

BALDWIN

JAMES

THE STORY OF

SIEGFRIED

James Baldwin

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The Fore Word

When the world was in its childhood, men looked upon the works of Nature with a strange kind of awe. They fancied that every thing upon the earth, in the air, or in the water, had a life like their own, and that every sight which they saw, and every sound which they heard, was caused by some intelligent being. All men were poets, so far as their ideas and their modes of expression were concerned, although it is not likely that any of them wrote poetry. This was true in regard to the Saxon in his chilly northern home, as well as to the Greek in the sunny southland. But, while the balmy air and clear sky of the south tended to refine men's thoughts and language, the rugged scenery and bleak storms of the north made them uncouth, bold, and energetic. Yet both the cultured Greek and the rude Saxon looked upon Nature with much the same eyes, and there was a strange resemblance in their manner of thinking and speaking. They saw, that, in all the phenomena which took place around them, there was a certain system or regularity, as if these were controlled by some law or by some superior being; and they sought, in their simple poetical way, to account for these appearances. They had not yet learned to measure the distances of the stars, nor to calculate the motions of the earth. The changing of the seasons was a mystery which they scarcely sought to penetrate. But they spoke of these occurrences in a variety of ways, and invented many charming, stories with reference to them, not so much with a view towards accounting for the mystery, as towards giving expression to their childlike but picturesque ideas.

Thus, in the south, when reference was made to the coming of winter and to the dreariness and discomforts of that season of the year, men did not know nor care to explain it all, as our teachers now do at school; but they sometimes told how Hades had stolen Persephone (the summer) from her mother Demetre (the earth), and had carried her, in a chariot drawn by four coal black steeds, to the gloomy land of shadows; and how, in sorrow for her absence, the Earth clothed herself in mourning, and no leaves grew upon the trees, nor flowers in the gardens, and the very birds ceased singing, because Persephone was no more. But they added, that in a few months the fair maiden would return for a time to her sorrowing mother, and that then the flowers would bloom, and the trees would bear fruit, and the harvest-fields would again be full of golden grain.

In the north a different story was told, but the meaning was the same. Sometimes men told how Odin (the All-Father) had become angry with Brunhild (the maid of spring), and had wounded her with the thorn of sleep, and how all the castle in which she slept was wrapped in deathlike slumber until Sigurd or Siegfried (the sunbeam) rode through flaming fire, and awakened her with a kiss. Sometimes men told how Loki (heat) had betrayed Balder (the sunlight), and had induced blind old Hoder (the winter months) to slay him, and how all things, living and inanimate, joined in weeping for the bright god, until Hela (death) should permit him to revisit the earth for a time.

So, too, when the sun arose, and drove away the darkness and the hidden terrors of the night, our ancestors thought of the story of a noble young hero slaying a hideous dragon, or taking possession of the golden treasures of Mist Land. And when the springtime came, and the earth renewed its youth, and the fields and woods were decked in beauty, and there was music everywhere, they loved to tell of Idun (the spring) and her youth-giving apples, and of her wise husband Bragi (Nature's musician). When storm-clouds loomed up from the horizon and darkened the sky, and thunder rolled overhead, and lightning flashed on every hand, they talked about the mighty Thor riding over the clouds in his goat-drawn chariot, and battling with the giants of the air. When the mountain-meadows were green with long grass, and the corn was yellow for the sickles of the reapers, they spoke of Sif, the

golden-haired wife of Thor, the queen of the pastures and the fields. When the seasons were mild, and the harvests were plentiful, and peace and gladness prevailed, they blessed Frey, the giver of good gifts to men.

To them the blue sky-dome which everywhere hung over them like an arched roof was but the protecting mantle which the All-Father had suspended above the earth. The rainbow was the shimmering bridge which stretches from earth to heaven. The sun and the moon were the children of a giant, whom two wolves chased forever around the earth. The stars were sparks from the fire-land of the south, set in the heavens by the gods. Night was a giantess, dark and swarthy, who rode in a car drawn by a steed the foam from whose bits sometimes covered the earth with dew. And Day was the son of Night; and the steed which he rode lighted all the sky and the earth with the beams which glistened from his mane.

It was thus that men in the earlier ages of the world looked upon and spoke of the workings of Nature; and it was in this manner that many myths, or poetical fables, were formed. By and by, as the world grew older, and mankind became less poetical and more practical, the first or mythical meaning of these stories was forgotten, and they were regarded no longer as mere poetical fancies, but as historical facts. Perhaps some real hero had indeed performed daring deeds, and had made the world around him happier and better. It was easy to liken him to Sigurd, or to some other mythical slayer of giants; and soon the deeds of both were ascribed to but one. And thus many myth-stories probably contain some historical facts blended with the mass of poetical fancies which mainly compose them; but, in such cases, it is generally impossible to distinguish what is fact from what is mere fancy.

All nations have had their myth-stories; but, to my mind, the purest and grandest are those which we have received from our northern ancestors. They are particularly interesting to us; because they are what our fathers once believed, and because they are ours by right of inheritance. And, when we are able to make them still more our own by removing the blemishes which rude and barbarous ages have added to some of them, we shall discover in them many things that are beautiful and true, and well calculated to make us wiser and better.

It is not known when or by whom these myth-stories were first put into writing, nor when they assumed the shape in which we now have them. But it is said, that, about the year 1100, an Icelandic scholar called Saemund the Wise collected a number of songs and poems into a book which is now known as the "Elder Edda;" and that, about a century later, Snorre Sturleson, another Icelander, wrote a prose-work of a similar character, which is called the "Younger Edda." And it is to these two books that we owe the preservation of almost all that is now known of the myths and the strange religion of our Saxon and Norman forefathers. But, besides these, there are a number of semi-mythological stories of great interest and beauty,—stories partly mythical, and partly founded upon remote and forgotten historical facts. One of the oldest and finest of these is the story of Sigurd, the son of Sigmund. There are many versions of this story, differing from each other according to the time in which they were written and the character of the people among whom they were received. We find the first mention of Sigurd and his strange daring deeds in the song of Fafnir, in the "Elder Edda." Then, in the "Younger Edda," the story is repeated in the myth of the Niflungs and the Gjukungs. It is told again in the "Volsunga Saga" of Iceland. It is repeated and re-repeated in various forms and different languages, and finally appears in the "Nibelungen Lied," a grand old German poem, which may well be compared with the Iliad of the Greeks. In this last version, Sigurd is called Siegfried; and the story is colored and modified by the introduction of many notions peculiar to the middle ages, and unknown to our Pagan fathers of the north. In our own time this myth has been woven into a variety of forms. William Morris has embodied it in his noble poem of "Sigurd the Volsung;" Richard Wagner, the famous German composer, has constructed from it his inimitable drama, the "Nibelungen Ring;" W. Jordan, another German writer, has given it to the world in his "Sigfrid's Saga;" and Emanuel Geibel has derived from it the materials for his "Tragedy of Brunhild."

And now I, too, come with the STORY OF SIEGFRIED, still another version of the time-honored legend. The story as I shall tell it you is not in all respects a literal rendering of the ancient myth; but I have taken the liberty to change and recast such portions of it as I have deemed advisable. Sometimes I have drawn materials from one version of the story, sometimes from another, and sometimes largely from my own imagination alone. Nor shall I be accused of impropriety in thus reshaping a narrative, which, although hallowed by an antiquity of a thousand years and more, has already appeared in so many different forms, and been clothed in so many different garbs; for, however much I may have allowed my fancy or my judgment to retouch and remodel the immaterial portions of the legend, the essential parts of this immortal myth remain the same. And, if I succeed in leading you to a clearer understanding and a wiser appreciation of the thoughts and feelings of our old northern ancestors, I shall have accomplished the object for which I have written this Story of Siegfried.

Adventure I. Mimer, the Master

At Santen, in the Lowlands, there once lived a young prince named Siegfried. His father, Siegmund, was king of the rich country through which the lazy Rhine winds its way just before reaching the great North Sea; and he was known, both far and near, for his good deeds and his prudent thrift. And Siegfried's mother, the gentle Sigelind, was loved by all for her goodness of heart and her kindly charity to the poor. Neither king nor queen left aught undone that might make the young prince happy, or fit him for life's usefulness. Wise men were brought from far-off lands to be his teachers; and every day something was added to his store of knowledge or his stock of happiness. And very skilful did he become in warlike games and in manly feats of strength. No other youth could throw the spear with so great force, or shoot the arrow with surer aim. No other youth could run more swiftly, or ride with more becoming ease. His gentle mother took delight in adding to the beauty of his matchless form, by clothing him in costly garments decked with the rarest jewels. The old, the young, the rich, the poor, the high, the low, all praised the fearless Siegfried, and all vied in friendly strife to win his favor. One would have thought that the life of the young prince could never be aught but a holiday, and that the birds would sing, and the flowers would bloom, and the sun would shine forever for his sake.

But the business of man's life is not mere pastime; and none knew this truth better than the wise old king, Siegmund.

"All work is noble," said he to Siegfried; "and he who yearns to win fame must not shun toil. Even princes should know how to earn a livelihood by the labor of their hands."

And so, while Siegfried was still a young lad, his father sent him to live with a smith called Mimer, whose smithy was among the hills not far from the great forest. For in those early times the work of the smith was looked upon as the most worthy of all trades,—a trade which the gods themselves were not ashamed to follow. And this smith Mimer was a wonderful master,—the wisest and most cunning that the world had ever seen. Men said that he was akin to the dwarf-folk who had ruled the earth in the early days, and who were learned in every lore, and skilled in every craft; and they said that he was so exceeding old that no one could remember the day when he came to dwell in the land of Siegmund's fathers. And some said, too, that he was the keeper of a wonderful well, or flowing spring, the waters of which imparted wisdom and far-seeing knowledge to all who drank of them.

To Mimer's school, then, where he would be taught to work skilfully and to think wisely, Siegfried was sent, to be in all respects like the other pupils there. A coarse blue blouse, and heavy leggings, and a leathern apron, took the place of the costly clothing which he had worn in his father's dwelling. His feet were incased in awkward wooden shoes, and his head was covered with a wolf-skin cap. The dainty bed, with its downy pillows, wherein every night his mother had been wont, with gentle care, to see him safely covered, was given up for a rude heap of straw in a corner of the smithy. And the rich food to which he had been used gave place to the coarsest and humblest fare. But the lad did not complain. The days which he passed in the smithy were mirthful and happy; and the sound of his hammer rang cheerfully, and the sparks from his forge flew briskly, from morning till night.

And a wonderful smith he became. No one could do more work than he, and none wrought with greater skill. The heaviest chains and the strongest bolts, for prison or for treasure-house, were but as toys in his stout hands, so easily and quickly did he beat them into shape. And he was alike cunning in work of the most delicate and brittle kind. Ornaments of gold and silver, studded with the rarest jewels, were fashioned into beautiful forms by his deft fingers. And among all of Mimer's apprentices none learned the master's lore so readily, nor gained the master's favor more.¹

¹ Siegfried's Boyhood. "All men agree that Siegfried was a king's son. He was born, as we here have good reason to know, 'at

One morning the master, Mimer, came to the smithy with a troubled look upon his face. It was clear that something had gone amiss; and what it was the apprentices soon learned from the smith himself. Never, until lately, had any one questioned Mimer's right to be called the foremost smith in all the world; but now a rival had come forward. An unknown upstart—one Amilias, in Burgundy-land—had made a suit of armor, which, he boasted, no stroke of sword could dint, and no blow of spear could scratch; and he had sent a challenge to all other smiths, both in the Rhine country and elsewhere, to equal that piece of workmanship, or else acknowledge themselves his underlings and vassals. For many days had Mimer himself toiled, alone and vainly, trying to forge a sword whose edge the boasted armor of Amilias could not foil; and now, in despair, he came to ask the help of his pupils and apprentices.

“Who among you is skilful enough to forge such a sword?” he asked.

One after another, the pupils shook their heads. And Veliant, the foreman of the apprentices, said, “I have heard much about that wonderful armor, and its extreme hardness, and I doubt if any skill can make a sword with edge so sharp and true as to cut into it. The best that can be done is to try to make another war-coat whose temper shall equal that of Amilias's armor.”

Then the lad Siegfried quickly said, “I will make such a sword as you want,—a blade that no war-coat can foil. Give me but leave to try!”

The other pupils laughed in scorn, but Mimer checked them. “You hear how this boy can talk: we will see what he can do. He is the king's son, and we know that he has uncommon talent. He shall make the sword; but if, upon trial, it fail, I will make him rue the day.”

Then Siegfried went to his task. And for seven days and seven nights the sparks never stopped flying from his forge; and the ringing of his anvil, and the hissing of the hot metal as he tempered it, were heard continuously. On the eighth day the sword was fashioned, and Siegfried brought it to Mimer.

The smith felt the razor-edge of the bright weapon, and said, “This seems, indeed, a fair fire-edge. Let us make a trial of its keenness.”

Then a thread of wool as light as thistle-down was thrown upon water, and, as it floated there, Mimer struck it with the sword. The glittering blade cleft the slender thread in twain, and the pieces floated undisturbed upon the surface of the liquid.

“Well done!” cried the delighted smith. “Never have I seen a keener edge. If its temper is as true as its sharpness would lead us to believe, it will indeed serve me well.”

But Siegfried took the sword again, and broke it into many pieces; and for three days he welded it in a white-hot fire, and tempered it with milk and oatmeal. Then, in sight of Mimer and the sneering apprentices, he cast a light ball of fine-spun wool upon the flowing water of the brook; and it was caught in the swift eddies of the stream, and whirled about until it met the bared blade of the sword, which was held in Mimer's hands. And it was parted as easily and clean as the rippling water, and not the smallest thread was moved out of its place.

Then back to the smithy Siegfried went again; and his forge glowed with a brighter fire, and his hammer rang upon the anvil with a cheerier sound, than ever before. But he suffered none to come near, and no one ever knew what witchery he used. But some of his fellow-pupils afterwards told how, in the dusky twilight, they had seen a one-eyed man, long-bearded, and clad in a cloud-gray kirtle, and wearing a sky-blue hood, talking with Siegfried at the smithy door. And they said that the stranger's face was at once pleasant and fearful to look upon, and that his one eye shone in

Santen in Netherland,' of Siegmund and the fair Siegelinde; yet by some family misfortune or discord, of which the accounts are very various, he came into singular straits during boyhood, having passed that happy period of life, not under the canopies of costly state, but by the sooty stithy, in one Mimer, a blacksmith's shop.”—Thomas Carlyle, *The Nibelungen Lied*. The older versions of this story represent Siegfried, under the name of Sigurd, as being brought up at the court of the Danish King Hialprek; his own father Sigmund having been slain in battle, as related in this chapter. He was early placed under the tuition of Regin, or Regino, an elf, who instructed his pupil in draughts, runes, languages, and various other accomplishments.—See Preface to Vollmer's *Nibelunge Not*, also the Song of Sigurd Fafnisbane, in the *Elder Edda*, and the *Icelandic Volsunga Saga*.

the gloaming like the evening star, and that, when he had placed in Siegfried's hands bright shards, like pieces of a broken sword, he faded suddenly from their sight, and was seen no more.

For seven weeks the lad wrought day and night at his forge; and then, pale and haggard, but with a pleased smile upon his face, he stood before Mimer, with the gleaming sword in his hands. "It is finished," he said. "Behold the glittering terror!—the blade Balmung. Let us try its edge, and prove its temper once again, that so we may know whether you can place your trust in it."

And Mimer looked long at the ruddy hilts of the weapon, and at the mystic runes that were scored upon its sides, and at the keen edge, which gleamed like a ray of sunlight in the gathering gloom of the evening. But no word came from his lips, and his eyes were dim and dazed; and he seemed as one lost in thoughts of days long past and gone.

Siegfried raised the blade high over his head; and the gleaming edge flashed hither and thither, like the lightning's play when Thor rides over the storm-clouds. Then suddenly it fell upon the master's anvil, and the great block of iron was cleft in two; but the bright blade was no whit dulled by the stroke, and the line of light which marked the edge was brighter than before.

Then to the flowing brook they went; and a great pack of wool, the fleeces of ten sheep, was brought, and thrown upon the swirling water. As the stream bore the bundle downwards, Mimer held the sword in its way. And the whole was divided as easily and as clean as the woollen ball or the slender woollen thread had been cleft before.

"Now, indeed," cried Mimer, "I no longer fear to meet that upstart, Amilias. If his war-coat can withstand the stroke of such a sword as Balmung, then I shall not be ashamed to be his underling. But, if this good blade is what it seems to be, it will not fail me; and I, Mimer the Old, shall still be called the wisest and greatest of smiths."

And he sent word at once to Amilias, in Burgundy-land, to meet him on a day, and settle forever the question as to which of the two should be the master, and which the underling. And heralds proclaimed it in every town and dwelling. When the time which had been set drew near, Mimer, bearing the sword Balmung, and followed by all his pupils and apprentices, wended his way towards the place of meeting. Through the forest they went, and then along the banks of the sluggish river, for many a league, to the height of land which marked the line between King Siegmund's country and the country of the Burgundians. It was in this place, midway between the shops of Mimer and Amilias, that the great trial of metal and of skill was to be made. And here were already gathered great numbers of people from the Lowlands and from Burgundy, anxiously waiting for the coming of the champions. On the one side were the wise old Siegmund and his gentle queen, and their train of knights and courtiers and fair ladies. On the other side were the three Burgundian kings, Gunther, Gernot, and Giselher, and a mighty retinue of warriors, led by grim old Hagen, the uncle of the kings, and the wariest chief in all Rhineland.

When every thing was in readiness for the contest, Amilias, clad in his boasted war-coat, went up to the top of the hill, and sat upon a great rock, and waited for Mimer's coming. As he sat there, he looked, to the people below, like some great castle-tower; for he was almost a giant in size, and his coat of mail, so skilfully wrought, was so huge that twenty men of common mould might have found shelter, or hidden themselves, within it. As the smith Mimer, so dwarfish in stature, toiled up the steep hillside, Amilias smiled to see him; for he felt no fear of the slender, gleaming blade that was to try the metal of his war-coat. And already a shout of expectant triumph went up from the throats of the Burgundian hosts, so sure were they of their champion's success.

But Mimer's friends waited in breathless silence, hoping, and yet fearing. Only King Siegmund whispered to his queen, and said, "Knowledge is stronger than brute force. The smallest dwarf who has drunk from the well of the Knowing One may safely meet the stoutest giant in battle."

When Mimer reached the top of the hill, Amilias folded his huge arms, and smiled again; for he felt that this contest was mere play for him, and that Mimer was already as good as beaten, and

his thrall. The smith paused a moment to take breath, and as he stood by the side of his foe he looked to those below like a mere black speck close beside a steel-gray castle-tower.

“Are you ready?” asked the smith.

“Ready,” answered Amilias. “Strike!”

Mimer raised the beaming blade in the air, and for a moment the lightning seemed to play around his head. The muscles on his short, brawny arms, stood out like great ropes; and then Balmung, descending, cleft the air from right to left. The waiting lookers-on in the plain below thought to hear the noise of clashing steel; but they listened in vain, for no sound came to their ears, save a sharp hiss like that which red-hot iron gives when plunged into a tank of cold water. The huge Amilias sat unmoved, with his arms still folded upon his breast; but the smile had faded from his face.

“How do you feel now?” asked Mimer in a half-mocking tone.

“Rather strangely, as if cold iron had touched me,” faintly answered the upstart.

“Shake thyself!” cried Mimer.

Amilias did so, and, lo! he fell in two halves; for the sword had cut sheer through the vaunted war-coat, and cleft in twain the great body incased within. Down tumbled the giant head and the still folded arms, and they rolled with thundering noise to the foot of the hill, and fell with a fearful splash into the deep waters of the river; and there, fathoms down, they may even now be seen, when the water is clear, lying like great gray rocks among the sand and gravel below. The rest of the body, with the armor which incased it, still sat upright in its place; and to this day travellers sailing down the river are shown on moonlit evenings the luckless armor of Amilias on the high hill-top. In the dim, uncertain light, one easily fancies it to be the ivy covered ruins of some old castle of feudal times.

The master, Mimer, sheathed his sword, and walked slowly down the hillside to the plain, where his friends welcomed him with glad cheers and shouts of joy. But the Burgundians, baffled, and feeling vexed, turned silently homeward, nor cast a single look back to the scene of their disappointment and their ill-fated champion’s defeat.

And Siegfried went again with the master and his fellows to the smoky smithy, to his roaring bellows and ringing anvil, and to his coarse fare, and rude, hard bed, and to a life of labor. And while all men praised Mimer and his knowing skill, and the fiery edge of the sunbeam blade, no one knew that it was the boy Siegfried who had wrought that piece of workmanship.

But after a while it was whispered around that not Mimer, but one of his pupils, had forged the sword. And, when the master was asked what truth there was in this story, his eyes twinkled, and the corners of his mouth twitched strangely, and he made no answer. But Veliant, the foreman of the smithy, and the greatest of boasters said, “It was I who forged the fire-edge of the blade Balmung.” And, although none denied the truth of what he said, but few who knew what sort of a man he was believed his story. And this is the reason, my children, that, in the ancient songs and stories which tell of this wondrous sword, it is said by most that Mimer, and by a few that Veliant, forged its blade. But I prefer to believe that it was made by Siegfried, the hero who afterwards wielded it in so many adventures.² Be this as it may, however, blind hate and jealousy were from this time uppermost in the coarse and selfish mind of Veliant; and he sought how he might drive the lad away from the smithy in disgrace. “This boy has done what no one else could do,” said he. “He may yet do greater deeds, and set himself up as the master smith of the world, and then we shall all have to humble ourselves before him as his underlings and thralls.”

² The Sword. “By this sword Balmung also hangs a tale. Doubtless it was one of those invaluable weapons sometimes fabricated by the old Northern smiths, compared with which our modern Foxes and Ferraras and Toledos are mere leaden tools. Von der Hagen seems to think it simply the sword Mimung under another name; in which case, Siegfried’s old master, Mimer, had been the maker of it, and called it after himself, as if it had been his son.”—Carlyle, on the Nibelungen Lied, note. In Scandinavian legends, the story of Mimer and Amilias is given, differing but slightly from the rendering in this chapter.—See Weber and Jamieson’s Illustrations of Northern Antiquities. In the older versions of the myth, the sword is called Gram, or the Wrath. It was wrought from the shards, or broken pieces, of Sigmund’s sword, the gift of Odin. It was made by Regin for Sigurd’s (Siegfried’s) use, and its temper was tested as here described.

And he nursed this thought, and brooded over the hatred which he felt towards the blameless boy; but he did not dare to harm him, for fear of their master, Mimer. And Siegfried busied himself at his forge, where the sparks flew as briskly and as merrily as ever before, and his bellows roared from early morning till late at evening. Nor did the foreman's unkindness trouble him for a moment, for he knew that the master's heart was warm towards him.

Oftentimes, when the day's work was done, Siegfried sat with Mimer by the glowing light of the furnace-fire, and listened to the sweet tales which the master told of the deeds of the early days, when the world was young, and the dwarf-folk and the giants had a name and a place upon earth. And one night, as they thus sat, the master talked of Odin the All-Father, and of the gods who dwell with him in Asgard, and of the puny men-folk whom they protect and befriend, until his words grew full of bitterness, and his soul of a fierce longing for something he dared not name. And the lad's heart was stirred with a strange uneasiness, and he said,—

“Tell me, I pray, dear master, something about my own kin, my father's fathers,—those mighty kings, who, I have heard said, were the bravest and best of men.”

Then the smith seemed pleased again. And his eyes grew brighter, and lost their far-away look; and a smile played among the wrinkles of his swarthy face, as he told a tale of old King Volsung and of the deeds of the Volsung kings:—

“Long years ago, before the evil days had dawned, King Volsung ruled over all the land which lies between the sea and the country of the Goths. The days were golden; and the good Frey dropped peace and plenty everywhere, and men went in and out and feared no wrong. King Volsung had a dwelling in the midst of fertile fields and fruitful gardens. Fairer than any dream was that dwelling. The roof was thatched with gold, and red turrets and towers rose above. The great feast-hall was long and high, and its walls were hung with sun-bright shields; and the door-nails were of silver. In the middle of the hall stood the pride of the Volsungs,—a tree whose blossoms filled the air with fragrance, and whose green branches, thrusting themselves through the ceiling, covered the roof with fair foliage. It was Odin's tree, and King Volsung had planted it there with his own hands.

“On a day in winter King Volsung held a great feast in his hall in honor of Siggeir, the King of the Goths, who was his guest. And the fires blazed bright in the broad chimneys, and music and mirth went round. But in the midst of the merry-making the guests were startled by a sudden peal of thunder, which seemed to come from the cloudless sky, and which made the shields upon the walls rattle and ring. In wonder they looked around. A strange man stood in the doorway, and laughed, but said not a word. And they noticed that he wore no shoes upon his feet, but that a cloud-gray cloak was thrown over his shoulders, and a blue hood was drawn down over his head. His face was half-hidden by a heavy beard; and he had but one eye, which twinkled and glowed like a burning coal. And all the guests sat moveless in their seats, so awed were they in the presence of him who stood at the door; for they knew that he was none other than Odin the All-Father, the king of gods and men. He spoke not a word, but straight into the hall he strode, and he paused not until he stood beneath the blossoming branches of the tree. Then, forth from beneath his cloud-gray cloak, he drew a gleaming sword, and struck the blade deep into the wood,—so deep that nothing but the hilt was left in sight. And, turning to the awe-struck guests, he said, ‘A blade of mighty worth have I hidden in this tree. Never have the earth-folk wrought better steel, nor has any man ever wielded a more trusty sword. Whoever there is among you brave enough and strong enough to draw it forth from the wood, he shall have it as a gift from Odin.’ Then slowly to the door he strode again, and no one saw him any more.

“And after he had gone, the Volsungs and their guests sat a long time silent, fearing to stir, lest the vision should prove a dream. But at last the old king arose, and cried, ‘Come, guests and kinsmen, and set your hands to the ruddy hilt! Odin's gift stays, waiting for its fated owner. Let us see which one of you is the favored of the All-Father.’ First Siggeir, the King of the Goths, and his earls, the Volsungs' guests, tried their hands. But the blade stuck fast; and the stoutest man among them failed to move it. Then King Volsung, laughing, seized the hilt, and drew with all his strength; but the sword

held still in the wood of Odin's tree. And one by one the nine sons of Volsung tugged and strained in vain; and each was greeted with shouts and laughter, as, ashamed and beaten, he wended to his seat again. Then, at last, Sigmund, the youngest son, stood up, and laid his hand upon the ruddy hilt, scarce thinking to try what all had failed to do. When, lo! the blade came out of the tree as if therein it had all along lain loose. And Sigmund raised it high over his head, and shook it, and the bright flame that leaped from its edge lit up the hall like the lightning's gleaming; and the Volsungs and their guests rent the air with cheers and shouts of gladness. For no one among all the men of the mid-world was more worthy of Odin's gift than young Sigmund the brave."

But the rest of Mimer's story would be too long to tell you now; for he and his young apprentice sat for hours by the dying coals, and talked of Siegfried's kinfolk,—the Volsung kings of old. And he told how Siggeir, the Goth king, was wedded to Signy the fair, the only daughter of Volsung, and the pride of the old king's heart; and how he carried her with him to his home in the land of the Goths; and how he coveted Sigmund's sword, and plotted to gain it by guile; and how, through presence of friendship, he invited the Volsung kings to visit him in Gothland, as the guests of himself and Signy; and how he betrayed and slew them, save Sigmund alone, who escaped, and for long years lived an outlaw in the land of his treacherous foe. And then he told how Sigmund afterwards came back to his own country of the Volsungs; and how his people welcomed him, and he became a mighty king, such as the world had never known before; and how, when he had grown old, and full of years and honors, he went out with his earls and fighting-men to battle against the hosts of King Lyngi the Mighty; and how, in the midst of the fight, when his sword had hewn down numbers of the foe, and the end of the strife and victory seemed near, an old man, one eyed and bearded, and wearing a cloud-gray cloak, stood up before him in the din, and his sword was broken in pieces, and he fell dead on the heap of the slain.³ And, when Mimer had finished his tale, his dark face seemed to grow darker, and his twinkling eyes grew brighter, as he cried out in a tone of despair and hopeless yearning,—

"Oh, past are those days of old and the worthy deeds of the brave! And these are the days of the home-stayers,—of the wise, but feeble-hearted. Yet the Norns have spoken; and it must be that another hero shall arise of the Volsung blood, and he shall restore the name and the fame of his kin of the early days. And he shall be my bane; and in him shall the race of heroes have an end."⁴

Siegfried's heart was strangely stirred within him as he hearkened to this story of ancient times and to the fateful words of the master, and for a long time he sat in silent thought; and neither he nor Mimer moved, or spoke again, until the darkness of the night had begun to fade, and the gray light of morning to steal into the smithy. Then, as if moved by a sudden impulse, he turned to the master, and said,—

"You speak of the Norns, dear master, and of their foretelling; but your words are vague, and their meaning very broad. When shall that hero come? and who shall he be? and what deeds shall be his doing?"

"Alas!" answered Mimer, "I know not, save that he shall be of the Volsung race, and that my fate is linked with his."

³ Sigmund The Volsung. Sigmund the Volsung, in the Volsunga Saga, is represented as the father of Sigurd (Siegfried); but there is such a marked contrast between him, and the wise, home-abiding King Siegmund of the later stories, that I have thought proper to speak of them here as two different individuals. The word "Sigmund," or "Siegmund," means literally the mouth of victory. The story of the Volsungs, as here supposed to be related by Mimer, is derived mainly from the Volsunga Saga.

⁴ The Idea of Fatality. Throughout the story of the Nibelungs and Volsungs, of Sigurd and of Siegfried,—whether we follow the older versions or the more recent renderings,—there is, as it were, an ever-present but indefinable shadow of coming fate, "a low, inarticulate voice of Doom," foretelling the inevitable. This is but in consonance with the general ideas of our Northern ancestors regarding the fatality which shapes and controls every man's life. These ideas are embodied in more than one ancient legend. We find them in the old Anglo-Saxon poem of Beowulf. "To us," cries Beowulf in his last fight, "to us it shall be as our Weird betides,—that Weird that is every man's lord!" "Each man of us shall abide the end of his life-work; let him that may work, work his doomed deeds ere death comes!" Similar ideas prevailed among the Greeks. Read, for example, that passage in the Iliad describing the parting of Hector and Andromache, and notice the deeper meaning of Hector's words.

“And why do you not know?” returned Siegfried. “Are you not that old Mimer, in whom it is said the garnered wisdom of the world is stored? Is there not truth in the old story that even Odin pawned one of his eyes for a single draught from your fountain of knowledge? And is the possessor of so much wisdom unable to look into the future with clearness and certainty?”

“Alas!” answered Mimer again, and his words came hard and slow, “I am not that Mimer, of whom old stories tell, who gave wisdom to the All-Father in exchange for an eye. He is one of the giants, and he still watches his fountain in far-off Jotunheim.⁵ I claim kinship with the dwarfs, and am sometimes known as an elf, sometimes as a wood-sprite. Men have called me Mimer because of my wisdom and skill, and the learning which I impart to my pupils. Could I but drink from the fountain of the real Mimer, then the wisdom of the world would in truth be mine, and the secrets of the future would be no longer hidden. But I must wait, as I have long waited, for the day and the deed and the doom that the Norns have foretold.”

And the old strange look of longing came again into his eyes, and the wrinkles on his swarthy face seemed to deepen with agony, as he arose, and left the smithy. And Siegfried sat alone before the smouldering fire, and pondered upon what he had heard.

⁵ Mimer. “The *Vilkinasaga* brings before us yet another smith, Mimer, by whom not only is Velint instructed in his art, but Sigfrid (Siegfried) is brought up,—another smith’s apprentice. He is occasionally mentioned in the later poem of *Biterolf*, as *Mime the Old*. The old name of Munster in Westphalia was *Mimigardiford*; the Westphalian *Minden* was originally *Mimidun*; and *Memleben* on the *Unstrut*, *Mimileba*. . . The elder Norse tradition names him just as often, and in several different connections. In one place, a *Mimingus*, a wood-satyr, and possessor of a sword and jewels, is interwoven into the myth of *Balder* and *Hoder*. The *Edda* gives a higher position to its Mimer. He has a fountain, in which wisdom and understanding lie hidden: drinking of it every morning, he is the wisest, most intelligent, of men. To Mimer’s fountain came *Odin*, and desired a drink, but did not receive it till he had given one of his eyes in pledge, and hidden it in the fountain: this accounts for *Odin* being one-eyed.... Mimer is no *Asa*, but an exalted being with whom the *Asas* hold converse, of whom they make use,—the sum total of wisdom, possibly an older *Nature-god*. Later fables degraded him into a wood-sprite, or clever smith.”—*Grimm’s Deutsche Mythologie*, I. p. 379. Concerning the Mimer of the *Eddas*, Professor *Anderson* says, “The name Mimer means the knowing. The Giants, being older than the *Asas*, looked deeper than the latter into the darkness of the past. They had witnessed the birth of the gods and the beginning of the world, and they foresaw their downfall. Concerning both these events, the gods had to go to them for knowledge. It is this wisdom that Mimer keeps in his fountain.”—*Norse Mythology*, p 209. In the older versions of the legend, the smith who cared for Siegfried (*Sigurd*) is called, as we have before noticed, *Regin*. He is thus described by *Morris*:— “The lore of all men he knew, And was deft in every cunning, save the dealings of the sword. So sweet was his tongue-speech fashioned, that men trowed his every word. His hand with the harp-strings blended was the mingler of delight With the latter days of sorrow: all tales he told aright. The Master of the Masters in the smithying craft was he; And he dealt with the wind and the weather and the stilling of the sea; Nor might any learn him leech-craft, for before that race was made, And that man-folk’s generation, all their life-days had he weighed.” *Sigurd the Volsung*, Bk. II.

Adventure II. Greyfell

Many were the pleasant days that Siegfried spent in Mimer's smoky smithy; and if he ever thought of his father's stately dwelling, or of the life of ease which he might have enjoyed within its halls, he never by word or deed showed signs of discontent. For Mimer taught him all the secrets of his craft and all the lore of the wise men. To beat hot iron, to shape the fire-edged sword, to smithy war-coats, to fashion the slender bracelet of gold and jewels,—all this he had already learned. But there were many other things to know, and these the wise master showed him. He told him how to carve the mystic runes which speak to the knowing ones with silent, unseen tongues; he told him of the men of other lands, and taught him their strange speech; he showed him how to touch the harp-strings, and bring forth bewitching music: and the heart of Siegfried waxed very wise, while his body grew wondrous strong. And the master loved his pupil dearly.

But the twelve apprentices grew more jealous day by day, and when Mimer was away they taunted Siegfried with cruel jests, and sought by harsh threats to drive him from the smithy; but the lad only smiled, and made the old shop ring again with the music from his anvil. On a day when Mimer had gone on a journey, Veliant, the foreman, so far forgot himself as to strike the boy. For a moment Siegfried gazed at him with withering scorn; then he swung his hammer high in air, and brought it swiftly down, not upon the head of Veliant, who was trembling with expectant fear, but upon the foreman's anvil. The great block of iron was shivered by the blow, and flew into a thousand pieces. Then, turning again towards the thoroughly frightened foreman, Siegfried said, while angry lightning-flashes darted from his eyes,—

“What if I were to strike you thus?”

Veliant sank upon the ground, and begged for mercy.

“You are safe,” said Siegfried, walking away. “I would scorn to harm a being like you!”

The apprentices were struck dumb with amazement and fear; and when Siegfried had returned to his anvil they one by one dropped their hammers, and stole away from the smithy. In a secret place not far from the shop, they met together, to plot some means by which they might rid themselves of him whom they both hated and feared.

The next morning Veliant came to Siegfried's forge, with a sham smile upon his face. The boy knew that cowardice and base deceit lurked, ill concealed, beneath that smile; yet, as he was wont to do, he welcomed the foreman kindly.

“Siegfried,” said Veliant, “let us be friends again. I am sorry that I was so foolish and so rash yesterday, and I promise that I will never again be so rude and unmanly as to become angry at you. Let us be friends, good Siegfried! Give me your hand, I pray you, and with it your forgiveness.”

Siegfried grasped the rough palm of the young smith with such a gripe, that the smile vanished from Veliant's face, and his muscles writhed with pain.

“I give you my hand, certainly,” said the boy, “and I will give you my forgiveness when I know that you are worthy of it.”

As soon as Veliant's aching hand allowed him speech, he said,—

“Siegfried, you know that we have but little charcoal left for our forges, and our master will soon return from his journey. It will never do for him to find us idle, and the fires cold. Some one must go to-day to the forest-pits, and bring home a fresh supply of charcoal. How would you like the errand? It is but a pleasant day's journey to the pits; and a ride into the greenwood this fine summer day would certainly be more agreeable than staying in the smoky shop.”

“I should like the drive very much,” answered Siegfried; “but I have never been to the coal-pits, and I might lose my way in the forest.”

“No danger of that,” said Veliant. “Follow the road that goes straight into the heart of the forest, and you cannot miss your way. It will lead you to the house of Regin, the master, the greatest charcoal-

man in all Rhineland. He will be right glad to see you for Mimer's sake, and you may lodge with him for the night. In the morning he will fill your cart with the choicest charcoal, and you can drive home at your leisure; and, when our master comes again, he will find our forges flaming, and our bellows roaring, and our anvils ringing, as of yore."

Siegfried, after some further parley, agreed to undertake the errand, although he felt that Veliant, in urging him to do so, wished to work him some harm. He harnessed the donkey to the smith's best cart, and drove merrily away along the road which led towards the forest.⁶ The day was bright and clear; and as Siegfried rode through the flowery meadows, or betwixt the fields of corn, a thousand sights and sounds met him, and made him glad. Now and then he would stop to watch the reapers in the fields, or to listen to the song of some heaven-soaring lark lost to sight in the blue sea overhead. Once he met a company of gayly dressed youths and maidens, carrying sheaves of golden grain,—for it was now the harvest-time,—and singing in praise of Frey, the giver of peace and plenty.

"Whither away, young prince?" they merrily asked.

"To Regin, the coal-burner, in the deep greenwood," he answered.

"Then may the good Frey have thee in keeping!" they cried. "It is a long and lonesome journey." And each one blessed him as they passed.

It was nearly noon when he drove into the forest, and left the blooming meadows and the warm sunshine behind him. And now he urged the donkey forwards with speed; for he knew that he had lost much precious time, and that many miles still lay between him and Regin's charcoal-pits. And there was nothing here amid the thick shadows of the wood to make him wish to linger; for the ground was damp, and the air was chilly, and every thing was silent as the grave. And not a living creature did Siegfried see, save now and then a gray wolf slinking across the road, or a doleful owl sitting low down in some tree-top, and blinking at him in the dull but garish light. Evening at last drew on, and the shadows in the wood grew deeper; and still no sign of charcoal-burner, nor of other human being, was seen. Night came, and thick darkness settled around; and all the demons of the forest came forth, and clamored and chattered, and shrieked and howled. But Siegfried was not afraid. The bats and vampires came out of their hiding-places, and flapped their clammy wings in his face; and he thought that he saw ogres and many fearful creatures peeping out from behind every tree and shrub. But, when he looked upwards through the overhanging tree-tops, he saw the star-decked roof of heaven, the blue mantle which the All-Father has hung as a shelter over the world; and he went bravely onwards, never doubting but that Odin has many good things in store for those who are willing to trust him.

And by and by the great round moon arose in the east, and the fearful sounds that had made the forest hideous began to die away; and Siegfried saw, far down the path, a red light feebly gleaming. And he was glad, for he knew that it must come from the charcoal-burners' pits. Soon he came out upon a broad, cleared space; and the charcoal-burners' fires blazed bright before him; and some workmen, swarthy and soot-begrimed, came forwards to meet him.

"Who are you?" they asked; "and why do you come through the forest at this late hour?"

"I am Siegfried," answered the boy; "and I come from Mimer's smithy. I seek Regin, the king of charcoal-burners; for I must have coal for my master's smithy."

"Come with me," said one of the men: "I will lead you to Regin."

Siegfried alighted from his cart, and followed the man to a low-roofed hut not far from the burning pits. As they drew near, they heard the sound of a harp, and strange, wild music within; and Siegfried's heart was stirred with wonder as he listened. The man knocked softly at the door, and the music ceased.

⁶ Siegfried's Journey Into The Forest. "In the shop of Mimer, Siegfried was nowise in his proper element, ever quarrelling with his fellow-apprentices, nay, as some say, breaking the hardest anvils into shivers by his too stout hammering; so that Mimer, otherwise a first-rate smith, could by no means do with him there. He sends him, accordingly, to the neighboring forest to fetch charcoal, well aware that a monstrous dragon, one Regin, the smith's own brother, would meet him, and devour him. But far otherwise it proved."—Carlyle, on The Nibelungen Lied.

“Who comes to break into Regin’s rest at such a time as this?” said a rough voice within.

“A youth who calls himself Siegfried,” answered the man. “He says that he comes from Mimer’s smithy, and he would see you, my master.”

“Let him come in,” said the voice.

Siegfried passed through the low door, and into the room beyond; and so strange was the sight that met him that he stood for a while in awe, for never in so lowly a dwelling had treasures so rich been seen. Jewels sparkled from the ceiling; rare tapestry covered the walls; and on the floor were heaps of ruddy gold and silver, still unfashioned. And in the midst of all this wealth stood Regin, the king of the forest, the greatest of charcoal-men. And a strange old man he was, wrinkled and gray and beardless; but out of his eyes sharp glances gleamed of a light that was not human, and his heavy brow and broad forehead betokened wisdom and shrewd cunning. And he welcomed Siegfried kindly for Mimer’s sake, and set before him a rich repast of venison, and wild honey, and fresh white bread, and luscious grapes. And, when the meal was finished, the boy would have told his errand, but Regin stopped him.

“Say nothing of your business to-night,” said he; “for the hour is already late, and you are weary. Better lie down, and rest until the morrow; and then we will talk of the matter which has brought you hither.”

And Siegfried was shown to a couch of the fragrant leaves of the myrtle and hemlock, overspread with soft white linen, such as is made in the far-off Emerald Isle; and he was lulled to sleep by sweet strains of music from Regin’s harp,—music which told of the days when the gods were young on the earth. And as he slept he dreamed. He dreamed that he stood upon the crag of a high mountain, and that the eagles flew screaming around him, and the everlasting snows lay at his feet, and the world in all its beauty was stretched out like a map below him; and he longed to go forth to partake of its abundance, and to make for himself a name among men. Then came the Norns, who spin the thread, and weave the woof, of every man’s life; and they held in their hands the web of his own destiny. And Urd, the Past, sat on the tops of the eastern mountains, where the sun begins to rise at dawn; while Verdanda, the Present, stood in the western sea, where sky and water meet. And they stretched the web between them, and its ends were hidden in the far-away mists. Then with all their might the two Norns span the purple and golden threads, and wove the fatal woof. But as it began to grow in beauty and in strength, and to shadow the earth with its gladness and its glory, Skuld, the pitiless Norn of the Future, seized it with rude fingers, and tore it into shreds, and cast it down at the feet of Hela, the white queen of the dead.⁷ And the eagles shrieked, and the mountain shook, and the crag toppled, and Siegfried awoke.

The next morning, at earliest break of day, the youth sought Regin, and made known his errand.

“I have come for charcoal for my master Mimer’s forges. My cart stands ready outside; and I pray you to have it filled at once, for the way is long, and I must be back betimes.”

Then a strange smile stole over Regin’s wrinkled face, and he said,—

“Does Siegfried the prince come on such a lowly errand? Does he come to me through the forest, driving a donkey, and riding in a sooty coal-cart? I have known the day when his kin were the mightiest kings of earth, and they fared through every land the noblest men of men-folk.”

The taunting word, the jeering tones, made Siegfried’s anger rise. The blood boiled in his veins; but he checked his tongue, and mildly answered,—

⁷ The Norns. The Norns are the Fates, which watch over man through life. They are Urd the Past, Verdanda the Present, and Skuld the Future. They approach every new-born child, and utter his doom. They are represented as spinning the thread of fate, one end of which is hidden by Urd in the far east, the other by Verdanda in the far west. Skuld stands ready to rend it in pieces. —See Grimm’s *Teutonic Mythology*, p. 405, also Anderson’s *Norse Mythology*, p. 209. The three weird women in Shakespeare’s *Tragedy of Macbeth* represent a later conception of the three Norns, now degraded to mere witches. Compare the Norns with the Fates of the Greek Mythology. These, also, are three in number. They sit clothed in white, and garlanded, singing of destiny. Clotho, the Past, spins; Lachesis, the Present, divides; and Atropos, the Future, stands ready with her shears to cut the thread.

“It is true that I am a prince, and my father is the wisest of kings; and it is for this reason that I come thus to you. Mimer is my master, and my father early taught me that even princes must obey their masters’ behests.”

Then Regin laughed, and asked, “How long art thou to be Mimer’s thrall? Does no work wait for thee but at his smoky forge?”

“When Mimer gives me leave, and Odin calls me,” answered the lad, “then I, too, will go faring over the world, like my kin of the earlier days, to carve me a name and great glory, and a place with the noble of earth.”

Regin said not a word; but he took his harp, and smote the strings, and a sad, wild music filled the room. And he sang of the gods and the dwarf-folk, and of the deeds that had been in the time long past and gone. And a strange mist swam before Siegfried’s eyes; and so bewitching were the strains that fell upon his ears, and filled his soul, that he forgot about his errand, and his master Mimer, and his father Siegmund, and his lowland home, and thought only of the heart-gladdening sounds. By and by the music ended, the spell was lifted, and Siegfried turned his eyes towards the musician. A wonderful change had taken place. The little old man still stood before him with the harp in his hand; but his wrinkled face was hidden by a heavy beard, and his thin gray locks were covered with a long black wig, and he seemed taller and stouter than before. As Siegfried started with surprise, his host held out his hand, and said,—

“You need not be alarmed, my boy. It is time for you to know that Regin and Mimer are the same person, or rather that Mimer is Regin disguised.⁸ The day has come for you to go your way into the world, and Mimer gives you leave.”

Siegfried was so amazed he could not say a word. He took the master’s hand, and gazed long into his deep, bright eyes. Then the two sat down together, and Mimer, or Regin as we shall now call him, told the prince many tales of the days that had been, and of his bold, wise forefathers. And the lad’s heart swelled within him; and he longed to be like them,—to dare and do and suffer, and gloriously win at last. And he turned to Regin and said,—

“Tell me, wisest of masters, what I shall do to win fame, and to make myself worthy to rule the fair land which my fathers held.”

“Go forth in your own strength, and with Odin’s help,” answered Regin,—“go forth to right the wrong, to help the weak, to punish evil, and come not back to your father’s kingdom until the world shall know your noble deeds.”

“But whither shall I go?” asked Siegfried.

“I will tell you,” answered Regin. “Put on these garments, which better befit a prince than those soot-begrimed clothes you have worn so long. Gird about you this sword, the good Balmung, and go northward. When you come to the waste lands which border upon the sea, you will find the ancient Gripir, the last of the kin of the giants. Ask of him a war-steed, and Odin will tell you the rest.”

So, when the sun had risen high above the trees, Siegfried bade Regin good-by, and went forth like a man, to take whatsoever fortune should betide. He went through the great forest, and across the bleak moorland beyond, and over the huge black mountains that stretched themselves across his way, and came to a pleasant country all dotted with white farmhouses, and yellow with waving, corn. But he tarried not here, though many kind words were spoken to him, and all besought him to stay. Right onwards he went, until he reached the waste land which borders the sounding sea. And there high mountains stood, with snow-crowned crags beetling over the waves; and a great river, all foaming with the summer floods, went rolling through the valley. And in the deep dales between the mountains were rich meadows, green with grass, and speckled with thousands of flowers of every hue, where

⁸ Regin. As we have already observed, the older versions of this myth called Siegfried’s master and teacher Regin, while the more recent versions call him Mimer. We have here endeavored to harmonize the two versions by representing Mimer as being merely Regin in disguise.

herds of cattle and deer, and noble elks, and untamed horses, fed in undisturbed peace. And Siegfried, when he saw, knew that these were the pastures of Gripir the ancient.

High up among the gray mountain-peaks stood Gripir's dwelling,—a mighty house, made of huge boulders brought by giant hands from the far north-land. And the wild eagle, built their nests around it, and the mountain vultures screamed about its doors. But Siegfried was not afraid. He climbed the steep pathway which the feet of men had never touched before, and, without pausing, walked straightway into the high-built hall. The room was so dark that at first he could see nothing save the white walls, and the glass-green pillars which upheld the roof. But the light grew stronger soon; and Siegfried saw, beneath a heavy canopy of stone, the ancient Gripir, seated in a chair made from the sea-horse's teeth.⁹ And the son of the giants held in his hand an ivory staff; and a purple mantle was thrown over his shoulders, and his white beard fell in sweeping waves almost to the sea-green floor. Very wise he seemed, and he gazed at Siegfried with a kindly smile.

“Hail, Siegfried!” he cried. “Hail, prince with the gleaming eye! I know thee, and I know the woof that the Norns have woven for thee. Welcome to my lonely mountain home! Come and sit by my side in the high-seat where man has never sat, and I will tell thee of things that have been, and of things that are yet to be.”

Then Siegfried fearlessly went and sat by the side of the ancient wise one. And long hours they talked together,—strong youth and hoariest age; and each was glad that in the other he had found some source of hope and comfort. And they talked of the great midworld, and of the starry dome above it, and of the seas which gird it, and of the men who live upon it. All night long they talked, and in the morning Siegfried arose to go.

“Thou hast not told me of thy errand,” said Gripir; “but I know what it is. Come first with me, and see this great mid-world for thyself.”

Then Gripir, leaning on his staff, led the way out of the great hall, and up to the top of the highest mountain-crag. And the wild eagles circled in the clear, cold air above them; and far below them the white waves dashed against the mountain's feet; and the frosty winds swept around them unchecked, bringing to their ears the lone lamenting of the north giants, moaning for the days that had been and for the glories that were past. Then Siegfried looked to the north, and he saw the dark mountain-wall of Norway trending away in solemn grandeur towards the frozen sea, but broken here and there by sheltering fjords, and pleasant, sunny dales. He looked to the east, and saw a great forest stretching away and away until it faded to sight in the blue distance. He looked to the south, and saw a pleasant land, with farms and vineyards, and towns and strong-built castles; and through it wound the River Rhine, like a great white serpent, reaching from the snow-capped Alps to the northern sea. And he saw his father's little kingdom of the Netherlands lying like a green speck on the shore of the ocean. Then he looked to the west, and nothing met his sight but a wilderness of rolling, restless waters, save, in the far distance, a green island half hidden by sullen mists and clouds. And Siegfried sighed, and said,—

“The world is so wide, and the life of man so short!”

“The world is all before thee,” answered Gripir. “Take what the Norns have allotted thee. Choose from my pastures a battle-steed, and ride forth to win for thyself a name and fame among the sons of men.”

Then Siegfried ran down the steep side of the mountain to the grassy dell where the horses were feeding. But the beasts were all so fair and strong, that he knew not which to choose. While he paused, uncertain what to do, a strange man stood before him. Tall and handsome was the man, with

⁹ Gripir. “A man of few words was Gripir; but he knew of all deeds that had been; And times there came upon him, when the deeds to be were seen: No sword had he held in his hand since his father fell to field, And against the life of the slayer he bore undinted shield: Yet no fear in his heart abided, nor desired he aught at all: But he noted the deeds that had been, and looked for what should befall.” Morris's Sigurd the Volsung, Bk. II.

one bright eye, and a face beaming like the dawn in summer; and upon his head he wore a sky-blue hood bespangled with golden stars, and over his shoulder was thrown a cloak of ashen gray.

“Would you choose a horse, Sir Siegfried?” asked the stranger.

“Indeed I would,” answered he. “But it is hard to make a choice among so many.”

“There is one in the meadow,” said the man, “far better than all the rest. They say that he came from Odin’s pastures on the green hill-slopes of Asgard, and that none but the noblest shall ride him.”

“Which is he?” asked Siegfried.

“Drive the herd into the river,” was the answer, “and then see if you can pick him out.”

And Siegfried and the stranger drove the horses down the sloping bank, and into the rolling stream; but the flood was too strong for them. Some soon turned back to the shore; while others, struggling madly, were swept away, and carried out to the sea. Only one swam safely over. He shook the dripping water from his mane, tossed his head in the air, and then plunged again into the stream. Right bravely he stemmed the torrent the second time. He clambered up the shelving bank, and stood by Siegfried’s side.

“What need to tell you that this is the horse?” said the stranger. “Take him: he is yours. He is Greyfell, the shining hope that Odin sends to his chosen heroes.”

And then Siegfried noticed that the horse’s mane glimmered and flashed like a thousand rays from the sun, and that his coat was as white and clear as the fresh-fallen snow on the mountains. He turned to speak to the stranger, but he was nowhere to be seen and Siegfried bethought him how he had talked with Odin unawares. Then he mounted the noble Greyfell and rode with a light heart across the flowery meadows.

“Whither ridest thou?” cried Gripir the ancient, from his doorway among the crags.

“I ride into the wide world,” said Siegfried; “but I know not whither. I would right the wrong, and help the weak, and make myself a name on the earth, as did my kinsmen of yore. Tell me, I pray you, where I shall go; for you are wise, and you know the things which have been, and those which shall befall.”

“Ride back to Regin, the master of masters,” answered Gripir. “He will tell thee of a wrong to be righted.”

And the ancient son of the giants withdrew into his lonely abode; and Siegfried, on the shining Greyfell, rode swiftly away towards the south.

Adventure III. The Curse of Gold

Forth then rode Siegfried, upon the beaming Greyfell, out into the broad mid-world. And the sun shone bright above him, and the air was soft and pure, and the earth seemed very lovely, and life a gladsome thing. And his heart was big within him as he thought of the days to come, of the deeds of love and daring, of the righting of many wrongs, of the people's praise, and the glory of a life well lived. And he wended his way back again toward the south and the fair lands of the Rhine. He left the barren moorlands behind him, and the pleasant farms and villages of the fruitful countryside, and after many days came once more to Regin's woodland dwelling. For he said to himself, "My old master is very wise; and he knows of the deeds that were done when yet the world was young, and my kin were the mightiest of men. I will go to him, and learn what grievous evil it is that he has so often vaguely hinted at."

Regin, when he saw the lad and the beaming Greyfell standing like a vision of light at his door, welcomed them most gladly, and led Siegfried into the inner room, where they sat down together amid the gold, and the gem-stones, and the fine-wrought treasures there.

"Truly," said the master, "the days of my long waiting are drawing to a close, and at last the deed shall be done."

And the old look of longing came again into his eyes, and his pinched face seemed darker and more wrinkled than before, and his thin lips trembled with emotion as he spoke.

"What is that deed of which you speak?" asked Siegfried.

"It is the righting of a grievous wrong," answered Regin, "and the winning of treasures untold. Lo, many years have I waited for the coming of this day; and now my heart tells me that the hero so long hoped for is here, and the wisdom and the wealth of the world shall be mine."

"But what is the wrong to be righted?" asked Siegfried. "And what is this treasure that you speak of as your own?"

"Alas!" answered Regin, "the treasure is indeed mine; and yet wrongfully has it been withheld from me. But listen a while to a tale of the early days, and thou shalt know what the treasure is, and what is the wrong to be righted."

He took his harp and swept the strings, and played a soft, low melody which told of the dim past, and of blighted hopes, and of a nameless, never-satisfied yearning for that which might have been. And then he told Siegfried this story:

Regin's Story.

When the earth was still very young, and men were feeble and few, and the Dwarfs were many and strong, the Asa-folk were wont oft-times to leave their halls in heaven-towering Asgard in order to visit the new-formed mid-world, and to see what the short-lived sons of men were doing. Sometimes they came in their own godlike splendor and might; sometimes they came disguised as feeble men-folk, with all man's weaknesses and all his passions. Sometimes Odin, as a beggar, wandered from one country to another, craving charity; sometimes, as a warrior clad in coat of mail, he rode forth to battle for the cause of right; or as a minstrel he sang from door to door, and played sweet music in the halls of the great; or as a huntsman he dashed through brakes and fens, and into dark forests, and climbed steep mountains in search of game; or as a sailor he embarked upon the sea, and sought new scenes in unknown lands. And many times did men-folk entertain him unawares.

Once on a time he came to the mid-world in company with Hoenir and Loki; and the three wandered through many lands and in many climes, each giving gifts wherever they went. Odin gave knowledge and strength, and taught men how to read the mystic runes; Hoenir gave gladness and good cheer, and lightened many hearts with the glow of his comforting presence; but Loki had nought to give but cunning deceit and base thoughts, and he left behind him bitter strife and many aching breasts. At last, growing tired of the fellowship of men, the three Asas sought the solitude of the

forest, and as huntsmen wandered long among the hills and over the wooded heights of Hunaland. Late one afternoon they came to a mountain-stream at a place where it poured over a ledge of rocks, and fell in clouds of spray into a rocky gorge below. As they stood, and with pleased eyes gazed upon the waterfall, they saw near the bank an otter lazily making ready to eat a salmon which he had caught. And Loki, ever bent on doing mischief, hurled a stone at the harmless beast, and killed it. And he boasted loudly that he had done a worthy deed. And he took both the otter, and the fish which it had caught, and carried them with him as trophies of the day's success.

Just at nightfall the three huntsmen came to a lone farmhouse in the valley, and asked for food, and for shelter during the night.

"Shelter you shall have," said the farmer, whose name was Hreidmar, "for the rising clouds foretell a storm. But food I have none to give you. Surely huntsmen of skill should not want for food; since the forest teems with game, and the streams are full of fish."

Then Loki threw upon the ground the otter and the fish, and said, "We have sought in both forest and stream, and we have taken from them at one blow both flesh and fish. Give us but the shelter you promise, and we will not trouble you for food."

The farmer gazed with horror upon the lifeless body of the otter, and cried out, "This creature which you mistook for an otter, and which you have robbed and killed, is my son Oddar, who for mere pastime had taken the form of the furry beast. You are but thieves and murderers!"

Then he called loudly for help: and his two sons Fafnir and Regin, sturdy and valiant kin of the dwarf-folk, rushed in, and seized upon the huntsmen, and bound them hand and foot; for the three Asas, having taken upon themselves the forms of men, had no more than human strength, and were unable to withstand them.

Then Odin and his fellows bemoaned their ill fate. And Loki said, "Wherefore did we foolishly take upon ourselves the likenesses of puny men? Had I my own power once more, I would never part with it in exchange for man's weaknesses."

And Hoenir sighed, and said, "Now, indeed, will darkness win: and the frosty breath of the Reimthursen giants will blast the fair handiwork of the sunlight and the heat; for the givers of life and light and warmth are helpless prisoners in the hands of these cunning and unforgiving jailers."

"Surely," said Odin, "not even the highest are free from obedience to heaven's behests and the laws of right. I, whom men call the Preserver of Life, have demeaned myself by being found in evil company; and, although I have done no other wrong, I suffer rightly for the doings of this mischief-maker with whom I have stooped to have fellowship. For all are known, not so much by what they are as by what they seem to be, and they bear the bad name which their comrades bear. Now I am fallen from my high estate. Eternal right is higher than I. And in the last Twilight of the gods I must needs meet the dread Fenris-wolf, and in the end the world will be made new again, and the shining Balder will rule in sunlight majesty forever."

Then the Asas asked Hreidmar, their jailer, what ransom they should pay for their freedom; and he, not knowing who they were, said, "I must first know what ransom you are able to give."

"We will give any thing you may ask," hastily answered Loki.

Hreidmar then called his sons, and bade them strip the skin from the otter's body. When this was done, they brought the furry hide and spread it upon the ground; and Hreidmar said, "Bring shining gold and precious stones enough to cover every part of this otter-skin. When you have paid so much ransom, you shall have your freedom."

"That we will do," answered Odin. "But one of us must have leave to go and fetch it: the other two will stay fast bound until the morning dawns. If, by that time, the gold is not here, you may do with us as you please."

Hreidmar and the two young men agreed to Odin's offer; and, lots being cast, it fell to Loki to go and fetch the treasure. When he had been loosed from the cords which bound him, Loki donned his magic shoes, which had carried him over land and sea from the farthest bounds of the mid-world,

and hastened away upon his errand. And he sped with the swiftness of light, over the hills and the wooded slopes, and the deep dark valleys, and the fields and forests and sleeping hamlets, until he came to the place where dwelt the swarthy elves and the cunning dwarf Andvari. There the River Rhine, no larger than a meadow-brook, breaks forth from beneath a mountain of ice, which the Frost giants and blind old Hoder, the Winter-king, had built long years before; for they had vainly hoped that they might imprison the river at its fountain-head. But the baby-brook had eaten its way beneath the frozen mass, and had sprung out from its prison, and gone on, leaping and smiling, and kissing the sunlight, in its ever-widening course towards Burgundy and the sea.

Loki came to this place, because he knew that here was the home of the elves who had laid up the greatest hoard of treasures ever known in the mid-world. He scanned with careful eyes the mountain-side, and the deep, rocky caverns, and the dark gorge through which the little river rushed; but in the dim moonlight not a living being could he see, save a lazy salmon swimming in the quieter eddies of the stream. Any one but Loki would have lost all hope of finding treasure there, at least before the dawn of day; but his wits were quick, and his eyes were very sharp.

“One salmon has brought us into this trouble, and another shall help us out of it!” he cried.

Then, swift as thought, he sprang again into the air; and the magic shoes carried him with greater speed than before down the Rhine valley, and through Burgundy-land, and the low meadows, until he came to the shores of the great North Sea. He sought the halls of old AEGir, the Ocean-king; but he wist not which way to go,—whether across the North Sea towards Isenland, or whether along the narrow channel between Britain-land and the main. While he paused, uncertain where to turn, he saw the pale-haired daughters of old AEGir, the white-veiled Waves, playing in the moonlight near the shore. Of them he asked the way to AEGir’s hall.

“Seven days’ journey westward,” said they, “beyond the green Isle of Erin, is our father’s hall. Seven days’ journey northward, on the bleak Norwegian shore, is our father’s hall.”

And they stopped not once in their play, but rippled and danced on the shelving beach, or dashed with force against the shore.

“Where is your mother Ran, the Queen of the Ocean?” asked Loki.

And they answered,—

“In the deep sea-caves
By the sounding shore,
In the dashing waves
When the wild storms roar,
In her cold green bowers
In the northern fiords,
She lurks and she glowers,
She grasps and she hoards,
And she spreads her strong net for her prey.”

Loki waited to hear no more; but he sprang into the air, and the magic shoes carried him onwards over the water in search of the Ocean-queen. He had not gone far when his sharp eyes espied her, lurking near a rocky shore against which the breakers dashed with frightful fury. Half hidden in the deep dark water, she lay waiting and watching; and she spread her cunning net upon the waves, and reached out with her long greedy fingers to seize whatever booty might come near her.

When the wary queen saw Loki, she hastily drew in her net, and tried to hide herself in the shadows of an overhanging rock. But Loki called her by name, and said,—

“Sister Ran, fear not! I am your friend Loki, whom once you served as a guest in AEGir’s gold-lit halls.”

Then the Ocean-queen came out into the bright moonlight, and welcomed Loki to her domain, and asked, "Why does Loki thus wander so far from Asgard, and over the trackless waters?"

And Loki answered, "I have heard of the net which you spread upon the waves, and from which no creature once caught in its meshes can ever escape. I have found a salmon where the Rhine-spring gushes from beneath the mountains, and a very cunning salmon he is for no common skill can catch him. Come, I pray, with your wondrous net, and cast it into the stream where he lies. Do but take the wary fish for me, and you shall have more gold than you have taken in a year from the wrecks of stranded vessels."

"I dare not go," cried Ran. "A bound is set, beyond which I may not venture. If all the gold of earth were offered me, I could not go."

"Then lend me your net," entreated Loki. "Lend me your net, and I will bring it back to-morrow filled with gold."

"Much I would like your gold," answered Ran; "but I cannot lend my net. Should I do so, I might lose the richest prize that has ever come into my husband's kingdom. For three days, now, a gold-rigged ship, bearing a princely crew with rich armor and abundant wealth, has been sailing carelessly over these seas. To-morrow I shall send my daughters and the bewitching mermaids to decoy the vessel among the rocks. And into my net the ship, and the brave warriors, and all their armor and gold, shall fall. A rich prize it will be. No: I cannot part with my net, even for a single hour."

But Loki knew the power of flattering words.

"Beautiful queen," said he, "there is no one on earth, nor even in Asgard, who can equal you in wisdom and foresight. Yet I promise you, that, if you will but lend me your net until the morning dawns, the ship and the crew of which you speak shall be yours, and all their golden treasures shall deck your azure halls in the deep sea."

Then Ran carefully folded the net, and gave it to Loki.

"Remember your promise," was all that she said.

"An Asa never forgets," he answered.

And he turned his face again towards Rhineland; and the magic shoes bore him aloft, and carried him in a moment back to the ice-mountain and the gorge and the infant river, which he had so lately left. The salmon still rested in his place, and had not moved during Loki's short absence.

Loki unfolded the net, and cast it into the stream. The cunning fish tried hard to avoid being caught in its meshes; but, dart which way he would, he met the skilfully woven cords, and these drew themselves around him, and held him fast. Then Loki pulled the net up out of the water, and grasped the helpless fish in his right hand. But, lo! as he held the struggling creature high in the air, it was no longer a fish, but the cunning dwarf Andvari.

"Thou King of the Elves," cried Loki, "thy cunning has not saved thee. Tell me, on thy life, where thy hidden treasures lie!"

The wise dwarf knew who it was that thus held him as in a vise; and he answered frankly, for it was his only hope of escape, "Turn over the stone upon which you stand. Beneath it you will find the treasure you seek."

Then Loki put his shoulder to the rock, and pushed with all his might. But it seemed as firm as the mountain, and would not be moved.

"Help us, thou cunning dwarf," he cried,— "help us, and thou shalt have thy life!"

The dwarf put his shoulder to the rock, and it turned over as if by magic, and underneath was disclosed a wondrous chamber, whose walls shone brighter than the sun, and on whose floor lay treasures of gold and glittering gem-stones such as no man had ever seen. And Loki, in great haste, seized upon the hoard, and placed it in the magic net which he had borrowed from the Ocean-queen. Then he came out of the chamber; and Andvari again put his shoulder to the rock which lay at the entrance, and it swung back noiselessly to its place.

“What is that upon thy finger?” suddenly cried Loki. “Wouldst keep back a part of the treasure? Give me the ring thou hast!”

But the dwarf shook his head, and made answer, “I have given thee all the riches that the elves of the mountain have gathered since the world began. This ring I cannot give thee, for without its help we shall never be able to gather more treasures together.”

And Loki grew angry at these words of the dwarf; and he seized the ring, and tore it by force from Andvari’s fingers. It was a wondrous little piece of mechanism shaped like a serpent, coiled, with its tail in its mouth; and its scaly sides glittered with many a tiny diamond, and its ruby eyes shone with an evil light. When the dwarf knew that Loki really meant to rob him of the ring, he cursed it and all who should ever possess it, saying,—

“May the ill-gotten treasure that you have seized tonight be your bane, and the bane of all to whom it may come, whether by fair means or by foul! And the ring which you have torn from my hand, may it entail upon the one who wears it sorrow and untold ills, the loss of friends, and a violent death! The Norns have spoken, and thus it must be.”

Loki was pleased with these words, and with the dark curses which the dwarf pronounced upon the gold; for he loved wrong-doing, for wrong-doing’s sake, and he knew that no curses could ever make his own life more cheerless than it always had been. So he thanked Andvari for his curses and his treasures; and, throwing the magic net upon his shoulder, he sprang again into the air, and was carried swiftly back to Hunaland; and, just before the dawn appeared in the east, he alighted at the door of the farmhouse where Odin and Hoenir still lay bound with thongs, and guarded by Fafnir and Regin.

Then the farmer, Hreidmar, brought the otter’s skin, and spread it upon the ground; and, lo! it grew, and spread out on all sides, until it covered an acre of ground. And he cried out, “Fulfil now your promise! Cover every hair of this hide with gold or with precious stones. If you fail to do this, then your lives, by your own agreement, are forfeited, and we shall do with you as we list.”

Odin took the magic net from Loki’s shoulder; and opening it, he poured the treasures of the mountain elves upon the otter-skin. And Loki and Hoenir spread the yellow pieces carefully and evenly over every part of the furry hide. But, after every piece had been laid in its place; Hreidmar saw near the otter’s mouth a single hair uncovered; and he declared, that unless this hair, too, were covered, the bargain would be unfulfilled, and the treasures and lives of his prisoners would be forfeited. And the Asas looked at each other in dismay; for not another piece of gold, and not another precious stone, could they find in the net, although they searched with the greatest care. At last Odin took from his bosom the ring which Loki had stolen from the dwarf; for he had been so highly pleased with its form and workmanship, that he had hidden it, hoping that it would not be needed to complete the payment of the ransom. And they laid the ring upon the uncovered hair. And now no portion of the otter’s skin could be seen. And Fafnir and Regin, the ransom being paid, loosed the shackles of Odin and Hoenir, and bade the three huntsmen go on their way.

Odin and Hoenir at once shook off their human disguises, and, taking their own forms again, hastened with all speed back to Asgard. But Loki tarried a little while, and said to Hreidmar and his sons,—

“By your greediness and falsehood you have won for yourselves the Curse of the Earth, which lies before you. It shall be your bane. It shall be the bane of every one who holds it. It shall kindle strife between father and son, between brother and brother. It shall make you mean, selfish, beastly. It shall transform you into monsters. The noblest king among men-folk shall feel its curse. Such is gold, and such it shall ever be to its worshippers. And the ring which you have gotten shall impart to its possessor its own nature. Grasping, snaky, cold, unfeeling, shall he live; and death through treachery shall be his doom.”

Then he turned away, delighted that he had thus left the curse of Andvari with Hreidmar and his sons, and hastened northward toward the sea; for he wished to redeem the promise that he had made to the Ocean-queen, to bring back her magic net, and to decoy the richly laden ship into her clutches.

No sooner were the strange huntsmen well out of sight than Fafnir and Regin began to ask their father to divide the glittering hoard with them.

“By our strength and through our advice,” said they, “this great store has come into your hands. Let us place it in three equal heaps, and then let each take his share and go his way.”

At this the farmer waxed very angry; and he loudly declared that he would keep all the treasure for himself, and that his sons should not have any portion of it whatever. So Fafnir and Regin, nursing their disappointment, went to the fields to watch their sheep; but their father sat down to guard his new-gotten treasure. And he took in his hand the glittering serpent-ring, and gazed into its cold ruby eyes: and, as he gazed, all his thoughts were fixed upon his gold; and there was no room in his heart for love toward his fellows, nor for deeds of kindness, nor for the worship of the All-Father. And behold, as he continued to look at the snaky ring, a dreadful change came over him. The warm red blood, which until that time had leaped through his veins, and given him life and strength and human feelings, became purple and cold and sluggish; and selfishness, like serpent-poison, took hold of his heart. Then, as he kept on gazing at the hoard which lay before him, he began to lose his human shape; his body lengthened into many scaly folds, and he coiled himself around his loved treasures,—the very likeness of the ring upon which he had looked so long.

When the day drew near its close, Fafnir came back from the fields with his herd of sheep, and thought to find his father guarding the treasure, as he had left him in the morning; but instead he saw a glittering snake, fast asleep, encircling the hoard like a huge scaly ring of gold. His first thought was that the monster had devoured his father; and, hastily drawing his sword, with one blow he severed the serpent’s head from its body. And, while yet the creature writhed in the death-agony, he gathered up the hoard, and fled with it beyond the hills of Hunaland, until on the seventh day he came to a barren heath far from the homes of men. There he placed the treasures in one glittering heap; and he clothed himself in a wondrous mail-coat of gold that was found among them, and he put on the Helmet of Dread, which had once been the terror of the mid-world, and the like of which no man had ever seen; and then he gazed with greedy eyes upon the fateful ring, until he, too, was changed into a cold and slimy reptile,—a monster dragon. And he coiled himself about the hoard; and, with his restless eyes forever open, he gloated day after day upon his loved gold, and watched with ceaseless care that no one should come near to despoil him of it. This was ages and ages ago; and still he wallows among his treasures on the Glittering Heath, and guards as of yore the garnered wealth of Andvari.¹⁰

When I, Regin, the younger brother, came back in the late evening to my father’s dwelling, I saw that the treasure had been carried away; and, when I beheld the dead serpent lying in its place, I knew that a part of Andvari’s curse had been fulfilled. And a strange fear came over me; and I left every thing behind me, and fled from that dwelling, never more to return. Then I came to the land of the Volsungs, where your father’s fathers dwelt, the noblest king-folk that the world has ever seen. But a longing for the gold and the treasure, a hungry yearning, that would never be satisfied, filled my soul. Then for a time I sought to forget this craving. I spent my days in the getting of knowledge and in teaching men-folk the ancient lore of my kin, the Dwarfs. I taught them how to plant and to sow, and to reap the yellow grain. I showed them where the precious metals of the earth lie hidden, and how to smelt iron from its ores,—how to shape the ploughshare and the spade, the spear and the battle-axe. I taught them how to tame the wild horses of the meadows, and how to train the yoke-beasts to the plough; how to build lordly dwellings and mighty strongholds, and how to sail in ships across old AEGir’s watery kingdom. But they gave me no thanks for what I had done; and as the years went by they forgot who had been their teacher, and they said that it was Frey who had given them this knowledge and skill. And I taught the young maidens how to spin and weave, and to handle the needle deftly,—to make rich garments, and to work in tapestry and embroidery. But they, too, forgot

¹⁰ The Hoard. This story is found in both the Elder and the Younger Eddas, and is really the basis upon which the entire plot of the legend of Sigurd, or Siegfried, is constructed. See also.

me, and said that it was Freyja who had taught them. Then I showed men how to read the mystic runes aright, and how to make the sweet beverage of poetry, that charms all hearts, and enlightens the world. But they say now that they had these gifts from Odin. I taught them how to fashion the tales of old into rich melodious songs, and with music and sweet-mouthed eloquence to move the minds of their fellow-men. But they say that Bragi taught them this; and they remember me only as Regin, the elfin schoolmaster, or at best as Mimer, the master of smiths. At length my heart grew bitter because of the neglect and ingratitude of men; and the old longing for Andvari's hoard came back to me, and I forgot much of my cunning and lore. But I lived on and on, and generations of short-lived men arose and passed, and still the hoard was not mine; for I was weak, and no man was strong enough to help me.

Then I sought wisdom of the Norns, the weird women who weave the woof of every creature's fate.^{11 12}

"How long," asked I, "must I hope and wait in weary expectation of that day when the wealth of the world and the garnered wisdom of the ages shall be mine?"

And the witches answered, "When a prince of the Volsung race shall come who shall excel thee in the smithying craft, and to whom the All-Father shall give the Shining Hope as a helper, then the days of thy weary watching, shall cease."

"How long," asked I, "shall I live to enjoy this wealth and this wisdom, and to walk as a god among men? Shall I be long-lived as the Asa-folk, and dwell on the earth until the last Twilight comes?"

"It is written," answered Skuld, "that a beardless youth shall see thy death. But go thou now, and bide thy time."

Here Regin ended his story, and both he and Siegfried sat for a long time silent and thoughtful.

"I know what you wish," said Siegfried at last. "You think that I am the prince of whom the weird sisters spoke; and you would have me slay the dragon Fafnir, and win for you the hoard of Andvari."

"It is even so," answered Regin.

"But the hoard is accursed," said the lad.

"Let the curse be upon me," was the answer. "Is not the wisdom of the ages mine? And think you that I cannot escape the curse? Is there aught that can prevail against him who has all knowledge and the wealth of the world at his call?"

"Nothing but the word of the Norns and the will of the All-Father," answered Siegfried.

"But will you help me?" asked Regin, almost wild with earnestness. "Will you help me to win that which is rightfully mine, and to rid the world of a horrible evil?"

"Why is the hoard of Andvari more thine than Fafnir's?"

¹¹ The Norns. The Norns are the Fates, which watch over man through life. They are Urd the Past, Verdande the Present, and Skuld the Future. They approach every new-born child, and utter his doom. They are represented as spinning the thread of fate, one end of which is hidden by Urd in the far east, the other by Verdande in the far west. Skuld stands ready to rend it in pieces. —See Grimm's Teutonic Mythology, p. 405, also Anderson's Norse Mythology, p. 209. The three weird women in Shakespeare's Tragedy of Macbeth represent a later conception of the three Norns, now degraded to mere witches. Compare the Norns with the Fates of the Greek Mythology. These, also, are three in number. They sit clothed in white, and garlanded, singing of destiny. Clotho, the Past, spins; Lachesis, the Present, divides; and Atropos, the Future, stands ready with her shears to cut the thread.

¹² The Idea of Fatality. Throughout the story of the Nibelungs and Volsungs, of Sigurd and of Siegfried,—whether we follow the older versions or the more recent renderings,—there is, as it were, an ever-present but indefinable shadow of coming fate, "a low, inarticulate voice of Doom," foretelling the inevitable. This is but in consonance with the general ideas of our Northern ancestors regarding the fatality which shapes and controls every man's life. These ideas are embodied in more than one ancient legend. We find them in the old Anglo-Saxon poem of Beowulf. "To us," cries Beowulf in his last fight, "to us it shall be as our Weird betides,—that Weird that is every man's lord!" "Each man of us shall abide the end of his life-work; let him that may work, work his doomed deeds ere death comes!" Similar ideas prevailed among the Greeks. Read, for example, that passage in the Iliad describing the parting of Hector and Andromache, and notice the deeper meaning of Hector's words.

“He is a monster, and he keeps the treasure but to gloat upon its glittering richness. I will use it to make myself a name upon the earth. I will not hoard it away. But I am weak, and he is strong and terrible. Will you help me?”

“To-morrow,” said Siegfried, “be ready to go with me to the Glittering Heath. The treasure shall be thine, and also the curse.”

“And also the curse,” echoed Regin.

Adventure IV. Fafnir, the Dragon

Regin took up his harp, and his fingers smote the strings; and the music which came forth sounded like the wail of the winter's wind through the dead treetops of the forest. And the song which he sang was full of grief and wild hopeless yearning for the things which were not to be. When he had ceased, Siegfried said,—

“That was indeed a sorrowful song for one to sing who sees his hopes so nearly realized. Why are you so sad? Is it because you fear the curse which you have taken upon yourself? or is it because you know not what you will do with so vast a treasure, and its possession begins already to trouble you?”

“Oh, many are the things I will do with that treasure!” answered Regin; and his eyes flashed wildly, and his face grew red and pale. “I will turn winter into summer; I will make the desert-places glad; I will bring back the golden age; I will make myself a god: for mine shall be the wisdom and the gathered wealth of the world. And yet I fear”—

“What do you fear?”

“The ring, the ring—it is accursed! The Norns, too, have spoken, and my doom is known. I cannot escape it.”

“The Norns have woven the woof of every man's life,” answered Siegfried. “To-morrow we fare to the Glittering Heath, and the end shall be as the Norns have spoken.”

And so, early the next morning, Siegfried mounted Greyfell, and rode out towards the desert-land that lay beyond the forest and the barren mountain-range; and Regin, his eyes flashing with desire, and his feet never tiring, trudged by his side. For seven days they wended their way through the thick greenwood, sleeping at night on the bare ground beneath the trees, while the wolves and other wild beasts of the forest filled the air with their hideous howlings. But no evil creature dared come near them, for fear of the shining beams of light which fell from Greyfell's gleaming mane. On the eighth day they came to the open country and to the hills, where the land was covered with black boulders and broken by yawning chasms. And no living thing was seen there, not even an insect, nor a blade of grass; and the silence of the grave was over all. And the earth was dry and parched, and the sun hung above them like a painted shield in a blue-black sky, and there was neither shade nor water anywhere. But Siegfried rode onwards in the way which Regin pointed out, and faltered not, although he grew faint with thirst and with the overpowering heat. Towards the evening of the next day they came to a dark mountain-wall which stretched far out on either hand, and rose high above them, so steep that it seemed to close up the way, and to forbid them going farther.

“This is the wall!” cried Regin. “Beyond this mountain is the Glittering Heath, and the goal of all my hopes.”

And the little old man ran forwards, and scaled the rough side of the mountain, and reached its summit, while Siegfried and Greyfell were yet toiling among the rocks at its foot. Slowly and painfully they climbed the steep ascent, sometimes following a narrow path which wound along the edge of a precipice, sometimes leaping, from rock to rock, or over some deep gorge, and sometimes picking their way among the crags and cliffs. The sun at last went down, and one by one the stars came out; and the moon was rising, round and red, when Siegfried stood by Regin's side, and gazed from the mountain-top down upon the Glittering Heath which lay beyond. And a strange, weird scene it was that met his sight. At the foot of the mountain was a river, white and cold and still; and beyond it was a smooth and barren plain, lying silent and lonely in the pale moonlight. But in the distance was seen a circle of flickering flames, ever changing,—now growing brighter, now fading away, and now shining with a dull, cold light, like the glimmer of the glow-worm or the fox-fire. And as Siegfried gazed upon the scene, he saw the dim outline of some hideous monster moving hither and thither, and seeming all the more terrible in the uncertain light.

“It is he!” whispered Regin, and his lips were ashy pale, and his knees trembled beneath him. “It is Fafnir, and he wears the Helmet of Terror! Shall we not go back to the smithy by the great forest, and to the life of ease and safety that may be ours there? Or will you rather dare to go forwards, and meet the Terror in its abode?”

“None but cowards give up an undertaking once begun,” answered Siegfried. “Go back to Rhineland yourself, if you are afraid; but you must go alone. You have brought me thus far to meet the dragon of the heath, to win the hoard of the swarthy elves, and to rid the world of a terrible evil. Before the setting of another sun, the deed which you have urged me to do will be done.”

Then he dashed down the eastern slope of the mountain, leaving Greyfell and the trembling Regin behind him. Soon he stood on the banks of the white river, which lay between the mountain and the heath; but the stream was deep and sluggish, and the channel was very wide. He paused a moment, wondering how he should cross; and the air seemed heavy with deadly vapors, and the water was thick and cold. While he thus stood in thought, a boat came silently out of the mists, and drew near; and the boatman stood up and called to him, and said,—

“What man are you who dares come into this land of loneliness and fear?”

“I am Siegfried,” answered the lad; “and I have come to slay Fafnir, the Terror.”

“Sit in my boat,” said the boatman, “and I will carry you across the river.”

And Siegfried sat by the boatman’s side; and without the use of an oar, and without a breath of air to drive it forwards, the little vessel turned, and moved silently towards the farther shore.

“In what way will you fight the dragon?” asked the boatman.

“With my trusty sword Balmung I shall slay him,” answered Siegfried.

“But he wears the Helmet of Terror, and he breathes deathly poisons, and his eyes dart forth lightning, and no man can withstand his strength,” said the boatman.

“I will find some way by which to overcome him.”

“Then be wise, and listen to me,” said the boatman. “As you go up from the river you will find a road, worn deep and smooth, starting from the water’s edge, and winding over the moor. It is the trail of Fafnir, adown which he comes at dawn of every day to slake his thirst at the river. Do you dig a pit in this roadway,—a pit narrow and deep,—and hide yourself within it. In the morning, when Fafnir passes over it, let him feel the edge of Balmung.”

As the man ceased speaking, the boat touched the shore, and Siegfried leaped out. He looked back to thank his unknown friend, but neither boat nor boatman was to be seen. Only a thin white mist rose slowly from the cold surface of the stream, and floated upwards and away towards the mountain-tops. Then the lad remembered that the strange boatman had worn a blue hood bespangled with golden stars, and that a gray kirtle was thrown over his shoulders, and that his one eye glistened and sparkled with a light that was more than human. And he knew that he had again talked with Odin. Then, with a braver heart than before, he went forwards, along the river-bank, until he came to Fafnir’s trail,—a deep, wide furrow in the earth, beginning at the river’s bank, and winding far away over the heath, until it was lost to sight in the darkness. The bottom of the trail was soft and slimy, and its sides had been worn smooth by Fafnir’s frequent travel through it.

In this road, at a point not far from the river, Siegfried, with his trusty sword Balmung, scooped out a deep and narrow pit, as Odin had directed. And when the gray dawn began to appear in the east he hid himself within this trench, and waited for the coming of the monster. He had not long to wait; for no sooner had the sky begun to redden in the light of the coming sun than the dragon was heard bestirring himself. Siegfried peeped warily from his hiding-place, and saw him coming far down the road, hurrying with all speed, that he might quench his thirst at the sluggish river, and hasten back to his gold; and the sound which he made was like the trampling of many feet and the jingling of many chains. With bloodshot eyes, and gaping mouth, and flaming nostrils, the hideous creature came rushing onwards. His sharp, curved claws dug deep into the soft earth; and his bat-like wings, half trailing on the ground, half flapping in the air, made a sound like that which is heard when Thor

rides in his goat-drawn chariot over the dark thunder-clouds. It was a terrible moment for Siegfried, but still he was not afraid. He crouched low down in his hiding-place, and the bare blade of the trusty Balmung glittered in the morning light. On came the hastening feet and the flapping wings: the red gleam from the monster's flaming nostrils lighted up the trench where Siegfried lay. He heard a roaring and a rushing like the sound of a whirlwind in the forest; then a black, inky mass rolled above him, and all was dark. Now was Siegfried's opportunity. The bright edge of Balmung gleamed in the darkness one moment, and then it smote the heart of Fafnir as he passed. Some men say that Odin sat in the pit with Siegfried, and strengthened his arm and directed his sword, or else he could not thus have slain the Terror. But, be this as it may, the victory was soon won. The monster stopped short, while but half of his long body had glided over the pit; for sudden death had overtaken him. His horrid head fell lifeless upon the ground; his cold wings flapped once, and then lay, quivering and helpless, spread out on either side; and streams of thick black blood flowed from his heart, through the wound beneath, and filled the trench in which Siegfried was hidden, and ran like a mountain-torrent down the road towards the river. Siegfried was covered from head to foot with the slimy liquid, and, had he not quickly leaped from his hiding-place, he would have been drowned in the swift-rushing, stream.¹³

The bright sun rose in the east, and gilded the mountain-tops, and fell upon the still waters of the river, and lighted up the treeless plains around. The south wind played gently against Siegfried's cheeks and in his long hair, as he stood gazing on his fallen foe. And the sound of singing birds, and rippling waters, and gay insects,—such as had not broken the silence of the Glittering Heath for ages,—came to his ears. The Terror was dead, and Nature had awakened from her sleep of dread. And as the lad leaned upon his sword, and thought of the deed he had done, behold! the shining Greyfell, with the beaming, hopeful mane, having crossed the now bright river, stood by his side. And Regin, his face grown wondrous cold, came trudging over the meadows; and his heart was full of guile. Then the mountain vultures came wheeling downwards to look upon the dead dragon; and with them were two ravens, black as midnight. And when Siegfried saw these ravens he knew them to be Odin's birds,—Hugin, thought, and Munin, memory. And they alighted on the ground near by; and the lad listened to hear what they would say. Then Hugin flapped his wings, and said,—

“The deed is done. Why tarries the hero?”

And Munin said,—

“The world is wide. Fame waits for the hero.”

And Hugin answered,—

“What if he win the Hoard of the Elves? That is not honor. Let him seek fame by nobler deeds.”

Then Munin flew past his ear, and whispered,—

“Beware of Regin, the master! His heart is poisoned. He would be thy bane.”

And the two birds flew away to carry the news to Odin in the happy halls of Gladsheim.

When Regin drew near to look upon the dragon, Siegfried kindly accosted him: but he seemed not to hear; and a snaky glitter lurked in his eyes, and his mouth was set and dry, and he seemed as one walking in a dream.

¹³ The Dragon. The oldest form of this story is the Song of Sigurd Fafnisbane, in the Elder Edda. The English legend of St. George and the Dragon was probably derived from the same original sources. A similar myth may be found among all Aryan peoples. Sometimes it is a treasure, sometimes a beautiful maiden, that the monster guards, or attempts to destroy. Its first meaning was probably this: The maiden, or the treasure, is the earth in its beauty and fertility. “The monster is the storm-cloud. The hero who fights it is the sun, with his glorious sword, the lightning-flash. By his victory the earth is relieved from her peril. The fable has been varied to suit the atmospheric peculiarities of different climes in which the Aryans found themselves.... In Northern mythology the serpent is probably the winter cloud, which broods over and keeps from mortals the gold of the sun's light and heat, till in the spring the bright orb overcomes the powers of darkness and tempest, and scatters his gold over the face of the earth.” This myth appears in a great variety of forms among the Scandinavian and German nations. In the Eddas, Sigurd (Siegfried) is represented as roasting the heart of Fafnir, and touching it to his lips. We have ventured to present a less revolting version.—See Baring-Gould's *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*. “The slaying of the dragon Fafnir reminds us of Python, whom Apollo overcame; and, as Python guarded the Delphic Oracle, the dying Fafnir prophesies.”—Jacob Grimm.

“It is mine now,” he murmured: “it is all mine, now,—the Hoard of the swarthy elf-folk, the garnered wisdom of ages. The strength of the world is mine. I will keep, I will save, I will heap up; and none shall have part or parcel of the treasure which is mine alone.”

Then his eyes fell upon Siegfried; and his cheeks grew dark with wrath, and he cried out,—

“Why are you here in my way? I am the lord of the Glittering Heath: I am the master of the Hoard. I am the master, and you are my thrall.”

Siegfried wondered at the change which had taken place in his old master; but he only smiled at his strange words, and made no answer.

“You have slain my brother!” Regin cried; and his face grew fearfully black, and his mouth foamed with rage.

“It was my deed and yours,” calmly answered Siegfried. “I have rid the world of a Terror: I have righted a grievous wrong.”

“You have slain my brother,” said Regin; “and a murderer’s ransom you shall pay!”

“Take the Hoard for your ransom, and let us each wend his way,” said the lad.

“The Hoard is mine by rights,” answered Regin still more wrathfully. “I am the master, and you are my thrall. Why stand you in my way?”

Then, blinded with madness, he rushed at Siegfried as if to strike him down; but his foot slipped in a puddle of gore, and he pitched headlong against the sharp edge of Balmung. So sudden was this movement, and so unlooked for, that the sword was twitched out of Siegfried’s hand, and fell with a dull splash into the blood-filled pit before him; while Regin, slain by his own rashness, sank dead upon the ground. Full of horror, Siegfried turned away, and mounted Greyfell.¹⁴

“This is a place of blood,” said he, “and the way to glory leads not through it. Let the Hoard still lie on the Glittering Heath: I will go my way from hence; and the world shall know me for better deeds than this.”

And he turned his back on the fearful scene, and rode away; and so swiftly did Greyfell carry him over the desert land and the mountain waste, that, when night came, they stood on the shore of the great North Sea, and the white waves broke at their feet. And the lad sat for a long time silent upon the warm white sand of the beach, and Greyfell waited at his side. And he watched the stars as they came out one by one, and the moon, as it rose round and pale, and moved like a queen across the sky. And the night wore away, and the stars grew pale, and the moon sank to rest in the wilderness of waters. And at day-dawn Siegfried looked towards the west, and midway between sky and sea he thought he saw dark mountain-tops hanging above a land of mists that seemed to float upon the edge of the sea.

While he looked, a white ship, with sails all set, came speeding over the waters towards him. It came nearer and nearer, and the sailors rested upon their oars as it glided into the quiet harbor. A minstrel, with long white beard floating in the wind, sat at the prow; and the sweet music from his harp was wafted like incense to the shore. The vessel touched the sands: its white sails were reefed as if by magic, and the crew leaped out upon the beach.

“Hail, Siegfried the Golden!” cried the harper. “Whither do you fare this summer day?”

“I have come from a land of horror and dread,” answered the lad; “and I would fain fare to a brighter.”

“Then go with me to awaken the earth from its slumber, and to robe the fields in their garbs of beauty,” said the harper. And he touched the strings of his harp, and strains of the softest music arose in the still morning air. And Siegfried stood entranced, for never before had he heard such music.

“Tell me who you are!” he cried, when the sounds died away. “Tell me who you are, and I will go to the ends of the earth with you.”

¹⁴ In order to harmonize subsequent passages in the story as related in different versions, we here represent Siegfried as turning his back upon the Glittering Heath, and leaving the Hoard to some other hero or discoverer. In the Younger Edda, Siegfried (Sigurd) rides onward until he comes to Fafnir’s bed, from which “he took out all the gold, packed it in two bags, and laid it on Grane’s (Greyfell’s) back, then got on himself and rode away.”

“I am Bragi,” answered the harper, smiling. And Siegfried noticed then that the ship was laden with flowers of every hue, and that thousands of singing birds circled around and above it, filling the air with the sound of their glad twitterings.

Now, Bragi was the sweetest musician in all the world. It was said by some that his home was with the song-birds, and that he had learned his skill from them. But this was only part of the truth: for wherever there was loveliness or beauty, or things noble and pure, there was Bragi; and his wondrous power in music and song was but the outward sign of a blameless soul. When he touched the strings of his golden harp, all Nature was charmed with the sweet harmony: the savage beasts of the wood crept near to listen; the birds paused in their flight; the waves of the sea were becalmed, and the winds were hushed; the leaping waterfall was still, and the rushing torrent tarried in its bed; the elves forgot their hidden treasures, and joined in silent dance around him; and the strom-karls and the musicians of the wood vainly tried to imitate him. And he was as fair of speech as he was skilful in song. His words were so persuasive that he had been known to call the fishes from the sea, to move great lifeless rocks, and, what is harder, the hearts of kings. He understood the voice of the birds, and the whispering of the breeze, the murmur of the waves, and the roar of the waterfalls. He knew the length and breadth of the earth, and the secrets of the sea, and the language of the stars. And every day he talked with Odin the All-Father, and with the wise and good in the sunlit halls of Gladsheim. And once every year he went to the North-lands, and woke the earth from its long winter’s sleep, and scattered music and smiles and beauty everywhere.¹⁵

Right gladly did Siegfried agree to sail with Bragi over the sea; for he wot that the bright Asa-god would be a very different guide from the cunning, evil-eyed Regin. So he went on board with Bragi, and the gleaming Greyfell followed them, and the sailors sat at their oars. And Bragi stood in the prow, and touched the strings of his harp. And, as the music arose, the white sails leaped up the masts, and a warm south breeze began to blow; and the little vessel, wafted by sweet sounds and the incense of spring, sped gladly away over the sea.

¹⁵ Of Siegfried, but is here introduced in order to acquaint you with some of the older myths of our ancestors. Bragi was the impersonation of music and eloquence, and here represents the music of Nature,—the glad songs and sounds of the spring-time. “Above any other god,” says Grimm, “one would like to see a more general veneration of Bragi revived, in whom was vested the gift of poetry and eloquence.... He appears to have stood in pretty close relation to AEGir.”

Adventure V. In A Egir's Kingdom

The vessel in which Siegfried sailed was soon far out at sea; for the balmy south wind, and the songs of the birds, and the music from Bragi's harp, all urged it cheerily on. And Siegfried sat at the helm, and guided it in its course. By and by they lost all sight of land, and the sailors wist not where they were; but they knew that Bragi, the Wise, would bring them safely into some haven whenever it should so please him, and they felt no fear. And the fishes leaped up out of the water as the white ship sped by on woven wings; and the monsters of the deep paused, and listened to the sweet music which floated down from above. After a time the vessel began to meet great ice-mountains in the sea,—mountains which the Reifriesen, and old Hoder, the King of the winter months, had sent drifting down from the frozen land of the north. But these melted at the sound of Bragi's music and at the sight of Siegfried's radiant armor. And the cold breath of the Frost-giants, which had driven them in their course, turned, and became the ally of the south wind.

At length they came in sight of a dark shore, which stretched on either hand, north and south, as far as the eye could reach; and as they drew nearer they saw a line of huge mountains, rising, as it were, out of the water, and stretching their gray heads far above the clouds. And the overhanging cliffs seemed to look down, half in anger, half in pity, upon the little white winged vessel which had dared thus to sail through these unknown waters. But the surface of the sea was smooth as glass; and the gentle breeze drove the ship slowly forwards through the calm water, and along the rock-bound coast, and within the dark shadows of the mountain-peaks. Long ago the Frost-giants had piled great heaps of snow upon these peaks, and built huge fortresses of ice between, and sought, indeed, to clasp in their cold embrace the whole of the Norwegian land. But the breezes of the South-land that came with Bragi's ship now played among the rocky steeps, and swept over the frozen slopes above, and melted the snow and ice; and thousands of rivulets of half-frozen water ran down the mountain-sides, and tumbled into rocky gorges, or plunged into the sea. And the grass began to grow on the sunny slopes, and the flowers peeped up through the half-melted snow, and the music of spring was heard on every side. Now and then the little vessel passed by deep, dark inlets enclosed between high mountain-walls, and reaching many leagues far into land. But the sailors steered clear of these shadowy fjords; for they said that Ran, the dread Ocean-queen, lived there, and spread her nets in the deep green waters to entangle unwary seafaring men. And the sound of Bragi's harp awakened all sleeping things; and it was carried from rock to rock, and from mountain-height to valley, and was borne on the breeze far up the fjords, and all over the land.

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