition of the question, whispered, "Yes." Then Giseler clasped her in his arms and gave her the kiss of betrothal, and the lifelong bond was consummated.

The guests tarried yet many a day with their friendly host, and the rich margrave left nothing undone which could give them pleasure. When finally the day of departure came, he bestowed upon every knight various gifts of ornaments, rings, garments, and steeds. Hagen would accept nothing of the sort. He wished only for a stout shield that hung on the wall among the other armor.

"It is the shield of Nudung, our only son, whom the faithless Wittich slew," said the margravine, and her tears dropped fast upon the shining armor. "Take it, brave hero; may it protect thee better than it did our loved one. Mayst thou bear it to the Huns with honor, and back again over the Rhine."



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“I intend to bear it with honor,” spake the Tronjan; “but if I shall bring it to Worms is not known to me.”

Dame Gotelinde also gave to Volker, the valourous minstrel, twelve costly rings of red gold, studded with many a precious stone. Then the hero took the viol, and, sweeping the strings with powerful touch, sang a parting lay, at first low and tender, then ever louder, until the tones rang through the vast halls:

“O mistress Love, I know thee, though thou abid'st
unseen,

Deep as the depths of heaven, upon whose veil
stars gleam.

'Tis thou hast led us hither to Bechelaren Land,
Where dwells a knight most noble, a hero brave
and grand;

And kindly Gotelinde, who with free hand be-
stows

Rich gifts; and her loved daughter, yet fairer
than the rose.

A crown is destined for her, a crown which is
her meed;

A youthful knight would give it, and for her
favor plead.

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O may this house, wherein joy and love and
faith abide,
God save from all disaster and woe that might
betide!
And yet, I hear the swords clash, and see the
blood flow red—
Hear weeping and bewailing, and moan as for
the dead.”

The minstrel threw the viol from him, so that
the strings brake with a sharp twang.

“A spirit from below, a false demon, struck
that note for me and forced me so to play and
sing,” cried he; “but I will conquer him.”

And thereupon he took his instrument again
in his hand and put in new strings. It had
grown quite still in the hall; a strange horror
seemed to have crept over guest and host.
Only Hagen appeared unmoved by it. He
said:

“So, too, spake the mermaids in the lake, yet
it troubles me not.”

Volker had tuned the cords of the viol, and
fiddled and sang of love and chivalry so charm-
ingly that all terror vanished and care disap-
peared, and one thought only of the happy
return home. Thereupon, the guests, with fare-

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wells and kisses, took leave of the most noble ladies ; but Rüdiger gave them his escort with four hundred mounted men through the land of Austria, even unto Etzelburg, where he was to present them to the king of the Huns.

As the proud castle, with its battlements and turrets, came into view, they saw a great body of mounted men in shining armor, who rode rapidly towards them.

“Those knights are known to me,” said Hagen. “It is the Bernese Dietrich with his comrades ; give them honorable greeting.”

At once the kings dismounted. Even so did Dietrich and his knights.

“Be welcome to the land of the Huns, ye valiant heroes from the Rhine,” cried the Lord of Bern ; “but I know not if ye will all be well received and cared for among the Huns. I deem that the noble margrave may have given ye to know that the queen yet ever laments the powerful Siegfried, whose death she intends to avenge on my old comrade in arms, Hagen. We fought aforetime, shield to shield, in Etzel’s battles, and thou hast averted many a spear from me, so will I now come to thine aid so much as ever I can. Yet, on account of the queen,

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I am not glad because of thy journey to the Huns."

"I give little heed to the hatred of a woman,¹ since I have come here in the service of my liege lord," said the bold hero. "Moreover, thy good faith consoles me, most noble Bernese knight."

"Me, too, mayst thou bear in mind," spake Volker, the minstrel. "In stress of battle will I ever prove myself thy faithful comrade."

After many greetings and talk on various subjects among the knights who had celebrated festivals and encountered battles together, the kings, with their escort, rode towards Etzelburg. On the road and in the castle court the folk crowded about the valiant Burgundians, intent above all upon seeing the far-famed Hagen of Tronje, who had slain the powerful Siegfried.

¹ This speech is hardly true, except as an index of his contempt of the sex. He advised against this visit to the Huns for fear of Chriemhild; he opposed the marriage with Etzel lest it might make her strong enough to avenge Siegfried's murder; and he plundered the Nibelung hoard because it was enabling Chriemhild to attach too many valiant knights to her personal service.

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As he sprang from his steed and went to the queen, they were amazed at his heroic stature, his broad chest, and powerful shoulders. But many a man was shocked when he gazed upon the grim features, framed in tangled hair already partially turned gray. As the crowd thickened, and thereby hindered the knights, he glanced about with his solitary eye so fiercely, that the Huns retreated in horror, as from a serpent.

The knights, led by Dietrich and Rüdiger, reached the castle court. Thither the queen, with her attendants, came to meet them. She greeted the kings, and kissed the young Giselher, her brother; but to the knights she seemed to give little heed. Then spake the hero of Tronje :

“When one has been invited, and on that account taken a long journey, then says the host, according to praiseworthy custom, ‘Be welcome!’ In the land of the Huns, meseems, this fashion is not known.”

“Lord Hagen of Tronje,” spake Chriemhild, “by thy deeds hast thou finely sought to win such a greeting! Hast thou perhaps brought me as a gift the stolen Nibelung hoard?”

“That lies sunk in the depths of the Rhine,

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until the world's destruction overtake us," replied the knight. "Had the heralds given me to know that the queen stood in need of gifts, I am rich enough to offer such."

"I can well spare them," spake the noble lady. "I am now rich enough to offer even to all the Burgundians gold and jewels. I but weened thou wert perhaps willing to give back that which was mine own, which was stolen from me."

"My burden is heavy with shield, helm, cuirass, and sword," spake the hero; "so I will bring thee the Devil; he has much hoarded wealth."

"I desire not thy gifts," cried the queen. "Thou hast already sorely served me with treacherous murder and cunning theft; for this I am still thy debtor."

And so she parted in anger from the knight; but she summoned her men, and promised that upon him who should avenge Siegfried's death she would bestow favor and great wealth. Then the knights took counsel among themselves as to how they should perform this service which their queen required.

Thereupon the queen returned to her brothers,

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and bade them lay aside their armor,¹ and to command their men to do likewise, since it was not customary to stand armed in the presence of the king of the Huns.

“That will I disadvise,” spake the hero of Tronje. “I intend honorably to bear shield and weapon before the king as before the queen. They would disarm us to give us over like fettered cattle to the butchers.”

“Did I know,” answered Chriemhild, “who had thus suggested, his life were in danger.”

“That man I can name to thee,” spake the hero of the Amelungs: “he is called Dietrich of Bern, and stands before thee. He knows that a fiendish plot² has been concocted to murder the

¹ In olden times, when there were no inns, perfect strangers were in the habit of freely asking and receiving hospitality in hut and castle; but as surety of good faith, in those days when deeds of violence were common, they doffed their armor and laid aside their weapons while claiming the title of guests.

² Dietrich appears greatly shocked at the plot against his old comrade, ignoring the fact that the queen's motive is revenge for the treacherous murder of Siegfried by Hagen. Besides the claims of a guest, Siegfried had laid the Burgundians under great obligations to him by important service in war against

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knights from the Rhine, particularly my old comrade of Tronje.”

The queen replied only by an angry glance, and passed on towards her apartments.

the Danes and Saxons and by rescuing the Burgundian princess from the dragon. Hagen, on the other hand, had no claim whatever upon the queen but the claim of hospitality—a claim already doubly forfeited. We are hardly permitted to suppose Dietrich ignorant of Hagen's unspeakable crime.

VIII

THE BURGUNDIANS AT THE COURT OF KING ETZEL

WHILE the kings were still talking together, Hunnish knights were seen moving about, regarding them with very unfriendly mien. Then Hagen asked if perhaps one of the Burgundian knights would go with him as far as Chriemhild's hall, that the Huns might see that they were without fear.

“Why dost thou stay to question?” spake the bold Volker. “I am thy comrade in arms, and I have so keen a fiddle bow that for very bliss heads topple off their shoulders when I begin to play.”

And so the dauntless knights went into the inner court, and seated themselves on a settle before the hall of the queen. The noble lady recognized them readily. With her women she descended the steps, and more than a hundred well-armed henchmen gathered about her. Volker would have risen before her, but his

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comrade bade him remain seated, since, otherwise, the Huns might believe that they were afraid. Conspicuously, across his knees, he also laid the good sword Balmung, with its hilt of jasper and its scabbard ringed with gold. The queen asked him why he bore her such desperate hatred, why he had treacherously slain the noble Siegfried.

“Troth!” spake he, “I have never yet denied that I did it. On his account the queen of the Burgundians was insulted, and the royal house brought into disgrace. With blood must the stigma be wiped out; and, because the hero was too powerful for open fight, he was craftily slain. Though I be blamed for this, and though vengeance be sought for what has happened, I am not afraid. I conceal naught; here am I easily found.”

Then Chriemhild turned to her henchmen, and challenged them to chastise this slander of their queen. But the two intrepid men glowered about them so grimly that none of the Huns dared lay hands on them, even though Chriemhild offered a rich measure of gold.

“Gold is, of a truth, a goodly boon, but therewith will a cleft head and slashed body not

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be made whole. For the minstrel, the Devil does stand, and, when he plays his fiddle, lets none escape. And Hagen we know well,—how once he was held as hostage¹ by King Etzel, and fought at the head of our troops with Walter of Spain. In those days he was young: now has he increased in strength and wit. Look, how his one eye flashes with rage, as if he sought whom he might first strike down.”

So spake the henchmen, and went their ways, but the queen, full of shame, retired to her chamber.

The message now arrived that the sovereign of the Huns desired to receive the noble Burgundians in his palace. There was no more

¹ In the Latin poem, *Waltharius*, we read of several instances in which the children or relatives of conquered kings were claimed by Attila as pledges of good faith. These young people were reared at his court and served in honorable positions in his armies or formed part of the retinue of his queen.

In such relation to King Etzel had Hagen stood, and Walter of Spain and his beloved Hildegunde, when the acquaintance was formed to which reference is here made, as we learn from the above-named poem.

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delay. King Gunther accompanied the Lord of Bern; with Gernot went Hawart, the tributary prince of Daneland; with Giseler, the noble Margrave Rüdiger; with Dankwart, the brave Irnfried;¹ Wolfhart, Dietrich's liegeman, and the Thuringian Iring followed with the other knights. Hagen and Volker parted not company, even as in the storm of battle they fought ever shield to shield. As the knights entered the great hall, Etzel rose from his chair of state and bade the guests welcome. They should be well accommodated, he said, with all their attendants. After having greeted the Nibelungs, he remarked:

“Now would I fain learn who those two comrades may be who stand there together and seem valiant knights.”

“It is Volker, the minstrel, and Hagen of Tronje, my kinsman,” spake King Gunther, indicating the two knights.

“So look I again upon thy face,” cried Etzel,

¹ William Grimm identifies Irnfried with King Irmenfried of Thuringia, who married Amalaberg, the niece of Theodoric, the Ostrogothic king. Hawart, Wolfhart, and Iring appear to be wholly legendary characters.

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“and greet thee as an old friend, most noble Hagen! But thou art grown to be another man from what thou wert in those days when, for the valiant deeds in my service, I loosed thee from the bonds of a hostage and sent thee free to Burgundia. Thou hast lost an eye, thy hair is mixed with gray, and thy face is marred so that thou mightest well strike terror to the heart of many a knight when thou dost draw thy broadsword.”

“Who can give us to know,” spake the doughty knight, “if that may not soon occur?”

“Never in the land of the Huns,” answered the sovereign; “there art thou, like all Burgundians, an honored guest.”

Many other greetings and many friendly words were there exchanged; then the knights were bidden to the banquet. It was just on the day of the summer solstice that the Burgundians arrived, and they had never celebrated the festival so magnificently as here in the land of the Huns. After the banquet, host and guest liberally imbibed sweet mead¹ and fiery wine.

¹“Mead is a drink prepared from honey, which from time immemorial was a favorite among the Ger-

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Not until late in the evening did they separate, and the Burgundians were shown into a vast hall, where beds with downy soft pillows and gold-bordered coverlets were arranged for them.

“The Huns accord us great honors and good quarters,” spake Hagen, “but methinks they have in mind some wily trick against us. Therefore let every knight keep his war gear in readiness; but I will be chamberlain, and guard well the portal against attack.”

“Then I am with thee,” cried the minstrel; “by the swords of two knights is the entrance more surely protected than by locks and bolts.”

Thereupon, the heroes seated themselves upon a stone settle before the portal. But Volker took his stringed instrument and swept the cords powerfully, until the walls of the hall echoed; then ever more softly and sweetly,

mans next to beer, and indeed gradually displaced the latter beverage from the first rank. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, mead, in Germany, was held in equal estimation with wine. When, in any region, bee-keeping received insufficient attention, the honey necessary for the preparation of mead was imported from Poland, where this is still a popular drink and excellently brewed.”—Richter's *Heldensagen*.

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until the men slept. Now he seized again sword and shield, and, with his comrade, kept the watch.

At midnight, by the light of the stars, the minstrel saw the glitter of helms and shields. He showed it to his companion, who at once perceived that it proceeded from the queen's men at arms, out upon a midnight errand of murder. Silently and stealthily they drew near, but retreated in alarm when they caught sight of the brave watchmen. The minstrel would have sprung out among them and given them escort with sharp blows of the sword, but Hagen objected, because perhaps a body of them in their rear might make their way into the hall and murder their sleeping friends. So the peace was maintained, and, as the blushing morning dawned, the Burgundians rose gayly, girded on their war gear, and strode armed into the temple¹ to the celebration of the festival of

¹ This celebration of a German pagan festival within a temple, at the court of the Hunnish King Attila, is not in accordance with probability. In the fifth century the heads of German families conducted their worship in the open air, the people having few priests and no temples. The barbarous Huns must have been

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the summer solstice. King Etzel appeared, too, with a great retinue, and asked in amazement, as he saw his guests armed in the temple, if, while under his protection, they had met with any unfriendly treatment. But they kept silence regarding the occurrence of the night, and said only that it was the custom of the Burgundians to go armed to festive celebrations.

After the festal offering, a plentiful repast was served; then followed games, dances, and songs of youths and maidens, and various sorts of amusements. The Huns held a tournament and invited the Burgundians to break a lance with them. Immediately the valorous guests entered the lists. The knights of Dietrich and

at least equally destitute. The poet must, therefore, have added to the ancient Siegfried tradition many details supplied from his own Middle-Age surroundings. It is, however, by no means improbable that through "the amalgamation of creeds," as says M. Saintine, "the neophyte remained half pagan and half Christian;" so that, though anachronistic, to represent men as "going devoutly to church after having consulted the Nix of the river as to their future fate" (as did Hagen) is no doubt a true picture of the Germany of the early Christian days.

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Rüdiger, too, wished to measure themselves with the heroes from the Rhine famous in arms, but their lords forbade them to tilt. Therefore the Nibelungs competed with the Huns alone, and, in every combat, proved that they were far superior to the latter. The games were ended: the knights desired to rest. But, as they were leaving the arena, a warlike Hunnish prince dashed up and challenged to a joust, saying that the stranger guests had measured themselves only with the common folk, not with princely heroes. At this was the brave Volker angered, laid his lance in rest, and, as the knight charged, thrust it into his body just under the rim of the shield.¹

¹ The tournament was not a battle, but a game, although a rough one, in which serious accidents sometimes happened; yet were these comparatively rare, all reasonable precautions being taken to avoid them. The laws which governed the game forbade blows except upon the helm, shield, or breastplate, which afforded tolerably effectual protection against mortal wounds. Failure to observe these rules might well give rise to suspicion of its intentional violation. According to Simrock, there were four nails in the middle of the shield, at which the lance was aimed in jousting.

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“Murder! Blood! Down with the murderous knave!” cried the Hunnish knights, and all the people crowded around the minstrel.

Already Hagen stood at his side, already the swords flashed, when King Etzel rushed into the crowd and threatened with death every one who should harm his guests. So peace was apparently restored, yet passion rankled in their hearts, as their angry looks testified.

The knights sat again at banquet,—upon their dais the king and queen. When they had eaten, many a beaker was drained and many a kindly word exchanged between one and another. Then Etzel, in happy mood, commanded that his beloved little son Ortlieb should be brought in.

“Behold,” spake he, as the attendant came with the beautiful child, “behold my joy and delight. He is like his mother, and, if he be of the same metal as her first husband, so will he become the most famous hero, and, like myself, shall be a powerful king, for I will give him twelve kingdoms, which I have won through many a hot battle. When he is older I will bring him to you over the Rhine that he may learn courtly manners and feats of tourney.”

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The knights admired the lovely child. Then Hagen's voice was heard:

"Never will I rank among his courtiers. The brat looks to me altogether weakly and miserable: it is doomed to an early death."¹

In displeasure and anger all eyes turned upon the bold hero of Tronje. At the same time from without was heard wild tumult, howling, the clash of weapons, and the ringing stroke of swords.

¹ This doom is both pronounced and fulfilled by the same brutal guest. If anything could be added to Chriemhild's justification for seeking Hagen's life, he appears eager to add it.

IX

STRIFE BETWEEN THE BURGUNDIANS AND THE HUNS

BEFORE the knights betook themselves to the banquet in the Kings' Hall, the queen had spoken secretly with the Lord of Bern.

"Thy thoughts are busy, valiant hero," said she, "with the recovery of thine Amelung Land. I will provide that Etzel shall aid thee to the full extent of his power, if thou wilt grant me one boon. I have been robbed, like thyself, of my dearest, mine only treasure,—by ignominious murder robbed of my Siegfried, the most glorious hero. Avenge him on Hagen, the murderer."

"Shouldest thou, most noble queen, pledge to me the land of the Amelungs and that of the Huns and the imperial crown of Rome, yet could I not be Siegfried's avenger,—for the Burgundians are to me valued friends, and in good faith have they journeyed hither."

So spake the hero of Bern, and left the queen disconsolate.

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Then came Blödelin,¹ Etzel's brother, hurriedly and in anger. He told her of the arrogance of the Nibelungs and how Volker had slain a distinguished, worshipful prince in the tournament. To him also she spoke of the unavenged death of Siegfried, and promised him a rich hoard of silver and gold. But he hesitated, out of fear of Etzel's anger. Howbeit, the shrewd woman offered him another marriage, with castles and towns, and, thereunto, an altogether lovely maiden of her retinue, who hitherto had disdained his suit. These promises won the Hunnish knight. He said to her that he would instigate a quarrel, and when the Tronjan came in haste to quell it, he would have him struck down by his men, bound, and delivered to the queen.

After making this compact, the queen betook herself to her chamber, where curtains of India silk² admitted only a soft twilight. Here she

¹ The historical Attila also had a brother named Bleda, or Blödelin, and this is one of the circumstances which prove that this famous Hunnish monarch was the original of King Etzel in the *Nibelungen Lied*.

² Window curtains were more indispensable in the Middle Ages than at present, since glass window panes

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reflected upon what had taken place, and thought how weak mortals can never foresee the consequences of an act or a decision. Then the words of her mother Ute occurred to her: "Women often shed more blood with their tongues and inflict deeper wounds than men with their swords." She was about to rise, to deter Blödelin, but a bier seemed to appear before her, and thereon lay the beloved hero, with the death-wound in his breast. He raised himself and stretched out his arms towards her. She hastened to him, but the vision had vanished. Waking, she had dreamed; but to her it seemed a monition to revenge, and she was resolved.

She proceeded to the Kings' Hall, and seated herself at Etzel's side. Yet she took no part in the converse of the heroes. In her soul thoughts surged to and fro.

"And should it cost my life, or that of my precious little son, or of Etzel,—should this castle and the kingdom of the Huns fall in ruins

were rare even as late as the end of the seventeenth century, and curtains were useful not only to secure seclusion and exclude the sun, but for protection against inclement weather.

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over me,—if I but bury the murderer with me in the abyss, I would die gladly.” These were her thoughts when the little Ortlieb was brought in.

Blödelin meantime had summoned his men, and commanded them to arm and to hold themselves in readiness for a sharp fight, since he thought to give the arrogant Nibelungs a lesson. That was to all glad news. They followed him readily to the hall where Dankwart, the marshal, had the henchmen under his charge. The hero rose from his seat to greet the princely knight, but the latter cried out to him :

“Prepare to die ! The queen demands bloody revenge for the death of the powerful Siegfried.”

“How shall I atone for the murder, since I knew naught of it ?”

“Yet must it be,” said the Hun ; “the swords of my men return not bloodless to their scabbards.”

“Then doth it repent me of my entreaty, and I give answer with the naked blade.”

Thereupon he drew his sword, and dealt the knight such a powerful blow through the gorget that his head fell from his body.

Wild tumult, cries of rage, arose in the hall.

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Spears were thrust, swords flashed ; the unarmed henchmen seized broken pieces of tables and seats, and with them shattered helms and shields, heads, arms, and legs ; yet were a great number of them slain. The brave Dankwart, well armed, strode ahead of his men, and, with those who were left, made a way for himself out into the open air. But here other thousands fell upon them, and the little company were all slain by the murderous weapons. Only the brave marshal still stood firm and undismayed ; showers of spears rattled upon helm and coat of mail ; he desired only a messenger who should bring news of his distress to the kings and to his brother.

“The messenger shalt thou thyself be,” cried the Huns, “when we carry thee dead into the hall.”

Meantime the powerful knight gave himself not up for lost. Wheresoever his sword struck, there, too, fell a Hun. So, grandly as a victor, he strode through the throng, reached the steps that led to the Kings' Hall, and, covered with blood, entered the room.

“Up, brother Hagen !” cried he ; “rescue me from the faithless Huns. Sir Blödelin fell upon me and our folk, to take vengeance for

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Siegfried's death. He lies slain by my hand, but the men are all dead. I alone escaped the murderers' hands."

Then Hagen rose and spake in ireful tones :

"Tell me, brother Dankwart, why art thou covered with blood?"

"As yet I am unharmed by the faithless Huns," answered the brave man. "This is the blood of the knights that my broadsword hath felled; therewith are my battle garments wet."

"Then be doorkeeper here, that none crowd in or out," spake the Tronjan hero; "we'll here hold judgment."

Thereupon he drew his sword and struck off the head of the child Ortlieb, so that it fell into Chriemhild's lap. Then he inflicted a mortal wound upon the attendant of the child, and struck off the minstrel Wörbelin's right hand, as he mockingly said:

"That for thy faithless errand over the Rhine!"

The Hunnish knights at once rose to arms; spears whizzed and swords flashed. Then King Gunther sprang into the midst of the strife, seeking to check it and part the infuriated combatants. In vain! He himself was forced to

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draw the sword to defend himself from the Huns. In like manner did also the powerful Gernot and the young Giseler. Meantime was Dankwart in danger, for from within and from without he was hard pressed. Therefore Hagen called the minstrel to the support of his brother. Now was the door effectually barred by the swords of two knights.

In consternation, Etzel and the queen sat in the midst of the hideous tumult. Dietrich and Rüdiger, too, who took no part in the conflict, were distressed. Then the Bernese hero rose and called loudly :

“Hearken to me, Nibelungs! Hear my word, ye friends from Burgundia! Let there be peace between us: permit me to retire unmolested with my men and the Margrave Rüdiger.”

King Gunther, recognizing the voice, replied :

“If one of my knights has harmed thee, most noble Lord of Bern, then will I make redress and amends.”

“None has done me injury,” answered the knight, “but I beg that thou wilt grant us free egress.”

“What need of much begging?” cried Wolfhart the bold; “we have sharp keys; they, verily,

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will unlock the door, though a hundred watchmen keep it."

"Hold thy peace, haughty comrade!" answered the Bernese knight; "thy speech is void of wit."

At the same time King Gunther commanded his men to cease their strife and open their ranks. Immediately through the ranks of the enraged Burgundians the Lord of Bern passed in peace,—on one arm, the queen, on the other, King Etzel,—and with him six hundred of his knights. Then followed Rüdiger with four hundred men. To him Giselher cried:

"Greet thy daughter; say to her that dying I will remember her."

Many Huns attempted to escape with King Etzel, but every one who ventured it was struck down by the sword of the minstrel.

In the hall, after the withdrawal of Dietrich and Rüdiger, the hideous butchery began anew; nor did the strife cease until all the Huns lay dead or dying in their blood. Now the Burgundians rested, and cleared the hall of the dead. Hagen and Volker guarded the door, and cast many a word of scorn at the Huns without. But Etzel loudly bewailed the fall of

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his followers. Chriemhild, too, shed many tears, and offered a shield full of gold and jewels to him who should slay her mortal foe, Hagen.

One ventured his life at the call of the queen, even Iring of Daneland. He fought bravely, wounding Hagen, yet not mortally; then, being himself pierced by the spear of the Tronjan, dragged his dying steps to the feet of his weeping sovereign and spake:

“Mourn not for me, most noble queen: my life is spent, and tears will not recall it. Faithfully have I served thee and the king, even until death. That, in dying, is the consolation of a knight.”

To avenge the fallen hero, Hawart and Irnfried, with their Danes and Thuringians, made desperate fight against the Nibelungs; yet were they also worsted in the struggle, and, of them all, not one escaped death.

There was a lull in the storm of battle; albeit the Burgundians, all of whom were now within the hall, were aware that, without, Etzel's men were ever increasing in number, until a host of twenty thousand warriors were assembled before the palace. And now the Nibelungs asked speech with the king and queen, that they might

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treat of peace. This was vouchsafed them. Yet would they not, at the demand of Chriemhild, purchase their safety by the delivery of Hagen into her hands, and other terms she rejected.

Infuriated by this refusal, the cruel queen now knew no mercy. She commanded that the wooden part of the palace over the hall of stone,¹ wherein were the Burgundian knights, should be given to the flames. She stood by her open window and watched the conflagration. Then she thought of the past,—how as a gentle maiden she could not be present when

¹ The earliest permanent dwellings of the Germans of which we have any account consisted of a single room. As civilization advanced, other apartments were added, but often as detached buildings. The hall (*Saal*), as the principal room was called, together with the watch-tower for observation and retreat in time of extreme danger, long continued to be regarded as the castle pre-eminently, separate buildings being provided for the use of the women, as well as for industrial purposes. King Etzel's palace appears to have included several very extensive halls, one of which had an upper story, or at least a roof, of combustible material. Both the poet and the artists have doubtless exaggerated the splendor of the Hunnish capital.

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the game of the forest was hunted down: now human sacrifice was her delight. She recalled her first maidenly greeting: "Be welcome, Sir Siegfried!"—her bliss as the brilliant hero took her hand and kissed it. Then she remembered how happy and free from trouble she had lived at his side in Netherland; finally, the hideous murder and the scornful defiance of the murderer. Yes, inevitable fate and the malice of man had brought it all to pass, that her heart should be hardened, that she should cause rivers of blood to flow, that she could see her brothers perish in the flames.

Tortured by smoke and heat throughout the night, the heroes nevertheless survived; and in the morning the queen heard with amazement that the Nibelungs still lived and were prepared to take up the conflict anew. As she was taking counsel with herself, a Hunnish chieftain cried that she should summon the margrave of Bechelaren, who held in fief from the king castles and towns and great wealth, or the Bernese Dietrich, who, as an exile, had so long been a recipient of the king's favor. That seemed to the queen sage advice, and she sent messengers to Rüdiger.

X

THE HERO OF BECHELAREN AND HIS AVENGERS

THE noble margrave followed the messengers without delay to the royal castle, where King Etzel and his spouse eagerly awaited him. The liege lord spake first of the dire disaster that had befallen him, recounting how the guests from the Rhine had slain his little son and, of a truth, all his kinsmen and lieges, and plunged the whole land in mourning. Further, he reminded the valiant knight how, aforesaid, banished from his paternal inheritance, he had come with his few vassals to the king, and received from him the richest margravate, great wealth, and honors. In return for these he had thus far rendered faithful help and service. But now, Etzel continued, the time was come for him to prove his loyalty by chastising the Nibelungs with the sword for all the harm they had done, for all the trouble they had brought upon the royal house and upon the land.

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“My lord and my king,” spake the worthy hero, distressed, “that which thou speakest is verily true, and for it I am ready for any service, should it even cost my life; only demand not that I break faith with those to whom I have pledged it under mine own roof, when, in accordance with thy command, I myself led them to Etzelburg. In all love they have trusted me; the young Giselher has chosen my daughter to wear with him the crown of Burgundia. Methinks 'twere ill done to draw the sword against such friends.”

As the king thereupon reminded him of his feudal oath, he continued:

“Take back all my castles and towns, all wealth wherewith thy bounty hath enriched me, and thereto the possessions which I have myself acquired; with a beggar's staff I will go with my wife and child into dismal, distant lands; but that best possession, honor and truth, I take with me into exile.”

“Thou canst not take these with thee, noble margrave,” spake the queen. “Thou dost rob thyself of them when thou refuseth obedience. Remember the time when, to woo me for Etzel, thou camest to Burgundia. To me it

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seemed ill-advised, without friend or helper, to journey to the barbarous Huns. Then didst thou swear with sacred oath to be my helper against any foe whatsoever, only not against thy liege lord. The pledge to me is older than that thou owest the Nibelungs: break it, and thou art devoid of honor."

Rüdiger long stood speechless before the great queen, then said:

"Take my life, call in one of thine axe-men, that he strike off my head and lay it at thy feet; I will not flinch with an eyelid; but spare me that which I may not do."

"Thy life I desire not," answered Chriemhild, "but thy sword,—that is demanded by thy liege lord, thine oath, and thine honor."

Again was the valiant knight silent. Now was he pallid, now flushed. At last he cried:

"Then that must be which I had never thought possible!"

With these words he took his leave and went to prepare himself for the conflict. He summoned his men and bade them arm for battle with the Burgundians. On the one hand, it gave them pleasure that they could measure themselves with the most valiant of knights;



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but, on the other hand, pain, because they had lived in peace and love with them at Bechelaren.

The Nibelungs were feeling the refreshing influence of the cool morning air; they peered about, if haply some unexpected aid might not arrive. Then Giselher cried, joyously:

“He comes! the faithful helper in time of need, the noble margrave, with his men! Oh, we shall again see Bechelaren, again behold the Rhine! Be comforted, good friends, for neither will the Bernese hero desert us!”

“I deem that faithful helpers do not come with raised shields and drawn swords,” spake the minstrel. “I ween they would do battle with us!”

Scarce had he uttered the words, when Rüdiger stood with his men before the hall, rested his shield upon the ground, and cried:

“Ye noble Nibelungs, prepare for defence! Grievous though it be to me, yet must I draw the sword against ye, my honored friends.”

“May God forefend,” spake King Gunther, “that thou shouldst take our lives, when thou hast given us such gracious hospitality, and to every one rich gifts.”

“Would that I had been long since slain in

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the storm of battle with my foes," spake Rüdiger, "then need I not now contend with loved friends; but the oath that I once swore to Etzel's queen forces me to this deed of blood, whether or not I will."

"How gladly, noble margrave," spake Gernot, "how gladly would I serve thee with this sword which once I received from thy hand, were it permitted me to return home. It has done me faithful service in these desperate fights; yet, slay my friends, and thou thyself shalt feel the keenness of its edge."

"Would that God might so ordain," answered the knight, "that thou shouldest carry the weapon over the Rhine, and I lie here dead! And if that come to pass, then take my beloved wife and orphaned child under thy protection."

"How canst thou so speak," cried Giselher, the youth. "All they who here stand are thy kinsmen, in that thou hast betrothed to me thy daughter. Wilt thou thus early widow thine only child? How have I confidently trusted thee above all heroes, since I have sued for thy fair daughter!"

"Be mindful of thy troth, thou whom already I call son. Should the grace of God send thee

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and thy kinsmen homeward, then cause not the maiden to suffer for that which her father is here compelled to do."

"Rest assured, good hero," answered Giselher, "the love in my heart wavers not while I live. Only death parts me from thee and the precious maiden, should we all die before thee."

"Vouchsafe me, too, a word, noble margrave," spake Hagen. "The shield that Dame Gotelinde gave me in Bechelaren, and that I bore faithfully to Etzelburg, the Huns have hewn in pieces. Did I bear so good a shield as thou, I should need no other weapon."

"How gladly would I offer it to thee," answered the margrave, "were it not for Chriemhild. And yet—take it, friend Hagen, and bear it on thine arm. Ah! would that thou mightest bear it into Burgundia!"

As Rüdiger so readily offered the knight this generous gift, a tear glistened in many an eye, and many a Burgundian said that in the wide world there was not, nor would be born, a hero like Rüdiger. It was perhaps the last gift that he bestowed in life. Savage as was ever the spirit of the Tronjan, that went home to his heart and moved his soul. He said:

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“Now God reward thee, that thou hast so armed me! Towards thee I keep peace, even shouldst thou slay all my kinsmen and men from Burgundia, even should I myself be threatened by thy sword—cursed be this hand if it be raised against thee!”

“In like manner I offer thee peace,” spake the brave Volker. “Behold this bow that I received from Gotelinde’s hand; lay this in my grave, if we Burgundians fall in battle, and tell the noble margravine how I treasured her gift until death.”

The men of Bechelaren, eager to win fame by contest with heroes so renowned, urged on to battle, which, as it raged, grew ever more furious, until well-nigh two hundred Nibelungs, and all the men of Bechelaren, lay slain in that fearful fight. Gernot fell by the sword of Rüdiger, and, dying, dealt the margrave a mortal blow.

“Now has the greatest misfortune befallen us,” spake King Gunther; “two men, to us the dearest, lie here slain, each by the hand of the other. Now will none of us survive.”

Etzel uttered a cry of horror at sight of the mutilated corpse of his faithful vassal Rüdiger, and cursed them who had killed him. Chriem-

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hild stood with folded arms before the house, beautiful still, but with visage lowering as that of a fallen angel. Only a few tears that ran over her pale cheeks betrayed that to her, too, the hero, beloved of all, had been a valued friend—that in him she had lost the last instrument of revenge. Perhaps she was planning new ways and means to attain her object; howbeit, it came to pass otherwise than the queen thought, for mortal men seldom discern the dark ways chosen by inevitable fate.

The palace and the fields round about re-echoed with the sound of weeping and wailing for the hero of Bechelaren. This came to the ears of one of Dietrich's men, who hastened to his lord with the woful tidings; and the hero of Bern, when this report had been confirmed, sent Hildebrand, the aged master,¹ to the Nibe-

¹ In the sagas it was common to appoint some hero of great skill at arms and of wide experience to counsel, protect, and train in warlike exercises a younger king. Such was the office of Hagen at the Burgundian capital, though for some reason the title "Master" was not customarily given to him, as to Hildebrand—perhaps on account of the family relationship between him and the kings. The old Master Hilde-

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lungs to demand how and why they had done this unrighteous deed.

Now, Wolfhart was concerned lest his uncle, Master Hildebrand, should receive evil treatment at the hands of the Burgundians, and, because of this, he caused him to go armed upon his errand, and, sorely against his will, to accept his escort with nigh upon five hundred men.

The spirit of the Nibelungs was not tamed, nor were their replies to Hildebrand's questions tempered with meekness; so that, despite the efforts of the master to preserve the peace in accordance with the will of his lord, the fiery Wolfhart and his Amelungs, eager to avenge the death of the much-loved hero of Bechelaren, were soon engaged in desperate battle with the Burgundians. Nor were their swords returned to their scabbards, for, of the five hundred Bernese heroes, Hildebrand alone survived, and of the Nibelungs there were left but Hagen and King Gunther.

brand has no counterpart in authentic history, but is conspicuous in several legends—even in one of very early date.

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“How now, Master Hildebrand,” cried a rough voice, “now shalt thou yield payment for my comrade Volker.”

It was Hagen who so called to the old man, and at the same time fell upon him with murderous blows. The master defended himself valiantly, but the Tronjan was powerful and grim, and Balmung sharp. A fearful blow cut through Hildebrand's coat of mail, so that the blood gushed freely.

When the old man felt the wound and looked into the cruel, hideous face, fear fell upon him for the first time in his long life, and he fled like a coward, his shield upon his back.

XI

THE LAST OF THE BURGUNDIANS

WITH cloven cuirass, and red from his own and others' blood, the old master entered the presence of his lord. When asked if he had fought with the Nibelungs, and was therefore so drenched with blood, he reported first how the Burgundians had slain the good Rüdiger, and had refused to give up even the dead body for burial. This was a great grief to the Bernese hero, so that he questioned no further how the dire disaster had resulted. At once he bade the old man arm his vassals.

“Whom shall I summon?” spake the master. “The knights of Bern are all present: thou thyself, my lord, and I; and, also, of the Nibelungs there remain but Hagen and King Gunther.”

Dietrich at first failed to comprehend these words, but when he rightly understood the tidings, he loudly lamented his friends and comrades

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“How is it that the brave men have succumbed to the battle-worn knights? Who shall help me now, that I recover my Amelung Land?” So he cried in his distress.

But the hero, who had already suffered many woes, raised himself at last in his strength, and, with Hildebrand, strode, well armed, to the house where Gunther and Hagen, leaning on their swords, alone in the midst of blood and corpses, with unflinching spirit, looked fate in the face. They saw him coming and forebode what he had come to seek.

Dietrich reproached them with having, for all his friendship, inflicted upon him the sorest injury, and called upon them to surrender themselves to him. To this Hagen made answer that should two knights in full armor give themselves up to him, that were as dastardly as the flight of the old master. Dietrich challenged to battle. Hagen first sprang forward, and boldly Balmung rang in his strong hand, and put the Bernese hero in great straits; but the latter knew how to ward off and avoid the powerful blows. When he saw that the brave man was weary, he made a sudden pass at him, threw him to the ground, and bound him.

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Then he brought his prisoner before Chriemhild, and recommended him to her mercy, since, as he said, he was the bravest and most valiant knight in all the world. He was aware only of her thanks, of the praise for his bravery from her lips; but he saw not the gleam of joy that flashed over her dark face, nor heard the jubilation of her heart, that might not utter itself in sound. He hurried away for the last conflict—with King Gunther.

Chriemhild saw her goal attained. Over the corpses of the noblest of heroes, through rivers of blood, had she passed. Now she stood face to face with her mortal foe. Well he read his fate in her eyes, yet he maintained his defiant spirit, even as a chained tiger that with glowing eyes still glares at his vanquisher. Then it occurred to her that perhaps she might wring from the abhorred man the secret where the stolen Nibelung hoard lay hidden. She therefore spake to him at first in kindly words; she promised him a safe conduct home if he would truthfully indicate the spot. This gentleness seemed to move the hero. He said that he would gladly reveal to her the secret, but he had sworn with solemn oath not to betray the

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hiding-place of the hoard so long as one of the kings might be alive.

Once again, most emphatically, she assured him that she would keep her promise if he would do her will; then she had him put in safe keeping.

"Lie upon lie! trick upon trick!" muttered he to himself as he was led away.

Soon the Bernese hero appeared with King Gunther bound, who was likewise led away, but to a separate cell. Chriemhild reflected what further should be done. Siegfried's murderers were in her hands: the one had planned the crime, and with wily craft perpetrated the assassination; the other had approved and sealed it with his royal word, and permitted the murderer to heap upon her scorn and injury, instead of lending to her plaint a willing ear. He, as well as his companion in murder, must fall a victim to her vengeance. Could she with his head recover the stolen hoard, that were a gain. Painful thoughts, indeed, rose in her mind, warning her against the shedding of a brother's blood; but soon she overcame them, and without faltering continued in her course. The king's head was severed from his body and laid

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at Hagen's feet, to convince him that the last king of Burgundia had ceased to live. With his foot the hero spurned the head contemptuously.

"Thou art not the prince," he said, "to whom I pledged my troth, whose crown I would have preserved untarnished! The royal house of Burgundia, to which I belong, is desolated, its splendor is departed. Of what value is the span of life that remains?"

In the night that followed the tempestuous day Chriemhild had a happy dream. Siegfried appeared to her, grand and brilliant as in the time of their happy union. He beckoned to her, stretched out his arms to embrace her, and vanished—the dawning morning had dispelled the image of her dream.

In her regalia, Chriemhild sat by the side of Etzel upon the seat of state; the mourning Dietrich and Master Hildebrand were also present. Upon the command of the queen, Hagen, disarmed and bound, was brought into the hall. She repeated her question concerning the hoard. He looked up to her with the usual defiance and scorn and answered:

"Thy wits have deserted thee, witch, that

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thou deemest thou hast vanquished the hero of Tronje, and tamed him as a lamb. Now are the kings dead, Gunther, Gernot, Giselher, who had knowledge of the treasure, and none knows, save God and myself, where in the depths of the Rhine it forever rests. But from me wilt thou never have tidings where thou mayest find it."

Chriemhild in silence descended from her seat of state and seized Balmung, the good sword, that lay with Hagen's armor.

"The gold," said she, "that thou as robber hast taken from me hast thou well guarded; but another treasure which, with shameless hand, thou hast stolen I hold here in my hands. That, my precious *Friedel* bore as I saw him for the last time before he suffered death at thy murderous hand. Now will I try if it be able to avenge its noble lord."

She had drawn the sword from its scabbard, swung it with both her hands, and the head of the bold Hagen flew from his shoulders and rolled to the feet of the old Hildebrand.

A cry of horror went through the hall; then all was still. Chriemhild thrust back the bloody weapon into its sheath and spake:

"Let not the blood be washed from this

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blade. Balmung, as it now is, shall be brought to Worms and laid in Siegfried's tomb. Haply it may tell him that his wife has loved him truly and taken life for life. My life was love and revenge: its work is done."

"Marvellous," spake Hildebrand, "how the boldest hero in all the world has been struck down by the hand of a woman! But, though living he well nigh robbed me of life and honor, yet, whatso may therefore befall me, I will avenge him."

The old master, with these words, drew his sword and struck the queen a death blow. Etzel uttered a loud cry and fell upon his knees beside his beloved queen, but her cheek had grown pallid. She spake with failing voice:

"Let none punish the old master!" Then Death bore away his prey.

"The proudest, grandest heroes lay slain in bitter strife,
And in the land was mourning and grievous wailing rife:
Pain followed in the footsteps of Etzel's wedding day,
As pain love follows ever, to dim its dazzling ray.



DEATH OF CHRIEMHILD



CHRIEMHILD'S REVENGE

From that time on, I know not what did that
land befall,
Only that knights and women and noble lieges
all
Wept for the slain in battle. Here hath the tale
an end.
It is a tale of evil, from which God us forfend."

RETROSPECT OF THE NIBELUNGEN LIED

THE great German epic, a version of which has been given in the preceding pages, originated in detached songs, sung by strolling minstrels in castles and towns, without regard to time or place, to the sound of the harp or the viol. These songs were varied according to the taste of the singer, enlarged with legends of the crusades, or of dwarfs, giants, and dragons from Alpine districts, and usually transposed from pagan times into the Christian Middle Ages and cast in apparent Christian mold. Even so the rhapsodists of the ancient Hellenes wandered from one royal court to another, and sang the rhapsodies of Agamemnon, Menelaus, Diomedes, Ajax, Odysseus, and the divine Achilles, until a Homer, or perhaps several poets, combined these various songs into one national work. A similar fate attended the legends and songs about the Nibelungs. With creative genius a highly

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gifted poet united them in one imposing work, which is called the *Nibelungen Lied*. So far as beauty of form is concerned, it is far inferior to the Greek epic. It has about it much that is harsh: the easy expansiveness of the epic seems disadvantageous, in that it unduly delays the progress of the action. Also the comparisons are few and seldom perfected. The poet lacks appreciation of the ideally beautiful in form, which was peculiar to the Hellenes, and which lent to their works, for all ages, the stamp of great perfection. In saying thus much we believe that all defects of our epic poem have been indicated.

On the other hand, our song has great and undeniable advantages over the Greek poem. Among these we mention, first, the imposing general scope of the whole. A brilliant hero, spotless and without reproach, the fame of whose incredible deeds precedes him, woos and wins a lovely maiden, who has grown up innocent and far from court life. The young wife appears to be without fault, modest and full of love towards her relatives. When, however, her sister-in-law ventures to defame her beloved husband, then, in true woman's fashion, she gives

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herself up to reckless resentment. Therefrom results the assassination of her adored husband, perpetrated with wily hypocrisy. The gentle, tender-hearted woman seems now utterly changed. Nevertheless, love for the man who has been torn from her remains the typical characteristic of her being. This unalterable love drives Chriemhild to revenge. Henceforth she has no other thought, the more so as new causes for offence arise. Under the domination of this passion she rushes on until she herself is involved in the general ruin.

In the sequence of events, as disaster results from one misdeed, as one fate attends upon another, the master hand of a divinely gifted poet manifests itself. The gradual growth of Chriemhild's character, from its innocent youth, from the first dawning preference for the hero, to where, as his avenger, she sees rivers of blood flowing, is developed before the reader with fidelity to nature and with inimitable art.

No less true and imposing is the portraiture of the other characters; notably the brave, spotless Siegfried, invincible in battle, faithful and unsuspecting towards his friends, and hence the easy victim of treachery. Confronting him

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stands the fearful figure of the hero of Tronje, characterized by a frightful external appearance. It is a figure as if cast in bronze, immutable in its decisions, reckless in its choice of means, fearing not the judgment of the world nor that of his own heart: the heart, in his opinion, hampering only weaklings. He makes no secret of the deed he has performed; he confesses it openly; and the avenger, be it a mortal man or be it inevitable fate, he boldly challenges to the arena. His purpose is to protect from dishonor that royal house of which he is a member. Yet the poet allows also selfish motives to shimmer through,—namely, envy of Siegfried's fame and fear of his superiority. All lands are known to Hagen, from Isenland to the home of the Huns; and he conducts the expedition to Etzelburg, although with a presentiment that it leads to ruin. He heeds not the prophecies of the swan-nymphs. Recklessly he affronts Chriemhild at Etzelburg, and when, in the murder of the Burgundian men-at-arms, retribution breaks upon him, he heaps up new horrors, hewing into pieces the child Ortlieb, killing its attendant, and mutilating the harmless minstrel, Wörbelin. In the battles which followed against

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friend and foe, he stood fearless among his Burgundians, without wavering for an instant, helpful not alone with his sword, but with sound counsel. He maintained his attitude of defiance until the last moment, and faced Chriemhild like a victor, when already she was brandishing Bal-mung for the death blow. But yet the fearful knight must have possessed great and admirable qualities, for the noblest heroes, such as Volker, Rüdiger, and Dietrich of Bern, love and honor him, and the two latter refuse to take vengeance upon him for Siegfried's murder. Only the beautiful, innocent Dietelinde shrinks away from him when she is bidden to kiss him; she is vaguely impressed that wantonly shed blood stains his hands. So stands the Titanic figure of Hagen before us, in bold defiance comparable to the Prometheus of Æschylus, but still more powerful; for the Greek hero bows at last before the supreme power of the Kronid,¹ but the will of the Tronjan breaks not, nor bends from its undeviating purpose even till his tragic death. No singer of the Hellenes, nor of the Norse skalds, neither the famous Briton, nor any

¹ Zeus, the son of Kronos.

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one of our more modern poets, has created such a Titan ; and yet this powerful character is developed with such consonance to nature, with such inherent truthfulness, that it seems to belong not to the creative genius of the poet, but to the realm of reality itself. One inclines to believe that, in the stormy days of the migration of the nations, such an unusual apparition might well have arisen.

Side by side with Hagen, we see the noble margrave of Bechelaren, an angel of light, honored and beloved by all for his faithful, affectionate, and gracious nature. That fatality which the poet with firm hand depicts as developing, partly through human instrumentality and partly through the influence of an unseen power, forces the valiant knight to wage war against his Burgundian friends. The colloquy preceding this event reveals the kindliness of his heart. There is an indescribable charm in his thrilling reply to Hagen, who has begged for the shield of the margrave :

“ How willingly would I give mine own good
shield to thee,
Were Chriemhild not my sov'reign! yet thou art
more to me.

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Then wear it on thine arm, friend; I yield it to
thy hand:

Ah, would that thou mightst bear it home to
Burgundia land!

And as his shield so gladly he gave for Hagen's
need,

Tears filled the eyes of many, touched by the
noble deed.

It was his last bestowal, for unto foe or friend,
Rüdiger Bechelaren could no more give nor
lend."

Equally clear and bold are the lines with which the other heroes are drawn. Above all, Volker, the brave minstrel, was a favorite of the poet. In courage and valor in battle he almost equals Hagen, whose especial comrade in arms he was, with whom he stood watch when the way-worn knights had quietly fallen asleep to the sound of the harp-strings. He appears ever at Hagen's side: only in treachery and murder he took no part. Dankwart, too, who in the first division of the song appears as a youthful hero, in the second as a powerful warrior, is free from the inexpiable guilt of Siegfried's blood. He breaks a gory path through the Hunnish knights, and gives the signal for the general

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battle. A most agreeable presence is that of the young king, Giselher. He knew nothing of the wicked plot to which Siegfried fell a victim. He gave his persecuted sister aid to the extent of his ability. In the hospitable mansion at Bechelaren he plighted his troth with the fair daughter of the margrave, whereby the latter was united in closer bonds with the Burgundian royal house, and thus became an object of greater interest. It reveals the gifted poet, that he brings up this incident and others and weaves them into the general plot. Even so he proves his master hand in the picturing of the passionate, fiery Wolfhart, and still more in that of the Master Hildebrand. The latter, when the battle becomes inevitable, charges on in advance even of his nephew, and slays the invincible Volker. His heroic valor is thus placed beyond all doubt: yet in the face of the grim Hagen he takes to flight, and is obliged to endure the reproach of cowardice. Notwithstanding this stigma, the old master cannot suffer that a hero like Hagen should be slain by a woman. He therefore takes revenge on the queen, and closes thus the tragic poem which has come down to us from the old pagan Teutonic sources. The Christian garb in which the

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poet has clothed it is foreign to its true nature, —mere tinsel, so to speak, which lacks harmony with its environment.

King Gunther the poet allows, in the first as in the second part of the song, to appear as Hagen's tool, destitute of volition. He calls him, it is true, a doughty knight, but of his valorous deeds he recounts little. He thus makes the more conspicuous the shrewdness of the hero of Tronje, who is really the principal hero of the second part. As a man of still weaker character King Etzel is represented, so that he has little in common with the fearful Hunnish king, Attila. His power, his wealth, are due to the great extent of his empire; perhaps, too, as the poem here and there suggests, to deeds of valor in his youth. In the song itself he appears as a good-natured, hospitable ruler, who readily receives exiled princes and knights, accords them asylum, amiably entertains guests, but, for the rest, possesses no firmness of will and, for war, no courage. The poet, by this means, has secured a contrast to the valorous knights, who all, with undaunted spirit, look death in the face.

Hitherto we have always spoken of one poet,

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but it is, with reason, regarded as unquestionable that more, probably two, gifted singers created the imposing work of the *Nibelungen Lied* from older treasures of song. Some differences in the language are perceptible upon comparison of the first with the second part; also many incongruities of incident. For example, Dankwart says that at the time of Siegfried's murder he was a child, while in the journey to Isenland he already appears as a youthful hero. However, the former representation might be owing to the original sources, the old rhapsodies that lie at the foundation of our song; the latter, one might well regard as an oversight on the part of the poet. On the other hand, another reason for the assumption of two composers appears decisive. Brunhild, who in the first part plays an important role, indeed, in the Norse poetry is the most conspicuous character, disappears almost without trace in the *Nibelungen Not*. The poet appears to have forgotten her entirely, a neglect which is in no way counterbalanced by her mention in the later and far inferior supplement, *Die Klage*—"The Lament"—since this supplement was evidently composed by a ballad singer of little merit. The gifted

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singer of the *Not*, on the contrary, had thoroughly familiarized himself with the rich material at his disposal. His command of it was masterly, so that, notwithstanding a few slight incongruities, a uniform imposing work, a precious inheritance from old Teutonic peoples, has resulted. May our version of it be to some small extent instrumental in securing for this rare jewel of the German nation a truer recognition and appreciation.

THE ARGUMENT AND SOURCES
OF
WAGNER'S MUSIC-DRAMA
THE NIBELUNGEN RING

THE NIBELUNGEN RING

THE *Nibelungen Lied* has been thought by many, who have given the subject comparatively little attention, to be the sole source from which Richard Wagner drew the material for the text of his famous drama, *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (The Nibelungen Ring, or, literally translated, The Ring of the Nibelung). A glance at the argument of Wagner's work will convince the readers of the foregoing pages that the later poem is not a mere dramatization of the earlier, but differs from it essentially, both in incident and in the portraiture of characters. From many sources the great composer and dramatist has gathered that which seemed best suited to his purpose, omitting, combining, enlarging, and even inventing, until a drama has been produced which has as well founded a claim to originality as many of Shakespeare's plays.

Wagner's *Nibelungen Ring* consists of four operas, the Tetralogy, dealing with the struggle

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for the possession of a magic ring, originally the property of the Nibelung Alberich. The first opera, *Das Rheingold*, is introductory to the other three, the Trilogy, composed of *Die Walkure* (The Valkyr), *Siegfried*, and *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods). As each part of the Trilogy is given a separate day for presentation, they are also designated as the First, Second, and Third Days of the Trilogy.

In *Rheingold* we are told of the precious metal which lies buried in the depths of the Rhine, guarded by water-nymphs. Of this gold, he who will forswear love will be able to form a ring which shall possess the magic property of increasing without limit the wealth and power of its owner. Now three orders of beings, the gods, the giants, and the dwarfs, or Nibelungs, contend for dominion over the world. Alberich, a Nibelung, covets the magic ring, fulfils the conditions, and secures it for himself. He forces into his service his brother, Mime (Mimer), a skilful smith, and compels him to forge for him a helmet which will enable its wearer to take any desired shape, and to find himself instantly transported to any spot, however distant, where he may desire to be.

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The gods desired that a fitting abode should be built for themselves, and Wotan, their chief, contracted with the giants Fasolt and Fafner for the same. Seeking advice of Loge, the spirit of evil, the giants demanded, as reward for their labor, the gift of the goddess Freia (Freya). Now, Freia it was from whose hands the gods daily received that golden fruit which preserved their youth, and the giants well knew that, deprived of this nourishment, Wotan and his hosts must soon succumb to age and death. Yet the gods consented to the demand of the giants, believing that Loge would aid them in evading the conditions.

Valhalla, the home and fortress of the gods, is finished in accordance with the contract, and the giants insist upon their wage. Loge is sent through the world to seek something sufficiently attractive to ransom the goddess, but reports that nothing seems to be more esteemed than woman, save by one dwarf, who has forsworn love to possess himself of a treasure of gold. The giants, alarmed to hear of such wealth in the hands of their enemies, finally agree to ransom the goddess for a pile of this gold so great that she would be completely hidden behind it.

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Wotan consents to this bargain, and goes with Loge in search of Alberich, to obtain from him his treasure. By the temptation to prove his magic power, Alberich is beguiled into taking the form of a toad, and, thus defenceless, is easily robbed of his gold, his ring, and his *Tarnkappe* (magic helmet). Enraged at his loss, he lays a curse upon the ring, swearing that it shall bring ruin upon him who may possess it, and be coveted by them who have it not, until it again be restored to its first owner. Wotan, nevertheless, greatly desires to retain this trinket.

The gold of the hoard is piled up before Freia for her ransom, but the giants declare that they can still see the hair of the goddess above it, and that through a tiny chink her eye is visible; and so the *Tarnkappe* and the ring are reluctantly added to the glittering gold, and the conditions of the bargain are acknowledged to be fulfilled.

The curse which rests upon the ring seems not tardy in its operation. So long as Wotan retained the fatal treasure, Freia was a captive, and he might not taste the life-giving fruit of the gods. Bestowed upon the giants, the ring breeds strife between them, until, in the struggle

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for its possession, Fasolt is killed by his brother, and Fafner, by virtue of his *Tarnkappe*, takes the form of a monstrous dragon and retires to the depths of the forest, there to live a wretched life devoted to the protection of his ill-gotten wealth.

The opera, *Die Walküre*, bears the name which designates those martial daughters of Wotan, whose mission it was to conduct to the home of the gods the heroes slain in battle. These warriors Wotan gathered about him that he might have a force for his defence; for Erda,¹ the all-wise, had prophesied that the fall of the gods was imminent, and warned Wotan that, should the magic ring find its way again to the hands of Alberich, his bitterest enemy, the catastrophe would be inevitable.

The only possible way for the gods to regain possession of this ring, so potent a menace in the hands of their foes, seems to be through human instrumentality; for their contract with the giants prohibits themselves from any direct effort to wrest the treasure from Fafner. But

¹ See p. 303.

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among the race of men none is mighty enough to conquer the fierce dragon. Therefore Wotan, under the name of Wälse, establishes the family of Wälsungs (or Volsungs) by taking to himself a wife of the children of men, and, in the depths of the forest, making a home for her and their two children, the twin brother and sister, Siegmund and Sieglinde.

Often father and son roam through the woods together, and once, returning from the chase, they find their home in ruins, the mother slain, and of the sister no trace. From that time on, Wotan and Siegmund find themselves pursued by secret enemies. Finally the son becomes separated from the father, and wanders alone and disheartened through the world, apparently shunned and hated by those whom he ventures to approach. Once he attempts the defence of a maiden, and kills her two brothers, by whom she has been cruelly treated. The relatives of the slain men ruthlessly pursue the hero, until, finally escaping them, he sinks exhausted by the hearth of a stranger, where we find him in the opening scene of the opera. This stranger is a man by the name of Hunding, and is even now absent from home in vengeful search of

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him who has murdered two of his relatives. His wife is Sieglinde. The sister cares tenderly for her brother, each failing to recognize the other, yet conscious of an undefined mutual attraction.

Upon Hunding's almost immediate return he questions his guest, and, learning that the enemy whom he has sought is sharing his own fireside, promises him hospitality only until the dawn of day, and bids him prepare then for defence. With gloomy forebodings Siegmund awaits the morning, reflecting upon his weaponless condition, yet recalling the promise of his father that in his direst need a sword should be provided for him.

In the watches of the night Sieglinde seeks her guest, and tells of a sword thrust deep into the heart of a tree by a mysterious stranger who had appeared at her unhappy wedding, and who had promised this weapon to him who should be able to draw it out. Many had essayed the task, but none had succeeded. Sufferings past, dangers anticipated, the voluptuous charm of the spring night-time, and the affinity of their god-like natures, move these children of Wotan to confidences ever deeper and more tender, until,

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with the freedom of the myth and the allegory, the love of the brother and sister merges in a warmer sentiment, and Siegmund claims Sieglinde as his bride. With godlike strength the hero wrenches the sword from the tree-trunk in which Wotan has imbedded it, and the lovers fly together.

But the wrong suffered by Hunding is not regarded with indifference in the halls of Valhalla. Fricka, the wife of Wotan, is the guardian goddess of wedlock, and she vehemently insists that the power of the gods shall be exerted for the succor of Hunding in his conflict with Siegmund. Wotan, forced to acknowledge that in aiding the Wälsung he should by an indirect attempt to outwit Fafner be faithless to his contract with the giants, reluctantly consents at last to the overthrow of the hero, from whom he had fondly hoped for effectual assistance in regaining the magic ring.

The Valkyr, Brünnhilde (Brunhild), the favorite of her father, receives from him the command to allow Siegmund to be slain in the impending conflict. Wotan does not conceal from his daughter the distress that this sentence causes him; on the contrary, at her entreaty,

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confides to her the hopes he has cherished, the fears by which he is assailed, and the necessity which constrains him to withdraw his protection from his son. Brünnhilde departs to announce to Siegmund his fate, when, impressed by his devotion to Sieglinde and influenced by her knowledge of her father's desire for his life, she rashly decides to succor the man condemned by the gods. The encounter between the outraged husband and his foe takes place in the forest whither the lovers have fled. Brünnhilde's attempts to aid Siegmund are foiled by Wotan himself, and the hero is slain. In punishment for her disobedience, the god condemns his favorite daughter to the loss of her rank as Valkyr, to marriage with any man who may be able to waken her from the deep sleep which shall fall upon her on the lonely mountain whither she is banished, and, since she has chosen to be the champion of love, henceforth to be its slave. Only one grace Brünnhilde implores: that the mountain whereon she must sleep may be encircled by a barrier of flame, through which none but a hero would venture for the capture of a maiden. Wotan, consenting, summons Loge, the spirit of evil, and bids him return to the

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form which was his in the beginning, and, as unquenchable flame, encompass the mount on which sleeps Brünnhilde, the Valkyr.

The title of the second opera of the Trilogy, *Siegfried*, is the name which Brünnhilde bade Sieglinde bestow upon her child, destined to recover the ring, in which task his father had failed. The unfortunate Sieglinde, after Siegmund has been slain, seeks refuge in that forest where the giant Fafner guards his Nibelung hoard. There she gives birth to her son, and, dying, confides him to the care of the smith Mime, brother of the dwarf Alberich, together with the pieces of Siegmund's sword Nothung, which Brünnhilde has rescued for the child's inheritance.

Mime rears the boy carefully, hoping to make use of his strength, his courage, and his sword, to slay the dragon and gain possession of the ring. He refrains, however, from imparting to him the secret of his parentage, wishing to claim for his own purposes the youth's filial affection and duty. But Siegfried, grown to manhood, disdains the idea of relationship to the hideous dwarf, and insists upon knowing his own origin, a demand to which Mime reluctantly yields.



WOTAN'S FAREWELL TO BRÜNNHILDE



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Wotan, having withdrawn his favor from the race of mortals who owed to him their being, in the guise of a wanderer, leads Mime into a contest of wit, apparently designed to afford the smith an opportunity of learning how to reforge Nothung, the all-powerful sword, and so to retain supremacy over Siegfried, who hates him. Mime foolishly wastes his opportunity, and is worsted in the conflict, in which the Wanderer has warned him that his life is at stake, and the sentence is pronounced that his head shall fall by the hand of him who knows no fear.

Now, Siegfried is a youth of utter fearlessness and superhuman prowess, qualities in which Mime has hitherto rejoiced as furthering his selfish aims. In perplexity and terror the smith realizes that, unless the boy can be taught to fear, the master will be slain by his pupil; and that if the lesson be learned, there will be none able to vanquish the dragon, for which no ordinary strength nor ordinary sword would avail. The dwarf first attempts intimidation, but the courage of this son of the gods is indomitable. He is confronted with the dragon, but far from flinching at the sight, after a short contest he slays the monster with the sword which he him-

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self has forged from the fragments of his father's Nothung, and, accidentally tasting the blood of the reptile, he finds himself endowed with the gift of understanding the language of birds. By them made aware of Mime's intention to poison him, he slays the hated dwarf, and, following the counsel of the birds, takes possession of the *Tarnkappe* and the ring, leaving the gold in the safe stronghold of the dragon. The feathered songsters, moreover, discourse to him of the charms of Brünnhilde, and eagerly the hero undertakes the task of winning so fair a bride. Nothing daunted, he passes the barrier of flame, wakes the maiden from the twenty years' sleep, which has but added to her beauty, and woos so successfully that Brünnhilde no longer regrets the forfeited glories of Valhalla.

Meanwhile, true to his promise to Fricka, Wotan has unwaveringly withheld his support from the son of Sieglinde. He has even gone so far as to court his own destruction, which he believes to be inevitable, to seek an interview with Alberich, to warn him that Mime is about to bring a powerful youth to slay the dragon, and to suggest that the dwarf should outwit his brother by bargaining with the dragon for the

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ring as the price of the giant's safety ; for, were the monster no longer in possession of the ring, Mime would have no object in taking his life. But the dragon, believing himself to be invincible, refuses the offer.

After Siegfried's victory over Fafner, Wotan intercepts the hero on his way to Brünnhilde's mountain, but fails in this last effort to defeat the Wälsung and so maintain his own supremacy by preventing the valor of the hero from union with the wisdom which Erda's daughter could bestow,—a combination to which even the power of the gods must succumb.

Momentarily dismayed, and defiant as he is in view of his own approaching ruin, Wotan rejoices, nevertheless, in the final triumph of his offspring. The god summons Erda, spirit of wisdom, mother of Brünnhilde, and bids her unravel for him the mysteries of fate. Unwillingly she responds, and chidingly recalls his inconsistency in rearing a race to desert it ; in inciting rebellion to condemn it ; in breaking one pledge to uphold another. And the power divided against itself acquiesces in its inevitable overthrow,—wills it with godlike approval of its justice, and bids Erda, the all-knowing, the

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source of fear, return to slumbers everlasting: for the scepter of the world is in the hands of Siegfried the fearless.

In German mythology, the *Götterdämmerung*, or, as often translated, the Twilight of the Gods, denotes the decline of the power of the pagan divinities and their final destruction as prophesied in the *Eddas*. In this sublime sense of justice, which sentences to death the gods themselves when they have sinned, there is a moral grandeur surpassing that found in the unreasoning awe with which the ancient Greek and Roman bowed before superior power, whether good or evil, and ascribed to it immortality. Nor did the Norseman's belief end in death and despair: he looked forward to a purification and resurrection of his gods, and life everlasting for all worthy to survive.

In *Götterdämmerung*, the last opera of the *Nibelungen Ring*, although the fate of the inhabitants of Valhalla is rehearsed and foreshadowed in the opening song of the Norns, yet the greater part of the poem is still concerned with the fortunes of Siegfried and Brünnhilde.

Brünnhilde joyously accepts her lord. All that she has is his,—her steed Grane, her armor,

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her strength, her wisdom. Of all that made her powerful as a Valkyr she deprives herself for his sake, until she stands before him a simple, defenceless, loving woman.

The hero thirsts for the achievement of valorous deeds, and Brünnhilde covets renown for him. So they part for a time, Siegfried first bestowing upon his bride the gift of the ring of the Nibelung.

In his wanderings in search of adventure Siegfried comes to the court of Gunther, a potentate of the Rhine. Hagen, whose father was Alberich, the Nibelung, and whose mother was Grimhilde, also the mother of Gunther, had already suggested that a certain fair woman named Brünnhilde would be a fitting consort for his royal half-brother, and the valiant Siegfried an invaluable ally in capturing the almost unapproachable maiden. He had, moreover, suggested that a love-philter might be administered to the hero, which would so inflame him with passion for Gunther's sister, Gutrune (Chriemhild), that any earlier love would be blotted from his memory, and he be ready to undertake any task for her favor.

On Siegfried's arrival at the court, Gutrune

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offers him the refreshing, fateful draught, and immediately, oblivious of his obligations to Brünnhilde, he consents to assume, with the aid of his *Tarnkappe*, the guise of Gunther, capture the flame-encompassed bride, and, as his reward, receive Gutrune to wife. Hagen, the wily son of the Nibelung, exults in the prospect of luring within reach the coveted magic ring, and his father urges him to zeal in pursuit of the treasure.

Brünnhilde has one more opportunity to repair her fault of filial disobedience. A sister Valkyr seeks her, describes Wotan's waning powers and wasting grief, as, in the halls of Valhalla surrounded by his heroes, he awaits the return of his ravens with news that the baleful ring has been restored to its rightful guardians, the nymphs of the Rhine. Not to release her father from torment will Brünnhilde consent that the waves shall claim from her Siegfried's parting gift. Yet soon it is torn from the hand of the defenceless woman by Siegfried himself in the guise of Gunther, to whom the hero resigns the maiden, she not perceiving that she has had to do with two persons rather than one.

After the capture of the unwilling bride, a double wedding is celebrated on the Rhine.

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Brünnhilde recognizes in Guttrune's husband her own faithless lover, and, amazed, sees upon his hand the ring that King Gunther, as she supposed, had wrested from her in token of her submission to him. The king is questioned, and it is apparent that he knows nothing of the affair, nor has ever had the ring in his possession. Siegfried, utterly unconscious of former events, is bewildered by Brünnhilde's distress at sight of him and her agonized confession that she is the rightful bride of him who wears that ring, however he be named. Siegfried solemnly swears that he has never wooed her. Brünnhilde as solemnly swears to the truth of her accusation, and vehemently demands to be avenged by Siegfried's death. Hagen craftily fans the flame, so that Gunther, notwithstanding Siegfried's whisper that the *Tarnkappe* must have failed to disguise him completely before Brünnhilde, believes that his mission has been but treacherously executed, and lends an all too willing ear to his half-brother's plot to murder the hero.

With this in view, a hunting party is arranged. In pursuit of game, Siegfried strays into a solitary place by the river, and there encounters the Rhine nymphs, who beg for his ring, warning

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him of the curse that rests upon it. Their very warnings spur his courage to presumption, and, defying all threatening evil, he rejects this one opportunity to escape his fate. Rejoining his comrades, he is treacherously slain by a thrust from Hagen's spear through the back. In the last moments of the hero's life, Hagen brews him a drink which recalls the past to his memory, and his words reveal the truth to Günther, yet too late for the king to save his friend.

When the body has been borne back to the castle, Hagen endeavors to possess himself of the ring. Gunther, too, lays claim to it in the name of his sister, Gutrune, and, in the struggle for it which ensues, is slain by Hagen, while the hand of the dead Siegfried, with threatening gesture, deters the horrified son of the Nibelung from his intended theft. None ventures to gain-say Brünnhilde, when, solemnly asserting her rights of wifhood, she transfers the ring to her own finger, promising that the waters of the Rhine shall loose it from her hand when she shall have given herself to the flames on Siegfried's funeral pyre.

Through the fiery glow that veils the horror

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of Brünnhilde's death, Hagen perceives the waters of the Rhine rolling nearer and the Rhine nymphs sporting in the waves, and, shrieking with dismay, he plunges madly into the flood. The nymphs wind their arms about him and drag him into the depths. One white hand is seen holding aloft the ring. Wotan's ravens sweep across the sky, and the flaming heavens proclaim the downfall of Valhalla, a tragedy which mortal eyes may not behold.

In comparing the above sketch of the opera text with the version of the *Nibelungen Lied* in the foregoing pages, many contrasts between the two works will be apparent. From the *Lied* the supernatural is almost banished, and the water-nymphs, who prophesy to Hagen the destruction of the Burgundians, form nearly the only undisguised link with that world in which, in Wagner's drama, the very springs of action are laid. Of the Rhine gold and its guardian nymphs, of the ring of magic potency, of the dragon as the transformed giant Fafner, of the understanding of bird language, the *Lied* knows nothing; its interests are purely human. The *Nibelungen Ring*, on the contrary, from beginning

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to end, is concerned with the fortunes of Wotan, and culminates in his tragic fall, when the god is represented as overthrown by the legitimate development of his own superb but guilty creations. In the *Lied*, national disaster follows upon the death of Siegfried, a tale of horror untouched by Wagner. The similarity of characters and incident in these two poems is only that which exists between works having their origin in different versions of the same old myths.

The tree-trunk of German mythology has numerous branches, of which the *Nibelungen Lied* is but one; and Wagner has plucked fruit from many, usually preferring the more ancient. The old Teutonic peoples, when they became distinct nations, severally and variously developed and modified, or even forgot, traditions which had once been the common property of all, so that when again the treasures of folklore are gathered from these related nations they are found to ring many changes upon the old themes, which, to the poet, suggest still other combinations. The poem of the *Nibelungen Ring* evinces intimacy on the part of its author with the Scandinavian legends (sagas) as well as with the

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German myths ; indeed, the old pagan traditions, upon which he has so largely drawn, are the almost exclusive property of those more northern nations where Christianity only later asserted its supremacy, and are to be sought in the Icelandic collections of sagas known as the *Elder* and *Younger Eddas*, and in kindred works, rather than in the great German epic of the *Nibelungen Lied*.

It has been aptly suggested that the *Eddas* fairly illustrate what the *Iliad* must have been before it was reduced to unity and elaborated by the great poet whom we know as Homer. Much of the material preserved to us in the *Eddas* was given its first connected form in the prose version called the *Volsunga Saga*. A further elaboration by a German Homer has given us the *Nibelungen Lied*. The discrepancies in the *Nibelungen Ring*, as compared with these sources of its material, much as they tend to confuse the novice in these studies, deserve to be set down as deliberately chosen for some dramatic advantage, and usually upon some legendary authority.

An outline of the *Volsunga Saga* will be given as an Appendix to this volume, to which occasional reference will be made in the following

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brief comparison of the Wagnerian drama with the old legends. Although this saga is the principal source of Wagner's material, yet some parts of the *Nibelungen Ring* cannot be said to correspond to any one saga, but only to be in general conformity to the general spirit of the myths. Of this we have an instance in the opening scene of the introductory opera, which represents the Rhine as the source of the gold found later in the possession of Alberich, who forswore love to obtain it. Now, although in the fragments of Teutonic folklore which have been rescued from oblivion there is no record of the Nibelung treasure having been derived from the Rhine, unless a single line of the *Elder Edda*¹ may be so construed, yet all nations have peopled their waters with nymphs and sung of treasures in their rivers and seas. Gold, or the love of it, was early regarded in the sagas, as elsewhere, as the root of all evil, and instances are numerous to illustrate that its baleful power is best developed, its acquisition best accomplished by him who gives his undivided soul to the service of Mammon.

¹ *Völundarkvidha*, 15.

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The Nibelung hoard, originating in the Rhine or elsewhere, always includes a ring, sometimes of magic properties. In the Wagnerian drama, this ring has been raised to a position of much greater prominence than it occupies in the sagas. It forms a connecting link for the four operas, throughout which the Nibelungs, or powers of darkness, are contending with the children of light, who have exposed themselves to this danger by their desire for undue power and wealth; that is, for attributes and possessions unsuited to their nature, and which, therefore, if acquired, must work their ruin. Potentially this ring exists in the innocent depths of the Rhine. Alberich's selfishness gives it form and burdens it with a curse. It passes through Wotan's hands, revealing his inordinate thirst for power and his unscrupulous use of means to extend his dominion. The touchstone of the ring also brings to light the brutality of the giants. In the hands of the lovers it develops the evils to which filial disobedience, gross ambition, deceit, and distrust can give rise. Purified at last by the triumph of love, which was forsworn to create it, over death, which its baleful power had decreed, it returns through the fires of human

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sacrifice from the funeral pyre of Siegfried and Brünnhilde to the Rhine, whence it was conjured.

To the building of Valhalla, as related in the opera, there is no perfectly corresponding account in the sagas. In the *Younger Edda*,¹ however, we read that Freia and the sun and the moon were, by Loki's advice, promised to a giant in payment for building a wall of defence around Asgard,² and that the contract was afterwards broken with results disastrous to the gods. According to the *Volsunga Saga*,³ the ring taken from the dwarf was not given by the gods for the building of Valhalla, but as compensation for the murder of a giant; yet in both myth and opera the transfer of this ring from the possession of Wotan to that of Fafner is as ransom for the gods who have foolishly forfeited

¹ Gylfaginning, 42.

² Asgard was the region where the gods made their home and in which the castle Valhalla was built. It was located above Midgard, the abode of mankind, and Utgard, where the giants lived. The tree Ygdrasil connected the three worlds. (See note 1, p. 100.)

³ See Appendix, p. 314.

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their liberty to the giants. The careless, aimless slaying of Hreidmar's son in the guise of an otter, in the *Volsunga Saga*, is an incident less imposing, a fault less godlike, than the ambitious rearing of Wotan's towers of defence in the drama. Herein lies the probable motive for the substitution.

The various gods, giants, and dwarfs appearing in the operas may be found described in the *Elder* and *Younger Eddas*, and with characteristics similar to those indicated by Wagner, and in most cases identical with them. In Wotan, superior to the powers of nature, yet bound by the decrees of fate, thirsting for power, wisdom, and wealth, and rashly offering any price to obtain these in excess, we recognize the Odin of the Norsemen. In the operas, as in the *Eddas*, he wanders in disguise among dwarfs, giants, men, and in solitary places, his all-powerful sword and spear flashing through the web of human destinies; and, as in the ancient songs, he holds his revels in Valhalla, among the heroes culled from battlefields, and sends his ravens out to bring him tidings of the doings of men.

The character of Fricka is sketched, perhaps, less in accordance with previous conceptions.

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Her jealousy, her readiness to impute unworthy and even petty motives to Wotan, displays the god in a light which the Frigg of mythology does not cast upon him. The sacredness of conjugal love, which it was the province of this goddess to uphold, has in the sagas a protectress of somewhat greater delicacy and dignity.

The charming Freia, goddess of love pure and simple, with or without its golden fetters, is lightly touched and retains her grace. She is represented as the guardian of the fruit which preserves the youth of the gods, an office usually ascribed to Iduna. The *Younger Edda*¹ also relates the capture of Iduna by the giants and the distress of the gods while temporarily deprived of her golden apples.

Of Loge's (Loki) attractive presence, his ready wit and fertility of resources, which made him a favorite companion and counsellor of the gods, we have confirmation in the oldest legends.

Froh² (Freyr) was the god of sunshine and

¹ Gylfaginning, 27, and Bragarödur, 56.

² Froh and Donner appear in *Rheingold* with the other divinities here named, though not mentioned in the argument (pp. 278-280).

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peace, the brother of Freia, and so her natural protector; and with him Wagner has appropriately associated a god of more bellicose character, the terrible Donner (Thor), whose teeth flash fire, whose hand hurls the thunderbolt, before whom giants are wont to cringe. Also in the *Elder Edda*,¹ Thor is represented as interposing in behalf of Freia when the goddess has fallen into the power of the giants.

Erda, who warns Wotan of the peril in which the gods stand, and whom Wagner entitles mother of Brünnhilde, Wotan's daughter, bears in the old sagas various names, as is so often the case with the Teutonic divinities, according as one or another of the multifarious sides of their characters is prominent. She is the mother of all beings and things, and to her must all likewise return; hence, while the goddess of life, she is also the goddess of death. The oldest of her names is Hel (Helle), but under this title she is found only in the subterranean world. Otherwise she is known as Jordh, the spouse of Odin, merged then in Frigg (Fricka), or, in her still more cheerful and youthful aspects, in Freya.

¹ *Völuspa*, 29, 30.

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Many other names are applied to her under different conditions. In the *Elder Edda*,¹ we read how Odin sought the goddess Hel, how unwillingly she responded, as, with conjuring song, he woke her from her slumbers, and questioned her of mysteries known only to her, as the all-wise prophetess "Wala." Some passages here almost exactly correspond with Wotan's interview with Erda in the opera *Siegfried*.

The three Norns, the goddesses of fate, who weave the wide-spreading web of destiny, human and divine; the tree of life, by which they dwelt; the spring of wisdom, for a draught from which Wotan gave one of his eyes; the spear of the god inscribed with runes; the prophecy of the fatal catastrophe which should finally overtake the divinities; all, as used by Wagner in the prelude to the *Götterdämmerung*, are found also in both the *Elder* and *Younger Eddas*.

Fafner appears in the *Volsunga Saga* as Fafnir, one of a trio of giants, and is represented by Wagner, as we always find him, the greedy guardian of the hoard. Fasolt is taken from another trio of giant brothers, Fasolt, Ecke, and

¹ Vegtamskvidha.

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Ebenrot, who appear in the *Eckenlied* and other German myths. Mime, the early guardian of Siegfried, corresponds, to a certain extent, to the covetous, treacherous, vindictive Reigin of the *Volsunga Saga*, inferior in stature to his brothers; although Mime is represented as the brother of the dwarf Alberich, not of the giant Fafner.

The *Tarnkappe* of the *Nibelungen Lied*, there wrested from Alberich, the guardian of the hoard, appears in the opera as the handiwork of Mime. In the Norse legends this hiding-cap does not exist, although dwarfs are there reputed to be skilful smiths and capable of forging articles possessing magic properties. Odin's wealth-producing ring, Draupnir, was of dwarf workmanship.

The ancestry of Siegfried, though in all the Northern legends traceable to Odin, is yet more immediately so in the Wagnerian poem than in the sagas. In the operas, Wälse, the father of Siegmund and Sieglinde (Signi), is none other than the god himself, whereas in the saga, Vol-sung (Wälse) is only a powerful king—of miraculous birth it is true, and a descendant of Odin. The character of Siegfried itself is another instance of condensation, it being a

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combination of the two sons of Sigmund (Siegmund)—Sinfliotli, who was the son of Signi, and was reared in the solitudes of the forest, and Sigurd, who slew the dragon, won Brynhild (Brünnhilde) for himself and then for another, and was treacherously slain by his wife's relatives. His early unruly youth and apprenticeship to the smith is described in conformity with the German lay, *Vom Hürnen Seyfrid*, and in the *Thidreks Saga*¹ we read that he was a foundling, picked up in the woods and reared by Smith Mimir.

In the *Walküre*, Hunding, the husband of Sieglinde, corresponds to the Gothic king, Siggeir, of the *Volsunga Saga*, while, in the *Elder Edda*² and also in the saga, we read of Hunding as a king who met his death at the hands of Sigmund's son Helgi. The *Saga* relates that Signi's husband sought the life of Sigmund, but not, as in the *Walküre*, successfully; for in the legend Sigmund lives to be slain in his old

¹ The *Thidreks Saga* (Legend of Dietrich) was told by Germans in Iceland and recorded in the Icelandic language about the middle of the thirteenth century.

² *Helgakvidha Hundingsbana fyrri*.

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age by Lingvi, his rival in the suit for the hand of Hiordys; and, for his overthrow, Odin himself, as in the opera, lends the aid of his invincible spear. In both versions we see how, at the close of Sigmund's life, Odin withdrew from him his favor; but in the *Saga* there is no suggestion that Sigmund's foe owed his victory to Frigg's (Fricka) championship. That feature of the drama may have been borrowed from a song of the *Elder Edda*,¹ where Odin and Frigg agree to apply a certain test to two heroes, and each lays a wager upon his or her favorite. Odin loses, and transfers his favor to a younger hero, of whom Frigg's protégé may be regarded as the prototype, the two bearing also the same name, Agnar. Now, Odin and Frigg interest themselves for the same hero, Agnar, who, in other legends,² is protected by Brynhild to the point of disobedience to the express command of Odin.

Wagner makes Brünnhilde the daughter of Wotan, while the sagas call King Budli her

¹ Grimnismal.

² Sigdrifumal and Helreidh Brynhildar of the *Elder Edda*, and the *Volsunga Saga* (see p. 317).

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father. In this there is no real inconsistency, since the daughters of kings might become Valkyrs, and were then called adoptive daughters of Odin.

Wagner omits the quarrel of the queens, so prominent in the *Lied* and the *Volsunga Saga*, allowing the presence of the ring on Siegfried's finger to excite Brünnhilde's suspicions of the identity of the man to whom she had with it pledged her troth. Him who possessed that token she regarded as her rightful lord, and—unable to remain true to him in life—in anger, shame, and love she decreed death for them both.

The character and parentage of Hagen, the perpetrator of Siegfried's murder, is described in the drama in accordance with the *Thidreks Saga*.

We thus see that the *Nibelungen Ring* coincides in its general spirit, and in innumerable details, with the old Norse and German myths. These are chiefly fragmentary songs, composed by various bards, which the modern poet, Richard Wagner, has woven into a single, consistent work of art, mirrored and rendered with intensified charm in the music which should be its inseparable accompaniment.



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OUTLINE OF THE VOLSUNGA SAGA

THE *Volsunga Saga* was probably of Norwegian origin, though early lost to that country and preserved in Icelandic literature. This legend relates that Sigi was supposed to be the son of Odin, and that he was king of the Huns and father of Rerir, who later inherited his kingdom. Rerir was long without an heir, and the birth of his posthumous son Volsung was due to a miracle graciously vouchsafed by Odin in response to the prayers of the parents. Volsung early succeeded to his father's crown and became a powerful monarch. He took to wife a Valkyr, the same who had brought to his father Odin's decree for his birth; and she bore to him ten sons and a daughter. Sigmund, the oldest son, and his sister Signi were twins, and the fairest of all the children of Volsung; yet were all the sons powerful heroes.

Signi was given by her father in marriage to Siggeir, King of the Goths. At the wedding feast a stranger appeared and thrust his sword

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into the trunk of a tree, declaring that whoso should be able to remove it might claim the weapon for his own, and would perceive that he had never wielded a better. All present vainly essayed the task, until Sigmund, with apparent ease, accomplished it. Siggeir, coveting so rare a weapon, offered for it its weight in gold; but Sigmund answered that, had the King of the Goths been worthy to bear it, he would have been able to wrest it from the tree; that now no gold would buy it from its rightful owner. Though angered by this reply, Siggeir concealed his rage, hastened his return home, taking with him his unwilling bride, and later plotted his revenge. He succeeded in treacherously murdering King Volsung and all his sons, with the exception of Sigmund, who was saved by a device of his sister, yet was believed by Siggeir to have been slain with his brothers.

Sigmund built for himself a hut in the woods, whither he had been enticed to meet his death, and lived hidden there, Signi ever seeking to aid him to avenge their father's death. She even sacrificed her own two sons to this object. She sent them to Sigmund, that he might use them to further his purposes of revenge; but they proved of too inferior spirit, and, upon her advice, he slew them. This experience proved to her that only a full-blooded Volsung, one who from both

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father and mother inherited godlike attributes, could effectually aid in the accomplishment of the desperate design. Changing shapes with a sorceress, she fled in this guise to her brother's hut, and remained with him three days and nights, he thinking only that he had harbored a beautiful woman who had lost her way in the forest; and Siggeir, deceived by the presence of the sorceress, was unaware of the absence of his wife.

In due time Signi gave birth to a son, Sinfiotli, who rapidly developed all the heroic traits of the Volsungs. At ten years of age she sent him to Sigmund, not yet revealing his parentage. He proved an apt pupil. Father and son roamed the forest together, led a life of hardship, and, for a time, prowled about in the form of wolves, partaking, too, of the savage nature of these beasts. When Sigmund had well proven Sinfiotli and found him ripe for the deed, he made use of his assistance in destroying King Siggeir and his palace by fire. Provision was made for Signi's safety, but she welcomed death, and openly confessing the means she had used to rear an avenger of her father's death, she voluntarily shared the fate of her wedded lord.

Sigmund, with his son, returned to his own kingdom, and there married a wife, Borghild. She bore him a son, Helgi, who was a great hero and

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killed in battle a powerful king named Hunding. Sinfiotli, in a quarrel, killed the brother of Borg-hild, and, in return, received a death potion from her hands. Soon after, the queen herself died.

In his old age Sigmund took another wife, Hiordys, daughter of King Eylimi. King Lingvi was also a suitor for the hand of this princess, and, having failed in his suit, invaded the kingdom of his successful rival, challenging him to battle. In this conflict, fortune seemed to favor Sigmund, until there appeared a one-eyed stranger, clad in a blue mantle, wearing a large hat, who opposed his spear to the sword of the Hunnish king; and the sword broke upon the spear. From this moment victory smiled upon King Lingvi.

Hiordys sought her mortally wounded lord upon the deserted battlefield, and he consoled her for his loss by assuring her that the son whom she should bear would be the most famous of his race. He cautioned her to rear this child with care, and to treasure the fragments of the father's sword, from which a good weapon, Gram, would some day be forged for the son, with which he would accomplish great deeds. Hiordys took refuge at the court of Halfrek, King of Dänemark, and there gave birth to Sigurd, son of Sigmund. Later she became the wife of the king.

Sigurd developed an amiable character, and was

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tenderly reared by his step-father. Nevertheless, the smith Reigin, to whose special care he was confided, sought to inspire him with discontent with his position and possessions, and to induce him to seek to acquire for himself a great hoard of gold, said to lie concealed in the forest under the protection of a hideous dragon. Sigurd seemed to suspect some other motive than those expressed, and asked Reigin to explain why he should urge a mere child to such deeds. In reply, Reigin said that he would tell him a story. And then he related how once he had lived with his father Hreidmar, a rich and powerful man, and his two brothers, Fafnir and Otur, both greater in stature than he. Otur liked to take the form of an otter, catch fish in the streams, and bring them to his father, who found such game especially strengthening food. There was also a dwarf, Andvari, who used often, in the guise of a pike, to play in the same waters frequented by Otur. One day the gods, Odin, Loki, and Hännir, came in their wanderings to this waterfall, and Loki cast a stone at an otter he saw there, and killed it. The gods took the skin from their game, and when in the evening they came to Hreidmar's dwelling they showed him what they had captured. He perceived that they had killed Otur, and, with his son's aid, held the gods prisoners, demanding that for their ransom they should

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fill and then cover the otter skin with gold. Loki, sent to procure the gold, went to Andvari's waterfall, and with a net captured the pike, whose form the dwarf had assumed, and forced Andvari to give up all his wealth, even to a ring, which he yielded with especial reluctance. Then the dwarf laid a curse upon gold and ring, and swore that it should henceforth bring misery and death upon its possessor. To fulfil their contract with Hreidmar, the gods were obliged to give all the gold brought by Loki; and even the ring, which Odin would gladly have retained, was needed to cover the last hair of the otter skin. Then Reigin related how Fafnir had slain his father to obtain possession of this wealth, and had refused to share it with his brother, but had carried it off to the forest, and, taking the form of a monstrous dragon, had stretched himself upon his hoard. Reigin, however, being skilled at the forge, took service as a smith with King Halfrek.

Sigurd listened with interest, and promised that he would try to slay the dragon, if Reigin would forge him a sword fit for the purpose. Twice the smith attempted this, but each time the blade broke like a toy in the hands of the youthful hero, who finally accused the man of treacherous dealing. Then he entreated his mother, and obtained from her the fragments of Sigmund's sword, Gram, from

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which Reigin succeeded in forging a faultless weapon.

About this time Sigurd paid a visit to Gripir, his mother's brother, a man able to foresee the future, and inquired concerning the fate destined for him. His uncle revealed it, though with reluctance, and foretold the events of the hero's life exactly as they afterwards came to pass.

Reigin now urged the conquest of the dragon, yet before attempting this feat, Sigurd insisted upon avenging his father's death by slaying his enemies. That accomplished, he accompanied Reigin to the place where Fafnir guarded his treasure. Across the path which the dragon must take in going to water, his assailant dug a ditch, in which he could stand and stab the beast from below. After the death blow had been dealt, Fafnir, expressed his amazement that any should be bold enough to attack so formidable a monster as himself, made still more terrifying by his Ægis-helm (a magic helmet which made its wearer an object of especial fear). He warned Sigurd, too, that he must pay the penalty of death, should he take possession of the gold, and that Reigin was his foe.

When the dragon was dead, Reigin came forward to share in the glory of the conquest, he having forged the sword, Gram, and having led Sigurd

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hither. Sigurd was disinclined to admit his claim. He consented to cut out the heart of the dragon and bake it for the smith, and, as he was thus busied, he accidentally tasted the blood of the beast. Immediately the song of the birds about him became freighted with meaning to his ear. One bird advised him to eat the heart himself, that he might become the wisest of men; another warned him that Reigin was cherishing a treacherous plot against him; a third suggested that he should kill the smith and take possession of the gold; a fourth said that it would be well for him, after killing the smith and securing the gold, to ride at once to Hindar mountain, where Brynhild slept, and from her learn wisdom; and the song of the other birds was of the same import.

Sigurd followed their advice; killed the smith, ate of the heart of the monster, secured for himself the gold, also a sword called Hrotti, the Ægis-helm, and other treasures possessed by Fafnir, and rode away on his steed Grani, the gift of King Halfrek.

He sought the Hindar mount, which lay near Frankenland. On the mountain there was a great light, as of a fire burning, and he found there a fortress built of shields. Entering, he beheld a sleeping figure, reclining in full armor. He thought it that of a man, but removing the hel-

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met, discovered a wondrously fair woman, whose cuirass he hastened to loosen with his sword. Awaking from sleep, Brynhild recognized in her deliverer, Sigurd, the Volsung. She told him how Odin had sent upon her this sleep; had denied to her glorious feats of arms; and had sentenced her to wed a mortal, because, in a conflict between two kings, Hialmgunnar and Agnar, she had slain the former, for whom Odin had designed victory. And she told Sigurd how she had vowed to marry only one incapable of fear. The hero besought her to instruct him, and she so impressed him with her wisdom, that he pledged her his troth, which she accepted. Thereupon he rode away. Later they again met and renewed their mutual pledges, he bestowing upon her the ring of Andvari.

On the upper Rhine there lived a king named Giuki, with his spouse, Grimhild, their three sons, Gunnar, Högni, and Guttorm, and their beautiful daughter, Gudrun. To this court came Sigurd, a welcome guest. Grimhild was desirous that he should wed her daughter, and administered to him a magic potion, which caused him to forget Brynhild, so that when Gunnar offered him Gudrun in marriage, he readily accepted her, and swore blood brotherhood with the older brothers.

And now Grimhild's ambition was to marry her son Gunnar with Brynhild, daughter of the power-

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ful king, Budli, and sister of the warlike Atli. Budli favored the wooing, only warned the suitor that his daughter would marry no man who had not courage to ride through the barrier of flame with which she had induced Odin to surround her castle. To do this, Gunnar made two futile attempts. Then Sigurd changed shapes with him, and, in Gunnar's name, claimed as his reward the hand of the unwilling bride. Her first lover being absent beyond recall, and her father desirous of alliance with the powerful family of Giuki, who threatened war in case Brynhild should be refused them, the defenceless woman was forced to accept her insistent suitor, whose apparent bravery half reconciled her to the necessity. Sigurd, then, having in the guise of Gunnar received Brynhild's plighted word, and, as its token, the ring of Andvari, returned to his friend, whose nuptials with the bride thus won were celebrated shortly after.

Brynhild and Gudrun were apparently on friendly terms after the marriage, nor were they newly acquainted, for Brynhild, in the days of her wisdom as Valkyr, had prophesied to Gudrun all that should later befall her. Some time after the wedding, the two women went bathing together, on which occasion Brynhild claimed precedence of Gudrun on account of her husband's superiority to Sigurd. Gudrun, angered, retorted that it

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little became Brynhild to malign a man to whom she had given a token of acceptance as her lover; and, in proof of her accusation, produced the fateful ring of Andvari, which she had obtained from her husband. Brynhild, recognizing the ring, was silenced, realizing that it must indeed have been Sigurd who broke through the flames and won her for Gunnar.

Seven days Brynhild spoke never a word, and lent a deaf ear to the entreaties of her friends, who sought to know the cause of her distress. Finally, in an interview with Sigurd, she admitted her grief and chagrin in having failed to obtain in her husband the most fearless and powerful man in the world, in having sacrificed to this ambition the rich and matchless hero whom she sincerely loved, and in having been betrayed into accepting one man as her husband and wedding another. She charged Sigurd with having brought this pain and disgrace upon her, and declared that only his blood could atone for such treachery. He affirmed his unalterable love for her; said that, for some inexplicable reason, he had not recognized her at the time of his wooing for Gunnar, and offered to put away Gudrun for her sake.

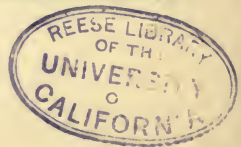
Brynhild remained implacable. She besought Gunnar to avenge her by the death of the faithless Sigurd, and the king, coveting the great wealth

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of his guest, easily persuaded himself that the hero had not honorably wooed Brynhild for him. Debarred by his blood brotherhood from perpetrating the deed himself, he administered to his younger brother, Guttorm, a potion which made the youth savage and suspicious, a docile instrument for the work of evil. In the early morning, while Sigurd slept, Guttorm entered his room and dealt the hero a mortal blow with the sword. The wounded man hurled the blade Gram at the assassin, and clove his body in twain.

Brynhild received these tidings with a bitter laugh. She acknowledged herself avenged, but reproached Gunnar with his treachery towards Sigurd, and told him how loyally the Volsung had wooed for his friend. She confessed her love for the martyred hero, and, scorning life without him, sought death by her own hand. In conformity with her dying request, her body was laid upon his funeral pyre, with the drawn sword Gram between them, as it had been when he wooed her for Gunnar.

The *Volsunga Saga* gives also details of Gudrun's after-life, and of her direful revenge for the murder of Sigurd; but as there is no allusion to these in Wagner's *Nibelungen Ring*, it would not serve our purpose to consider them here.



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