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The Edda

II

The Heroic Mythology of the North

By

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Author's Note

The present study forms a sequel to No. 12 (*The Edda: Divine Mythology of the North*), to which the reader is referred for introductory matter and for the general Bibliography. Additional bibliographical references are given, as the need occurs, in the notes to the present number.

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July 1902.

The Heroic Mythology of the North

Sigemund the Waelsing and Fitela, Aetla, Eormanric the Goth and Gifica of Burgundy, Ongendtheow and Theodric, Heorrenda and the Heodenings, and Weland the Smith: all these heroes of Germanic legend were known to the writers of our earliest English literature. But in most cases the only evidence of this knowledge is a word, a name, here and there, with no hint of the story attached. For circumstances directed the poetical gifts of the Saxons in England towards legends of the saints and Biblical paraphrase, away from the native heroes of the race; while later events completed the exclusion of Germanic legend from our literature, by substituting French and Celtic romance. Nevertheless, these few brief references in *Beowulf* and in the small group of heathen English relics give us the right to a peculiar interest in the hero-poems of the Edda. In studying these heroic poems, therefore, we are confronted by problems entirely different in character from those which have to be considered in connexion with the mythical texts. Those are in the main the product of one, the Northern, branch of the Germanic race, as we have seen (No. 12 of this series), and the chief question to be determined is whether they represent, however altered in form, a mythology common to all the Germans, and as such necessarily early; or whether they are in substance, as well as in form, a specific creation of the

Scandinavians, and therefore late and secondary. The heroic poems of the Edda, on the contrary, with the exception of the Helgi cycle, have very close analogues in the literatures of the other great branches of the Germanic race, and these we are able to compare with the Northern versions.

The Edda contains poems belonging to the following heroic cycles:

(*a*) **Weland the Smith**.—Anglo-Saxon literature has several references to this cycle, which must have been a very popular one; and there is also a late Continental German version preserved in an Icelandic translation. But the poem in the Edda is the oldest connected form of the story.

(*b*) **Sigurd and the Nibelungs**.—Again the oldest reference is in Anglo-Saxon. There are two well-known Continental German versions in the *Nibelungen Lied* and the late Icelandic *Thidreks Saga*, but the Edda, on the whole, has preserved an earlier form of the legend. With it is loosely connected

(*c*) **The Ermanric Cycle**.—The oldest references to this are in Latin and Anglo-Saxon. The Continental German version in the *Thidreks Saga* is late, and, like that in the Edda, contaminated with the Sigurd story, with which it had originally nothing to do.

(*d*) **Helgi**.—This cycle, at least in its present form, is peculiar to the Scandinavian North.

All the above-named poems are contained in Codex Regius of the Elder Edda. From other sources we may add other poems which are Eddic, not Skaldic, in style, in which other heroic cycles are represented. The great majority of the poems deal with the favourite story of the Volsungs, which threatens to swamp all the rest; for one hero after another, Burgundian, Hun, Goth, was absorbed into it. The poems in this part of the MS. differ far more widely in date and style than do the mythological ones; many of the Volsung-lays are comparatively late, and lack the fine simplicity which characterises the older popular poetry.

Völund.—The lay of Völund, the wonderful smith, the Weland of the Old English poems and the only Germanic hero who survived for any considerable time in English popular tradition, stands alone in its cycle, and is the first heroic poem in the MS. It is in a very fragmentary state, some of the deficiencies being supplied by short pieces of prose. There are two motives in the story: the Swan-maids, and the Vengeance of the Captive Smith. Three brothers, Slagfinn, Egil and Völund, sons of the Finnish King, while out hunting built themselves a house by the lake in Wolfsdale. There, early one morning, they saw three Valkyries spinning, their swancoats lying beside them. The brothers took them home; but after seven years the swan-maidens, wearied of their life, flew away to battle, and did not return.

“Seven years they stayed there, but in the eighth longing seized them, and in the ninth need parted them.” Egil and Slagfinn went to seek their wives, but Völund stayed where he was and worked at his forge. There Nithud, King of Sweden, took him captive:

> “Men went by night in studded mailcoats; their shields shone by the waning moon. They dismounted from the saddle at the hall-gable, and went in along the hall. They saw rings strung on bast which the hero owned, seven hundred in all; they took them off and put, them on again, all but one. The keen-eyed archer Völund came in from hunting, from a far road.... He sat on a bear-skin and counted his rings, and the prince of the elves missed one; he thought Hlodve's daughter, the fairy-maid, had come back. He sat so long that he fell asleep, and awoke powerless: heavy bonds were on his hands, and fetters clasped on his feet.”

They took him away and imprisoned him, ham-strung, on an island to forge treasures for his captors. Then Völund planned vengeance:

> ”'I see on Nithud's girdle the sword which I knew keenest and best, and which I forged with all my skill. The glittering blade is taken from me for ever; I shall not see it borne to Völund's smithy. Now Bödvild wears my bride's red ring; I expect no atonement.' He sat and slept not, but struck with his hammer.”

Nithud's children came to see him in his smithy: the two boys he slew, and made drinking-cups for Nithud from their skulls; and the daughter Bödvild he beguiled, and having made himself wings he rose into the air and left her weeping for her lover and Nithud mourning his sons.

In the Old English poems allusion is made only to the second part of the story; there is no reference to the legend of the enchanted brides, which is indeed distinct in origin, being identical with the common tale of the fairy wife who is obliged to return to animal shape through some breach of agreement by her mortal husband. This incident of the compact (*i.e.*, to hide the swan-coat, to refrain from asking the wife's name, or whatever it may have been) has been lost in the Völund tale. The Continental version is told in the late Icelandic *Thidreks Saga*, where it is brought into connexion with the Volsung story; in this the story of the second brother, Egil the archer, is also given, and its antiquity is supported by the pictures on the Anglo-Saxon carved whale-bone box known as the Franks Casket, dated by Professor Napier at about 700 A.D. The adventures of the third brother, Slagfinn, have not survived. The Anglo-Saxon gives Völund and Bödvild a son, Widia or Wudga, the Wittich who appears as a follower of Dietrich's in the Continental German sources.

The Volsungs.—No story better illustrates the growth of heroic legend than the Volsung cycle. It is composite, four or five mythical motives combining to form the nucleus; and as it took possession more and more strongly of the imagination of the early Germans, and still more of the Scandinavians, other heroic cycles were brought into dependence on it. None of the Eddic poems on the subject are quite equal in poetic value to the Helgi lays; many are

fragmentary, several late, and only one attempts a review of the whole story. The outline is as follows: Sigurd the Volsung, son of Sigmund and brother of Sinfjötli, slays the dragon who guards the Nibelungs' hoard on the Glittering Heath, and thus inherits the curse which accompanies the treasure; he finds and wakens Brynhild the Valkyrie, lying in an enchanted sleep guarded by a ring of fire, loves her and plights troth with her; Grimhild, wife of the Burgundian Giuki, by enchantment causes him to forget the Valkyrie, to love her own daughter Gudrun, and, since he alone can cross the fire, to win Brynhild for her son Gunnar. After the marriage, Brynhild discovers the trick, and incites her husband and his brothers to kill Sigurd.

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The series begins with a prose piece on the Death of Sinfjötli, which says that after Sinfjötli, son of Sigmund, Volsung's son (which should be Valsi's son, Volsung being a tribal, not a personal, name), had been poisoned by his stepmother Borghild, Sigmund married Hjördis, Eylimi's daughter, had a son Sigurd, and fell in battle against the race of Hunding. Sigmund, as in all other Norse sources, is said to be king in Frankland, which, like the Niderlant of the *Nibelungen Lied*, means the low lands on the Rhine. The scene of the story is always near that river: Sigurd was slain by the Rhine, and the treasure of the Rhine is quoted as proverbial in the Völund lay.

Gripisspa (the Prophecy of Gripi), which follows, is appropriately placed first of the Volsung poems, since it gives a summary of the whole story. Sigurd rides to see his mother's brother, Gripi, the wisest of men, to ask about his destiny, and the soothsayer prophesies his adventures and early death. This poem makes clear some original features of the legend which are obscured elsewhere, especially in the Gudrun set; Grimhild's treachery, and Sigurd's unintentional breach of faith to Brynhild. In the speeches of both Gripi and Sigurd, the poet shows clearly that Brynhild had the first right to Sigurd's faith, while the seer repeatedly protests his innocence in breaking it: “Thou shalt never be blamed though thou didst betray the royal maid.... No better man shall come on earth beneath the sun than thou, Sigurd.” On the other hand, the poet gives no indication that Brynhild and the sleeping Valkyrie are the same, which is a sign of confusion. Like all poems in this form, *Gripisspa* is a late composition embodying earlier tradition.

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The other poems are mostly episodical, though arranged so as to form a continued narrative. *Gripisspa* is followed by a compilation from two or more poems in different metres, generally divided into three parts in the editions: *Reginsmal* gives the early history of the treasure and the dragon, and Sigurd's battle with Hunding's sons; *Fafnismal*, the slaying of the dragon and the advice of the talking birds; *Sigrdrifumal*, the awakening of the Valkyrie. Then follows a fragment on the death of Sigurd. All the rest, except the poem generally called the *Third*, or *Short, Sigurd Lay* (which tells of the marriage with Gudrun and Sigurd's wooing of Brynhild for Gunnar) continue the story after Sigurd's death, taking up the death of Brynhild, Gudrun's mourning, and the fates of the other heroes who became connected with the legend of the treasure.

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In addition to the poems in the Elder Edda, an account of the story is given by Snorri in *Skaldskaparmal*, but it is founded almost entirely on the surviving lays. *Völsunga Saga* is also a paraphrase, but more valuable, since parts of it are founded on lost poems, and it therefore, to some extent, represents independent tradition. It was, unfortunately from a literary point of view, compiled after the great saga-time was over, in the decadent fourteenth century, when material of all kinds, classical, biblical, romantic, mythological, was hastily cast into saga-form. It is not, like the *Nibelungen Lied*, a work of art, but it has what in this case is perhaps of greater importance, the one great virtue of fidelity. The compiler did not, like the author of the German masterpiece, boldly recast his material in the spirit of his own time; he clung closely to his originals, only trying with hesitating hand to copy the favourite literary form of the Icelander. As a saga, therefore, *Völsunga* is far behind not only such great works as *Njala*, but also many of the smaller sagas. It lacks form, and is marred by inconsistencies; it is often careless in grammar and diction; it is full of traces of the decadent romantic age. Sigurd, in the true spirit of romance, is endowed with magic weapons and supernatural powers, which are no improvement on the heroic tradition, “Courage is better than a good sword.” At every turn, Odin is at hand to help him, which tends to efface the older and truer picture of the hero with all the fates against him; such heroes, found again and again in the historic sagas, more truly represent the heathen heroic age and that belief in the selfishness and caprice of the Gods on which the whole idea of sacrifice rests. There is also the inevitable deterioration in the character of Brynhild, without the compensating elevation in that of her rival by which the *Nibelungen Lied* places Chriemhild on a height as lofty and unapproachable as that occupied by the Norse Valkyrie; the Brynhild of *Völsunga Saga* is something of a virago, the Gudrun is jealous and shrewish. But for actual material, the compiler is absolutely to be trusted; and *Völsunga Saga* is therefore, in spite of artistic faults, a priceless treasure-house for the real features of the legend.

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There are two main elements in the Volsung story: the slaying of the dragon, and the awakening and desertion of Brynhild. The latter is brought into close connexion with the former, which becomes the real centre of the action. In the Anglo-Saxon reference, the fragment in *Beowulf*, the second episode does not appear.

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In this, the oldest version of the story, which, except for a vague reference to early feats by Sigmund and Sinfjötli, consists solely of the dragon adventure, the hero is not Sigurd, but Sigemund the Waelsing. All that it tells is that Sigemund, Fitela (Sinfjötli) not being with him, killed the dragon, the guardian of the hoard, and loaded a ship with the treasure. The few preceding lines only mention the war which Sigmund and Sinfjötli waged on their foes. They are there uncle and nephew, and there is no suggestion of the closer relationship assigned to them by *Völsunga Saga*, which tells their story in full.

Sigmund, one of the ten sons of Volsung (who is himself of miraculous birth) and the Wishmaiden Hlod, is one of the chosen heroes of Odin. His twin-sister Signy is married against her will to Siggeir, an hereditary enemy, and at the wedding-feast Odin enters and thrusts a sword up to the hilt into the tree growing in the middle of the hall. All try to draw it, but only the chosen Sigmund succeeds. Siggeir, on returning to his own home with his unwilling bride, invites

her father and brothers to a feast. Though suspecting treachery, they come, and are killed one after another, except Sigmund who is secretly saved by his sister and hidden in the wood. She meditates revenge, and as her two sons grow up to the age of ten, she tests their courage, and finding it wanting makes Sigmund kill both: the expected hero must be a Volsung through both parents. She therefore visits Sigmund in disguise, and her third son, Sinfjötli, is the child of the Volsung pair. At ten years old, she sends him to live in the wood with Sigmund, who only knows him as Signy's son. For years they live as wer-wolves in the wood, till the time comes for vengeance. They set fire to Siggeir's hall; and Signy, after revealing Sinfjötli's real parentage, goes back into the fire and dies there, her vengeance achieved: Page 14

> “I killed my children, because I thought them too weak to avenge our father; Sinfjötli has a warrior's might because he is both son's son and daughter's son to King Volsung. I have laboured to this end, that King Siggeir should meet his death; I have so toiled for the achieving of revenge that I am now on no condition fit for life. As I lived by force with King Siggeir, of free will shall I die with him.”

Though no poem survives on this subject, the story is certainly primitive; its savage character vouches for its antiquity. *Völsunga* then reproduces the substance of the prose *Death of Sinfjötli* mentioned above, the object of which, as a part of the cycle, seems to be to remove Sinfjötli and leave the field clear for Sigurd. It preserves a touch which may be original in Sinfjötli's burial, which resembles that of Scyld in *Beowulf*: his father lays him in a boat steered by an old man, which immediately disappears. Page 15

Sigmund and Sinfjötli are always close comrades, “need-companions” as the Anglo-Saxon calls them. They are indivisible and form one story. Sigurd, on the other hand, is only born after his father Sigmund's death. *Völsunga* says that Sigmund fell in battle against Hunding, through the interference of Odin, who, justifying Loki's taunt that he “knew not how to give the victory fairly,” shattered with his spear the sword he had given to the Volsung. For this again we have to depend entirely on the prose, except for one line in *Hyndluljod*: “The Father of Hosts gives gold to his followers;... he gave Sigmund a sword.” And from the poems too, Sigurd's fatherless childhood is only to be inferred from an isolated reference, where giving himself a false name he says to Fafni: “I came a motherless child; I have no father like the sons of men.” Sigmund, dying, left the fragments of the sword to be given to his unborn son, and Sigurd's fosterfather Regin forged them anew for the future dragon-slayer. But Sigurd's first deed was to avenge on Hunding's race the death of his father and his mother's father. *Völsunga* tells this story first of Helgi and Sinfjötli, then of Sigurd, to whom the poems also attribute the deed. It is followed by the dragon-slaying.

Up to this point, the story of Sigurd consists roughly of the same features which mark that of Sigmund and Sinfjötli. Both are probably, like Helgi, versions of a race-hero myth. In each case there is the usual irregular birth, in different forms, both familiar; a third type, the miraculous or supernatural birth, is attributed by *Völsunga* to Sigmund's father Volsung. Each story again includes a deed of vengeance, and a dragon and treasure. The sword which the hero alone could draw, and the wer-wolf, appear only in the Sigmund and Sinfjötli version. Among those Germanic races which brought the legend to full perfection, Sigurd's version soon became the sole one, and Sigmund and Sinfjötli practically drop out. Page 16

The Dragon legend of the Edda is much fuller and more elaborate than that of any other mythology. As a rule tradition is satisfied with the existence of the monster “old and proud of his treasure,” but here we are told its full previous history, certain features of which (such as the shape-shifting) are signs of antiquity, whether it was originally connected with the Volsungs or not.

As usual, *Völsunga* gives the fullest account, in the form of a story told by Regin to his foster-son Sigurd, to incite him to slay the dragon. Regin was one of three brothers, the sons of Hreidmar; one of the three, Otr, while in the water in otter's shape, was seen by three of the Aesir, Odin, Loki and Hoeni, and killed by Loki. Hreidmar demanded as wergild enough gold to fill the otter's skin, and Loki obtained it by catching the dwarf Andvari, who lived in a waterfall in the form of a fish, and allowing him to ransom his head by giving up his wealth. One ring the dwarf tried to keep back, but in vain; and thereupon he laid a curse upon it: that the ring with the rest of the gold should be the death of whoever should get possession of it. In giving the gold to Hreidmar, Odin also tried to keep back the ring, but had to give it up to cover the last hair. Then Fafni, one of the two remaining sons, killed his father, first victim of the curse, for the sake of the gold. He carried it away and lay guarding it in the shape of a snake. But Regin the smith did not give up his hopes of possessing the hoard: he adopted as his foster-son Sigurd the Volsung, thus getting into his power the hero fated to slay the dragon. Page 17

The curse thus becomes the centre of the action, and the link between the two parts of the story, since it directly accounts for Sigurd's unconscious treachery and his separation from Brynhild, and absolves the hero from blame by making him a victim of fate. It destroys in turn Hreidmar, the Dragon, his brother Regin, the dragon-slayer himself, Brynhild (to whom he gave the ring), and the Giukings, who claimed inheritance after Sigurd's death. Later writers carried its effects still further.

Page 18 This narrative is also told in the pieces of prose interspersed through *Reginsmal*. The verse consists only of scraps of dialogue. The first of these comprises question and answer between Loki and the dwarf Andvari in the form of the old riddle-poems, and seems to result from the confusion of two ideas: the question-and-answer wager, and the captive's ransom by treasure. Then follows the curse, in less general terms than in the prose: “My gold shall be the death of two brothers, and cause strife among eight kings; no one shall rejoice in the possession of my treasure.” Next comes a short dialogue between Loki and Hreidmar, in which the former warns his host of the risk he runs in taking the hoard. In the next fragment Hreidmar calls on his daughters to avenge him; Lyngheid replies that they cannot do so on their own brother, and her father bids her bear a daughter whose son may avenge him. This has given rise to a suggestion that

Hjördis, Sigurd's mother, was daughter to Lyngheid, but if that is intended, it may only be due to the Norse passion for genealogy. The next fragment brings Regin and Sigurd together, and the smith takes the young Volsung for his foster-son. A speech of Sigurd's follows, in which he refuses to seek the treasure till he has avenged his father on Hunding's sons. The rest of the poem is concerned with the battle with Hunding's race, and Sigurd's meeting with Odin by the way.

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The fight with Fafni is not described in verse, very little of this poetry being in narrative form; but *Fafnismal* gives a dialogue between the wounded dragon and his slayer. Fafni warns the Volsung against the hoard: “The ringing gold and the glowing treasure, the rings shall be thy death.” Sigurd disregards the warning with the maxim “Every man must die some time,” and asks questions of the dragon in the manner of *Vafthrudnismal*. Fafni, after repeating his warning, speaks of his brother's intended treachery: “Regin betrayed me, he will betray thee; he will be the death of both of us,” and dies. Regin returning bids Sigurd roast Fafni's heart, while he sleeps. A prose-piece tells that Sigurd burnt his fingers by touching the heart, put them in his mouth, and understood the speech of birds. The advice given him by the birds is taken from two different poems, and partly repeats itself; the substance is a warning to Sigurd against the treachery plotted by Regin, and a counsel to prevent it by killing him, and so become sole owner of the hoard. Sigurd takes advantage of the warning: “Fate shall not be so strong that Regin shall give my death-sentence: both brothers shall go quickly hence to Hel.” Regin's enjoyment of the hoard is therefore short. The second half of the story begins when one of the birds, after a reference to Gudrun, guides Sigurd to the sleeping Valkyrie:

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> “Bind up the red rings, Sigurd; it is not kingly to fear. I know a maid, fairest of all, decked with gold, if thou couldst get her. Green roads lead to Giuki's, fate guides the wanderer forward. There a mighty king has a daughter; Sigurd will buy her with a dowry. There is a hall high on Hindarfell; all without it is swept with fire.... I know a battle-maid who sleeps on the fell, and the flame plays over her; Odin touched the maid with a thorn, because she laid low others than those he wished to fall. Thou shalt see, boy, the helmed maid who rode Vingskorni from the fight; Sigrdrifa's sleep cannot be broken, son of heroes, by the Norns' decrees.”

Sigrdrifa (dispenser of victory) is, of course, Brynhild; the name may have been originally an epithet of the Valkyrie, and it was probably such passages as this that misled the author of *Gripisspa* into differentiating the Valkyrie and Brynhild. The last lines have been differently interpreted as a warning to Sigurd not to seek Brynhild and an attempt to incite him to do so by emphasising the difficulty of the deed; they may merely mean that her sleep cannot be broken except by one, namely, the one who knows no fear. Brynhild's supernatural origin is clearly shown here, and also in the prose in *Sigrdrifumal. Völsunga Saga*, though it paraphrases in full the passages relating to the magic sleep, removes much of the mystery surrounding her by providing her with a genealogy and family connections; while the *Nibelungen Lied* goes further still in the same direction by leaving out the magic sleep. The change is a natural result of Christian ideas, to which Odin's Wishmaidens would become incomprehensible.

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Thus far the story is that of the release of the enchanted princess, popularly most familiar in the nursery tale of the Sleeping Beauty. After her broken questions to her deliverer, “What cut my mail? How have I broken from sleep? Who has flung from me the dark spells?” and his answer, “Sigmund's son and Sigurd's sword,” she bursts into the famous “Greeting to the World”:

> “Long have I slept, long was I sunk in sleep, long are men's misfortunes. It was Odin's doing that I could not break the runes of sleep. Hail, day! hail, sons of day! hail, night! Look on us two with gracious eyes, and give victory to us who sit here. Hail, Aesir! hail, Asynjor! hail, Earth, mother of all! give eloquence and wisdom to us the wonderful pair, and hands of healing while we live.”

She then becomes Sigurd's guardian and protectress and the source of his wisdom, as she speaks the runes and counsels which are to help him in all difficulties; and from this point corresponds to the maiden who is the hero's benefactress, but whom he deserts through sorcery: the “Mastermaid” of the fairy-tales, the Medeia of Greek myth. Gudrun is always an innocent instrument in drawing Sigurd away from his real bride, the actual agent being her witch-mother Grimhild. This part of the story is summarised in *Gripisspa*, except that the writer seems unaware that the Wishmaiden who teaches Sigurd “every mystery that men would know” and the princess he betrays are the same:

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> “A king's daughter bright in mail sleeps on the fell; thou shalt hew with thy sharp sword, and cut the mail with Fafni's slayer.... She will teach thee every mystery that men would know, and to speak in every man's tongue.... Thou shalt visit Heimi's dwelling and be the great king's joyous guest.... There is a maid fair to see at Heimi's; men call her Brynhild, Budli's daughter, but the great king Heimi fosters the proud maid.... Heimi's fair foster-daughter will rob thee of all joy; thou shalt sleep no sleep, and judge no cause, and care for no man unless thou see the maiden. ... Ye shall swear all binding oaths but keep few when thou hast been one night Giuki's guest, thou shalt not remember Heimi's brave foster-daughter.... Thou shalt suffer treachery from another and pay the price of Grimhild's plots. The bright-haired lady will offer thee her daughter.”

Völsunga gives additional details: Brynhild knows her deliverer to be Sigurd Sigmundsson and the slayer of Fafni, and they swear oaths to each other. The description of their second meeting, when he finds her among her maidens, and she prophesies that he will marry Giuki's daughter, and also the meeting between her and Gudrun before the latter's marriage, represent a later development of the story, inconsistent with the older conception of the Shield-maiden. Sigurd gives Brynhild the ring Andvaranaut, which belonged to the hoard, as a pledge, and takes it from her again later when he woos her in Gunnar's form. It is the sight of the ring afterwards on Gudrun's hand which reveals to her the deception; but the episode has also a deeper significance, since it brings her into connection with the central action by passing the curse on to her. According to Snorri's paraphrase, Sigurd gives the ring to Brynhild when he goes to her in Gunnar's form.

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For the rest of the story we must depend chiefly on *Gripisspa* and *Völsunga*. The latter tells that Grimhild, the mother of

the Giukings, gave Sigurd a magic drink by which he forgot Brynhild and fell in love with Giuki's daughter. Gudrun's brothers swore oaths of friendship with him, and he agreed to ride through the waverlowe, or ring of fire, disguised and win Brynhild for the eldest brother Gunnar. After the two bridals, he remembered his first passing through the flame, and his love for Brynhild returned. The Shield-maiden too remembered, but thinking that Gunnar had fairly won her, accepted her fate until Gudrun in spite and jealousy revealed the trick that had been played on her. Of the treachery of the Giukings Brynhild takes little heed; but death alone can pay for Sigurd's unconscious betrayal. She tells Gunnar that Sigurd has broken faith with him, and the Giukings with some reluctance murder their sister's husband. Brynhild springs on to the funeral pyre, and dies with Sigurd. Page 24 *Völsunga* makes the murder take place in Sigurd's chamber, and one poem, the *Short Sigurd Lay*, agrees. The fragment which follows *Sigrdrifumal*, on the other hand, places the scene in the open air:

> “Sigurd was slain south of the Rhine; a raven on a tree called aloud: 'On you will Atli redden the sword; your broken oaths shall destroy you.' Gudrun Giuki's daughter stood without, and these were the first words she spoke: 'Where is now Sigurd, the lord of men, that my kinsmen ride first?' Högni alone made answer: 'We have hewn Sigurd asunder with the sword; the grey horse still stoops over his dead lord.'”

This agrees with the *Old Gudrun Lay* and with the Continental German version, as a prose epilogue points out.

Of the Giuking brothers, Gunnar appears only in a contemptible light: he gains his bride by treachery, and keeps his oath to Sigurd by a quibble. Högni, who has little but his name in common with Hagen von Tronje of the *Nibelungen Lied*, advises Gunnar against breaking his oath, but it is he who taunts Gudrun afterwards. The later poems of the cycle try to make heroes out of both; the same discrepancy exists between the first and second halves of the *Nibelungen Lied*. Their half-brother, Gutthorm, plays no part in the story except as the actual murderer of Sigurd.

The chief effect of the influences of Christianity and Romance on the legend is a loss of sympathy with the heroic type of Page 25 Brynhild, and an attempt to give more dignity to the figure of Gudrun. The Shield-maiden of divine origin and unearthly wisdom, with her unrelenting vengeance on her beloved, and her contempt for her slighter rival (“Fitter would it be for Gudrun to die with Sigurd, if she had a soul like mine”), is a figure out of harmony with the new religion, and beyond the comprehension of a time coloured by romance; while both the sentiment and the morality of the age would be on the side of Gudrun as the formally wedded wife. So the poem known as the *Short Sigurd Lay*, which has many marks of lateness, such as the elaborate description of the funeral pyre and the exaggeration of the signs of mourning, says nothing of Sigurd's love for Brynhild, nor do his last words to Gudrun give any hint of it. The *Nibelungen Lied* suppresses Sigurd's love to Brynhild, and the magic drink, and altogether lowers Brynhild, but elevates Gudrun (under her mother's name); her slow but terrible vengeance, and absolute forgetfulness of the ties of blood in pursuit of it, are equal to anything in the original version. The later heroic poems of the Edda make a less successful attempt to create sympathy for Gudrun; some, such as the so-called *First Gudrun Lay*, which is entirely romantic in character, try to make her pathetic by the abundance of tears she sheds; others, to make her heroic, though the result is only a spurious savagery. Page 26

The remaining poems of the cycle, all late in style and tone, deal with the fates of Gudrun and her brothers, and owe their existence to a narrator's unwillingness to let a favourite story end. The curse makes continuation easy, since the Giukings inherit it with the hoard. Gudrun was married at the wish of her kinsmen to Atli the Hun, said to be Brynhild's brother. He invited Gunnar and Högni to his court and killed them for the sake of the treasure, in vengeance for which Gudrun killed her own two sons and Atli; this latter incident being possibly an imitation of Signy. If we may believe that Gudrun, like Chriemhild in the *Nibelungen Lied*, married Atli in order to gain vengeance for Sigurd, we might suppose that there was confusion here: that she herself incited the murder of her brothers, and killed Atli when he had served his purpose. This would strengthen the part of Gudrun, who as the tale stands is rather a futile character. But in all probability the episode is due to a confusion of Signy's story with that of the German Chriemhild and Etzel.

One point has still to be considered: the place of the Nibelungs in the story. In the Edda, the Hniflungs are always the Giukings, Gunnar and Högni, and Snorri gives it as the name of an heroic family. The title of the first *aventiure* of the *Nibelungen Lied* also apparently uses the word of the Burgundians. Page 27 Yet the treasure is always the Nibelungs' hoard, which clearly means that they were the original owners; and when Hagen von Tronje tells the story later in the poem, he speaks of the Nibelungs correctly as the dwarfs from whom Siegfried won it. On this point, therefore, the German preserves the older tradition: the Norse Andvari, the river-dwarf, is the German Alberich the Nibelung. In the *Nibelungen Lied* the winning of the treasure forms no part of the action: it is merely narrated by Hagen. This accounts for the shortening of the episode and the omission of the intermediate steps: the robbing of the dwarf, the curse, and the dragon-slaying. * * * * *

Ermanric.—The two poems of *Gudrun's Lament* and *Hamthismal*, in the Edda attached to the Volsung cycle, belong correctly to that of the Gothic hero Ermanric. According to these poems, Gudrun, Giuki's daughter, married a third time, and had three sons, Sörli, Hamthi and Erp. She married Svanhild, her own and Sigurd's daughter, to Jörmunrek, king of the Goths; but Svanhild was slandered, and her husband had her trodden to death by horses' hoofs. The description of Svanhild is a good example of the style of the romantic poems:

> “The bondmaids sat round Svanhild, dearest of my children; Svanhild was like a glorious sunbeam in my hall. I dowered her with gold and goodly fabrics when I married her into Gothland. Page 28 That was the hardest of my griefs, when they trod Svanhild's fair hair into the dust beneath the horses' hoofs.”

Gudrun sent her three sons to avenge their sister; two of them slew Erp by the way, and were killed themselves in their

attack on Jörmunrek for want of his help. So died, as Snorri says, all who were of Giuking descent; and only Aslaug, daughter of Sigurd and Brynhild, survived. *Heimskringla*, a thirteenth century history of the royal races of Scandinavia, traces the descent of the Norse kings from her.

This Ermanric story, which belongs to legendary history rather than myth, is in reality quite independent of the Volsung or Nibelung cycle. The connection is loose and inartistic, the legend being probably linked to Gudrun's name because she had become a favourite character and Icelandic narrators were unwilling to let her die. The historic Ermanric was conquered by the Huns in 374; the sixth century historian Jornandes is the earliest authority for the tradition that he was murdered by Sarus and Ammius in revenge for their sister's death by wild horses. Saxo also tells the story, with greater similarity of names. It seems hardly necessary to assume, with many scholars, the existence of two heroes of the name Ermanric, an historic and a mythical one. A simpler explanation is that a legendary story became connected with the name of a real personage. The slaying of Erp introduces a common folk-tale incident, familiar in stories like the *Golden Bird*, told by both Asbjörnsen and Grimm. * * * * *

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Helgi.—The Helgi-lays, three in number, are the best of the heroic poems. Nominally they tell two stories, Helgi Hjörvardsson being sandwiched between the two poems of Helgi Hundingsbane; but essentially the stories are the same.

In *Helyi Hjörvardsson*, Helgi, son of Hjörvard and Sigrlinn, was dumb and nameless until a certain day when, while sitting on a howe, he saw a troop of nine Valkyries. The fairest, Svava, Eylimi's daughter, named him, and bidding him avenge his grandfather on Hrodmar (a former wooer of Sigrlinn's, and her father's slayer), sent him to find a magic sword. Helgi slew Hrodmar and married Svava, having escaped from the sea-giantess Hrimgerd through the protection of his Valkyrie bride and the wit of a faithful servant. His brother Hedin, through the spells of a troll-wife, swore to wed Helgi's bride. Repenting, he told his brother, who, dying in a fight with Hrodmar's son, charged Svava to marry Hedin. A note by the collector adds “Helgi and Svava are said to have been born again.”

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In *Helgi Hundingsbane I.*, Helgi is the son of Sigmund and Borghild. He fought and slew Hunding, and afterwards met in battle Hunding's sons at Logafell, where the Valkyrie Sigrun, Högni's daughter, protected him, and challenged him to fight Hödbrodd to whom her father had plighted her. She protected his ships in the storm which overtook them as they sailed to meet Hödbrodd, and watched over him in the battle, in which he slew his rival and was greeted as victor by Sigrun: “Hail, hero of Yngvi's race ... thou shalt have both the red rings and the mighty maid: thine are Högni's daughter and Hringstad, the victory and the land.”

Helgi Hundingsbane II., besides giving additional details of the hero's early life, completes the story. In the battle with Hödbrodd, Helgi killed all Sigrun's kinsmen except one brother, Dag, who slew him later in vengeance. But Helgi returned from the grave, awakened by Sigrun's weeping, and she went into the howe with him. The collector again adds a note: “Helgi and Sigrun are said to have been born again: he was then called Helgi Haddingjaskati, and she Kara Halfdan's daughter, as it is told in the Kara-ljod, and she was a Valkyrie.”

This third Helgi legend does not survive in verse, the *Kara-ljod* having perished. It is told in prose in the late saga of Hromund Gripsson, according to which Kara was a Valkyrie and swan-maid: while she was hovering over Helgi, he killed her accidentally in swinging his sword.

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There can be little doubt that these three are merely variants of the same story; the foundation is the same, though incidents and names differ. The three Helgis are one hero, and the three versions of his legend probably come from different localities. The collector could not but feel their identity, and the similarity was too fundamental to be overlooked; he therefore accounted for it by the old idea of re-birth, and thus linked the three together. In each Helgi has an hereditary foe (Hrodmar, Hunding, or Hadding); in each his bride is a Valkyrie, who protects him and gives him victory; each ends in tragedy, though differently.

The two variants in the Poetic Edda have evident marks of contamination with the Volsung cycle, and some points of superficial resemblance. Helgi Hjörvardsson's mother is Sigrlinn, Helgi Hundings-bane's father is Sigmund, as in the *Nibelungen Lied* Siegfried is the son of Sigemunt and Sigelint. Helgi Hundingsbane is a Volsung and Wolfing (Ylfing), and brother to Sinfjötli; his first fight, like Sigurd's, is against the race of Hunding; his rival, Hödbrodd, is a Hniflung; he first meets the Valkyrie on Loga-fell (Flame-hill); he is killed by his brother-in-law, who has sworn friendship. But there is no parallel to the essential features of the Volsung cycle, and such likenesses between the two stories as are not accidental are due to the influence of the more favoured legend; this is especially true of the names. The prose-piece *Sinfjötli's Death* also makes Helgi half-brother to Sinfjötli; it is followed in this by *Völsunga Saga*, which devotes a chapter to Helgi, paraphrasing *Helyi Hundingsbane I.* There is, of course, confusion over the Hunding episode; the saga is obliged to reconcile its conflicting authorities by making Helgi kill Hunding and some of his sons, and Sigurd kill the rest.

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If the theory stated below as to the original Helgi legend be correct, the feud with Hunding's race, as told in these poems, must be extraneous. I conjecture that it belonged originally to the Volsung cycle, and to the wer-wolf Sinfjötli. It must not be forgotten that, though he passes out of the Volsung story altogether in the later versions, both Scandinavian and German, he is in the main action in the earliest one (that in *Beowulf*), where even Sigurd does not appear. The feud might easily have been transferred from him to Helgi as well as to Sigurd, for invention is limited as regards episodes, and a narrator who wishes to elaborate the story of a favourite hero is often forced to borrow adventures. In the original story, Helgi's blood-feud was probably with the kindred of Sigrun or Svava.

The origin of the Helgi legend must be sought outside of the Volsung cycle. Some writers are of opinion that the name should be Holgi, and there are two stories in which a hero Holgi appears. With the legend of Thorgerd Holgabrud, told by Saxo, who identified it with that of Helgi Hundingsbane, it has nothing in common; and the connection which has been sought with the legend of Holger Danske is equally difficult to establish. The essence of this latter story is the hero's disappearance into fairyland, and the expectation of his return sometime in the future: a motive which has been very fruitful in Irish romance, and in the traditions of Arthur, Tryggvason, and Barbarossa, among countless others. But it is absent from the Helgi poems; and the “old wives' tales” of Helgi's re-birth have nothing to do with his legend, but are merely a bookman's attempt to connect stories which he felt to be the same though different.

The essential feature of the story told in these poems is the motive familiar in that class of ballads of which the *Douglas Tragedy* is a type: the hero loves the daughter of his enemy's house, her kinsmen kill him, and she dies of grief. This is the story told in both the lays of *Helgi Hundingsbane*, complete in one, unfinished in the other. No single poem preserves all the incidents of the legend; some survive in one version, some in another, as usual in ballad literature.

Like Sinfjötli and Sigurd, Helgi is brought up in obscurity. He spends his childhood disguised in his enemy's household, and on leaving it, sends a message to tell his foes whom they have fostered. They pursue him, and he is obliged, like Gude Wallace in the Scottish ballad, to disguise himself in a bondmaid's dress:

> “Piercing are the eyes of Hagal's bondmaid; it is no peasant's kin who stands at the mill: the stones are split, the bin springs in two. It is a hard fate for a warrior to grind the barley; the sword-hilt is better fitted for those hands than the mill-handle.”

Sigrun is present at the battle, in which, as in the English and Scottish ballads, Helgi slays all her kindred except one brother. He tells her the fortunes of the fight, and she chooses between lover and kinsmen:

> Helgi. “Good luck is not granted thee, maid, in all things, though the Norns are partly to blame. Bragi and Högni fell to-day at Frekastein, and I was their slayer;... most of thy kindred lie low. Thou couldst not hinder the battle: it was thy fate to be a cause of strife to heroes. Weep not, Sigrun, thou hast been Hild to us; heroes must meet their fate.”
>
> Sigrun. “I could wish those alive who are fallen, and yet rest in thy arms.”

The surviving brother, Dag, swears oaths of reconciliation to Helgi, but remembers the feud. The end comes, as in the Norse Sigmund tale, through Odin's interference: he lends his spear to Dag, who stabs Helgi in a grove, and rides home to tell his sister. Sigrun is inconsolable, and curses the murderer with a rare power and directness:

> “May the oaths pierce thee that thou hast sworn to Helgi.... May the ship sail not that sails under thee, though a fair wind lie behind. May the horse run not that runs under thee, though thou art fleeing from thy foes. May the sword bite not that thou drawest, unless it sing round thine own head. If thou wert an outlaw in the woods, Helgi's death were avenged.... Never again while I live, by night or day, shall I sit happy at Sevafell, if I see not the light play on my hero's company, nor the gold-bitted War-breeze run thither with the warrior.”

But Helgi returns from the grave, unable to rest because of Sigrun's weeping, and she goes down into the howe with him:

> Sigrun. “Thy hair is covered with frost, Helgi; thou art drenched with deadly dew, thy hands are cold and wet. How shall I get thee help, my hero?”
>
> Helgi. “Thou alone hast caused it, Sigrun from Sevafell, that Helgi is drenched with deadly dew. Thou weepest bitter tears before thou goest to sleep, gold-decked, sunbright, Southern maid; each one falls on my breast, bloody, cold and wet, cruel, heavy with grief....”
>
> Sigrun. “I have made thee here a painless bed, Helgi, son of the Wolfings. I will sleep in thy arms, my warrior, as if thou wert alive.”
>
> Helgi. “There shall be no stranger thing at Sevafell, early or late, than that thou, king-born, Högni's fair daughter, shouldst be alive in the grave and sleep in a dead man's arms.”

The lay of Helgi Hjörvardsson is furthest from the original, for there is no feud with Svava's kindred, nor does Helgi die at their hands; but it preserves a feature omitted elsewhere, in his leaving his bride to his brother's protection. Like the wife in the English ballad of *Earl Brand*, and the heroine of the Danish *Ribold and Guldborg*, Svava refuses, but Hedin's last words seem to imply that he is to return and marry her after avenging Helgi. This would be contrary to all parallels, according to which Svava should die with Helgi.

The alternative ending of the *Helgi and Kara* version is interesting as providing the possible source of another Scottish ballad dealing with the same type of story. In *The Cruel Knight*, as here, the hero slays his bride, who is of a hostile family, by mistake. One passage of *Helgi Hundingsbane II.* describes Helgi's entrance into Valhalla, which, taken with the incident of Sigrun's joining him in the howe, supplies an instance of the survival side by side of inconsistent notions as to the state of the dead. The lover's return from the grave is the subject of *Clerk Saunders* (the second part) and several other Scottish ballads.

The Song of the Mill.—The magic mill is best known in the folk-tale, “Why the sea is salt”; but this is not the oldest part of the story, though it took most hold of the popular imagination which loves legendary explanations of natural phenomena. The hero, Frodi, a mythical Danish king, is the northern Croesus. His reign was marked by a world-peace, and the peace, the wealth, the liberality of Frodi became proverbial. The motive of his tale is again the curse that follows gold. It is told by Snorri, in whose work *Grottasöngr* is embodied.

Frodi possessed two magic quern-stones, from which the grinder could grind out whatever he wished; but he had no one strong enough to turn them until he bought in Sweden two bondmaids of giant-race, Menja and Fenja. He set them to grind at the quern by day, and by night when all slept, and as they ground him gold, and peace, and prosperity, they sang:

> "We grind wealth for Frodi, all bliss we grind, and abundance of riches in the fortunate bin. May he sit on wealth, may he sleep on down, may he wake to delight; then the grinding were good. Here shall no man hurt another, prepare evil nor work death, nor hew with the keen sword though he find his brother's slayer bound."

But when they wearied of their toil and asked for a little rest, Frodi answered: "Ye shall sleep no longer than the cuckoo is silent, or while I speak one stave." Then the giant-maids grew angry, and sang:

> "Thou wert not wise, Frodi, in buying thy bondmaids: thou didst choose us for our strength and size but asked not our race. Bold were Hrungni and his father, and mightier Thiazi; Idi and Orni were our ancestors, from them are we daughters of the mountain-giants sprung.... We maids wrought mighty deeds, we moved the mountains from their places, we rolled rocks over the court of the giants, so that the earth shook.... Now we are come to the king's house, meeting no mercy and held in bondage, mud beneath our feet and cold over our heads, we grind the Peace-maker. It is dreary at Frodi's."

As they sang of their wrongs by night, their mood changed, and instead of grinding peace and wealth, they ground war, fire and sword:

> "Waken, Frodi! waken, Frodi! if thou wilt hear our songs.... I see fire burn at the east of the citadel, the voice of war awakes, the signal is given. A host will come hither in speed, and burn the hall over the king."

So the bondmaids ground on in giant-wrath, while the sea-king Mysing sailed nearer with his host, until the quern-stones split; and then the daughters of the mountain-giants spoke once more: "We have ground to our pleasure, Frodi; we maids have stood long at the mill."

A Norseman was rarely content to allow a fortunate ending to any hero, and a continuation of the story therefore makes the mill bring disaster on Mysing also. After slaying Frodi and burning his hall, he took the stones and the bondmaids on board his ship, and bade them grind salt. They ground till the weight sank the ship to the bottom of the sea, where the mill is grinding still. This is not in the song, though it has lived longer popularly than the earlier part. Dr. Rydberg identities Frodi with Frey, the God of fertility.

The Everlasting Battle.—No Eddic poem survives on the battle of the Hjathnings, the story of which is told in prose by Snorri. It must, however, be an ancient legend; and the hero Hedin belongs to one of the old Germanic heroic races, for the minstrel Deor is a dependent of the Heodenings in the Old English poem to which reference will be made later. The legend is that Hild, daughter of Högni, was carried away by Hedin the Hjathning, Hjarrandi's son. Högni pursued, and overtook them near the Orkneys. Then Hild went to her father and offered atonement from Hedin, but said also that he was quite ready to fight, and Högni need expect no mercy. Högni answered shortly, and Hild returning told Hedin that her father would accept no atonement but bade him prepare to fight. Both kings landed on an island, followed by their men. Hedin called to Högni and offered atonement and much gold, but Högni said it was too late, his sword was already drawn. They fought till evening, and then returned to their ships; but Hild went on shore and woke up all the slain by sorcery, so that the battle began again next day just as before. Every day they fight, and every night the dead are recalled to life, and so it will go on till Ragnarök.

In the German poem, *Gudrun*, the Continental version of this legend occurs in the story of the second Hilde. She is carried away by the minstrel Horant (who thus plays a more active part than the Norse Hjarrandi), as envoy from King Hettel, Hedin's German counterpart. Her father Hagen pursues, and after a battle with Hettel agrees to a reconciliation. The story is duplicated in the abduction of Hilde's daughter Gudrun, and the battle on the Wülpensand.

Another reference may probably be supplied by the much debated lines 14–16 from the Anglo-Saxon *Deor*, of which the most satisfactory translation seems to be: "Many of us have heard of the harm of Hild; the Jute's loves were unbounded, so that the care of love took from him sleep altogether." Saxo, it is true, makes Hild's father a Jute, instead of her lover, and Snorri apparently agrees with him in making Hedin Norwegian; but in the *Gudrun* Hettel is Frisian or Jutish. The Anglo-Saxon *Widsith* mentions in one line Hagena, king of the Holmrygas (a Norwegian province), and Heoden, king of the Glommas (not identified), who may be the Högni and Hedin of this tale.

The Anglo-Saxon and German agree on another point where both differ from the Norse. The Anglo-Saxon poem *Deor* is supposed to be spoken by a *scop* or court poet who has been ousted from the favour of his lord, a Heodening, by Heorrenda, another singer: "Once I was the Heodenings' scop, dear to my lord: Deor was my name. Many a year I had a good service and a gracious lord, until the song-skilled Hoerrenda received the rights which the protector of men once granted me." Like Heorrenda, Horant in the *Gudrun* is a singer in the service of the Heathnings. The Norse version keeps the name, and its connection with the Heathnings, but gives Hjarrandi, as the hero's father, no active part to play. In both points, arguing from the probable Frisian origin of the story, the Anglo-Saxon and German are more likely to have the correct form.

The legend is, like those of Walter and Hildigund, Helgi and Sigrun, founded on the primary instincts of love and war. In the Norse story of the Heathnings, however, the former element is almost eliminated. It is from no love to Hedin that Hild accompanies him, though Saxo would have it so. Nothing is clearer than that strife is her only object. It is her mediation which brings about the battle, when apparently both heroes would be quite willing to make peace; and her

arts which cause the daily renewal of fighting. This island battle among dead and living is peculiar to the Norse version, and coloured by, if not originating in, the Valhalla idea: Högni and Hedin and their men are the Einherjar who fight every day and rest and feast at night, Hild is a war-goddess. The conception of her character, contrasting with the gentler part played by the Continental German heroines (who are rather the causes than the inciters of strife), can be paralleled from many of the sagas proper.

Högni's sword Dainsleif, forged by the dwarfs, as were all magic weapons, is like the sword of Angantyr, in that it claims a victim whenever it is drawn from the sheath: an idea which may easily have arisen from the prowess of any famous swordsman.

The Sword of Angantyr.—Like the two last legends, Angantyr's story is not represented in the Elder Edda; it is not even told by Snorri. Yet poems belonging to the cycle survive (preserved by good fortune in the late mythical *Hervarar Saga*) which among the heroic poems rank next in artistic beauty to the Helgi Lays. Since the story possesses besides a striking originality, and is connected with the name of a Pan-Germanic hero, the Ongendtheow of Old English poetry, I cannot follow the example of most editors and omit it from the heroic poems.

Like the Volsung legend it is the story of a curse; and there is a general similarity of outline, with the exception that the hero is in this case a woman. The curse-laden treasure is here the sword Tyrfing, which Svafrlami got by force from the dwarfs. They laid a curse on it: that it should bring death to its bearer, no wound it made should be healed, and it should claim a victim whenever it was unsheathed. In the saga, the story is spread over several generations: partly, no doubt, in order to include varying versions; partly also in imitation of the true Icelandic family saga. The chief actors in the legend, beside the sword, are Angantyr and his daughter Hervör.

The earlier history of Tyrfing is told in the saga. Svafrlami is killed, with the magic weapon itself, by the viking Arngrim, who thus gains possession of it; when he is slain in his turn, it descends to Angantyr, the eldest of his twelve berserk sons. For a while no one can withstand them, but the doom overtakes them at last in the battle of Samsey against the Swedes Arrow-Odd and Hjalmar. In berserk-rage, the twelve brothers attack the Swedish ships, and slay every man except the two leaders who have landed on the island. The battle over, the berserks go ashore, and there when their fury is past, they are attacked by the two Swedish champions. Odd fights eleven of the brothers, but Hjalmar has the harder task in meeting Angantyr and his sword. All the twelve sons of Arngrim fall, and Hjalmar is mortally wounded by Tyrfing. The survivor buries his twelve foemen where they fell, and takes his comrade's body back to Sweden. The first poem gives the challenge of the Swedish champions, and Hjalmar's dying song.

Hervör, the daughter of Angantyr, is in some respects a female counterpart of Sigurd. Like him, she is born after her father's death, and brought up in obscurity. When she learns her father's name, she goes forth without delay to claim her inheritance from the dead, even with the curse that goes with it. Here the second poem begins. On reaching the island where her father fell, she asks a shepherd to guide her to the graves of Arngrim's sons:

> “I will ask no hospitality, for I know not the islanders; tell me quickly, where are the graves called Hjörvard's howes?”

He is unwilling: “The man is foolish who comes here alone in the dark shade of night: fire is flickering, howes are opening, field and fen are aflame,” and flees into the woods, but Hervör is dauntless and goes on alone. She reaches the howes, and calls on the sons of Arngrim:

> “Awake, Angantyr! Hervör calls thee, only daughter to thee and Tofa. Give me from the howe the keen sword which the dwarfs forged for Svafrlami, Hervard, Hjörvard, Hrani, Angantyr! I call you all from below the tree-roots, with helm and corselet, with sharp sword, shield and harness, and reddened spear.”

Angantyr denies that the sword is in his howe: “Neither father, son, nor other kinsmen buried me; my slayers had Tyrfing;” but Hervör does not believe him. “Tell me but truth.... Thou art slow to give thine only child her heritage.” He tries to frighten her back to the ships by describing the sights she will see, but she only cries again, “Give me Hjalmar's slayer from the howe, Angantyr!”

> A. “Hjalmar's slayer lies under my shoulders; it is all wrapped in fire; I know no maid on earth who dare take that sword in her hands.”
>
> H. “I will take the sharp sword in my hands, if I can get it: I fear no burning fire, the flame sinks as I look on it.”
>
> A. “Foolish art thou, Hervör the fearless, to rush into the fire open-eyed. I will rather give thee the sword from the howe, young maid; I cannot refuse thee.”
>
> H. “Thou dost well, son of vikings, to give me the sword from the howe. I think its possession better than to win all Norway.”

Her father warns her of the curse, and the doom that the sword will bring, and she leaves the howes followed by his vain wish: “Would that I could give thee the lives of us twelve, the strength and energy that we sons of Arngrim left behind us!”

It is unnecessary here to continue the story as the saga does, working out the doom over later generations; over Hervör's son Heidrek, who forfeited his head to Odin in a riddle-contest, and over his children, another Angantyr, Hlod, and a second Hervör. The verse sources for this latter part are very corrupt.

A full discussion of the relation between the Eddic and the Continental versions of the heroic tales summarised in the foregoing pages would, of course, be far beyond the scope of this study; the utmost that can be done in that direction is

to suggest a few points. Three of the stories are not concerned in this section: Helgi and Frodi are purely Scandinavian cycles; while though Angantyr is a well-known heroic name (in *Widsith* Ongendtheow is king of the Swedes), the legend attached to his name in the Norse sources does not survive elsewhere. The Weland cycle is perhaps common property. None of the versions localise it, for the names in *Völundarkvida*, Wolfdale, Myrkwood, &c., are conventional heroic place-names. It was popular at a very early date in England, and is probably a Pan-Germanic legend. The Sigurd and Hild stories, on the contrary, are both, in all versions, localised on the Continent, the former by the Rhine, the latter in Friesland or Jutland; both, therefore, in Low German country, whence they must have spread to the other Germanic lands. To England they were doubtless carried by the Low German invaders of the sixth century. On the question of their passage to the North there are wide differences of opinion. Most scholars agree that there was an earlier and a later passage, the first taking Hild, Ermanric, and the Volsung story; the second, about the twelfth or thirteenth century, the Volsungs again, with perhaps Dietrich and Attila. But there is much disagreement as to the date of the first transmission. Müllenhoff put it as early as 600; Konrad Maurer, in the ninth and tenth centuries; while Dr. Golther is of opinion that the Volsung story passed first to the vikings in France, and then westward over Ireland to Iceland; therefore also not before the ninth century. Such evidence as is afforded by the very slight English references makes it probable that the Scandinavians had the tales later than the English, a view supported by the more highly developed form of the Norse version, and, in the case of the Volsung cycle, its greater likeness to the Continental German. The earliest Norse references which can be approximately dated are in the Skald Bragi (first half of the ninth century), who knew all three stories: the Hild and Ermanric tales he gives in outline; his only reference to the Volsungs is a kenning, “the Volsungs' drink,” for serpent. With the possible exception of the Anglo-Saxon fragments, the Edda preserves on the whole the purest versions of those stories which are common to all, though, as might be expected, the Continental sources sometimes show greater originality in isolated details. These German sources have entangled the different cycles into one involved mass; but in the Norse the extraneous elements are easily detached.

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The motives of heroic tales are limited in number and more or less common to different races. Heroic cycles differ as a rule merely in their choice or combination of incidents, not in the nature of their material. The origin of these heroic motives may generally be found in primitive custom or conditions of life, seized by an imaginative people and woven into legend; sometimes linked to the name of some dead tribal hero, just as the poets of a later date wound the same traditions in still-varying combinations round the names of Gretti Asmundarson and Gold-Thori; though often the hero is, like the Gods, born of the myth. In the latter case, the story is pure myth; in the former it is legend, or a mixture of history and legend, as in the Ermanric and Dietrich tales, which have less interest for the mythologist.

The curse-bringing treasure, one of the most fruitful Germanic motives, probably has its origin in the custom of burying a dead man's possessions with him. In the *Waterdale Saga*, Ketil Raum, a viking of the eighth and early ninth centuries, reproaches his son Thorstein as a degenerate, in that he expects to inherit his father's wealth, instead of winning fortune for himself: “It used to be the custom with kings and earls, men of our kind, that they won for themselves fortune and fame; wealth was not counted as a heritage, nor would sons inherit from their fathers, but rather lay their possessions in the howe with them.” It is easy to see that when this custom came into conflict with the son's natural desire to inherit, the sacrosanctity of the dead man's treasure and of his burial-mound would be their only protection against violation. The fear of the consequences of breaking the custom took form in the myth of the curse, as in the sword of Angantyr and the Nibelungs' hoard; while the dangers attending the violation of the howe were personified in the dragon-guardian. In *Gold-Thori's Saga*, the dead berserks whose howe Thori enters, are found guarding their treasure in the shape of dragons; while Thori himself is said to have turned into a dragon after death.

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Marriage with alien wives, which in the case of the Mastermaid story has been postulated as means of transmission and as the one possible explanation of its nearly universal diffusion, may perhaps with more simplicity be assumed as the common basis in custom for independently arising myths of this type. The attempts of the bride's kindred to prevent the marriage, and of the bridegroom's to undo it, would be natural incidents in such a story, and the magic powers employed by and against the bride would be the mythical representatives of the mutually unfamiliar customs of alien tribes. This theory at least offers a credible explanation of the hero's temporary oblivion of or unfaithfulness to his protectress, after their successful escape together.

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In the Valkyrie-brides, Brynhild and Sigrun, with their double attributes of fighting and wisdom, there is an evident connexion with the Germanic type of woman preserved in the allusions of Cæsar and Tacitus, which reaches its highest development in the heroines of the Edda. Any mythical or ideal conception of womanhood combines the two primitive instincts, love and fighting, even though the woman may be only the innocent cause of strife, or its passive prize. The peculiarity of the Germanic representation is that the woman is never passive, but is herself the incarnation of both instincts. Even if she is not a Valkyrie, nor taking part herself in the fight, she is ready, like the wives of the Cimbri, to drive the men back to the battle from which they have escaped. Hild and Hervör are at one extreme: war is their spiritual life. Love is in Hild nothing more than instinct; in Hervör it is not even that: she would desire nothing from marriage beyond a son to inherit the sword. At the other extreme is Sigrun, who has the warlike instinct, but is spiritually a lover as completely and essentially as Isolde or Juliet. The interest in Signy lies in the way in which she sacrifices what are usually considered the strongest feminine instincts, without, however, by any means abandoning them, to her uncompromising revenge and pride of race. Her pride in her son seems to include something of both trains of feeling; and she dies with the husband she detests, simply because he is her husband. Brynhild, lastly, is a highly modern type, as independent in love as in war. It is impossible to imagine Sigrun, or Wagner's Sieglinde, taking her revenge on a faithless lover; from no lack of spirit, but simply because revenge would have given no comfort to either. To Brynhild it is not only a distinct relief, but the only endurable end; she can forgive when she is avenged.

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The other motives of these stories may be briefly enumerated. The burning of Brynhild and Signy, and Sigrun's entrance

into the howe, are mythical reminiscences of widow-burial. The “sister's son” is preserved in the Sigmund and Sinfjötli tale, which also has a trace of animism in the werwolf episode. The common swanmaid motive occurs in two, the Völund story and the legend of Helgi and Kara; while the first Helgi tale suggests the Levirate in the proposed marriage of Svava to her husband's brother. The waverlowe of the Volsung myth may be traced back to the midsummer fires; the wooing of Brynhild by Sigurd's crossing the fire would thus, like the similar bridal of Menglad and Svipdag and the winning of Gerd for Frey, be based on the marriages which formed a part of agricultural rites.

Bibliographical Notes

To avoid confusion, and in view of the customary loose usage of the word “saga,” it may be as well to state that it is here used only in its technical sense of a prose history.

Völund. (Pages 5 to 8.)

Dr. Rydberg formulates a theory identifying Völund with Thiazi, the giant who carried off Idunn. It is based chiefly on arguments from names and other philological considerations, and gives perhaps undue weight to the authority of Saxo. It is difficult to see any fundamental likenesses in the stories.

The Old English references to Weland are in the *Waldere* fragment and the *Lament of Deor*. For the Franks Casket, see Professor Napier's discussion, with photographs, in the *English Miscellany* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1901). The *Thidreks Saga* (sometimes called *Vilkina Saga*), was edited by Unger (Christiania, 1853), and by Hylten-Cavallius (1880). There are two German translations: by Rassmann (*Heldensage,* (1863), and by Von der Hagen (*Nordische Heldenromane*, 1873).

The Volsungs. (Pages 8 to 27.)

As divided in most editions the poems connected with the Volsung cycle, including the two on Ermanric, are fifteen in number:

Gripisspa.

Reginsmal, Fafnismal, Sigrdrifumal, a continued narrative compiled from different sources.

Sigurd Fragment, on the death of Sigurd.

First Gudrun Lay, on Gudrun's mourning, late.

Short Sigurd Lay (called *Long Brynhild Lay* in the *Corpus Poeticum*; sometimes called *Third Sigurd Lay*). style late.

Brynhild's Hellride, a continuation of the preceding.

Second, or *Old, Gudrun Lay*, is also late. It contains more kennings than are usual in Eddic poetry, and the picture of Gudrun's sojourn in Denmark and the tapestry she wrought with Thora Halfdan's daughter, together with the descriptions of her suitors, belong to a period which had a taste for colour and elaboration of detail.

Third Gudrun Lay, or the *Ordeal of Gudrun* (after her marriage to Atli), is romantic in character. The Gothic hero Thjodrek (Dietrich) is introduced.

Oddrun's Lament, in which Gunnar's death is caused by an intrigue with Atli's sister Oddrun, marks the disintegration of the Volsung legend.

The two Atli Lays *(Atlakvida* and *Atlamal*, the latter of Greenland origin), deal with the death of Gunnar and Högni, and Gudrun's vengeance on Atli.

Gudrun's Lament and *Hamthismal* belong to the Ermanric cycle.

Volsung Paraphrases. (Page 11.)

Skaldskaparmal, Völsunga Saga and *Norna-Gests Thattr* (containing another short paraphrase) are all included in Dr. Wilken's *Die Prosaische Edda* (Paderborn, 1878). There is an English version of *Völsunga* by Magnusson and Morris (London, 1870) and a German version of *Völsunga* and *Norna-Gest* by Edzardi.

Nibelungenlied. (Page 11.)

Editions by Bartsch (Leipzig, 1895) and Zarncke (Halle, 1899); translation into modern German by Simrock.

Signy and Siggeir. (Page 13.)

Saxo Grammaticus (Book vii.) tells the story of a Signy, daughter of Sigar, whose lover Hagbard, after slaying her brothers, wins her favour. Sigar in vengeance had him strangled on a hill in view of Signy's windows, and she set fire to her house that she might die simultaneously with her lover. The antiquity of part at least of this story is proved by the kenning “Hagbard's collar” for halter, in a poem probably of the tenth century. On the other hand, a reference in

Völsunga Saga, that “Haki and Hagbard were great and famous men, yet Sigar carried off their sister, ... and they were slow to vengeance,” shows that there is confusion somewhere. It seems possible that Hagbard's story has been contaminated with a distorted account of the Volsung Signy, civilised as usual by Saxo, with an effect of vulgarity absent from the primitive story.

In a recently published pamphlet by Mr. W.W. Lawrence and Dr. W.H. Schofield (*The First Riddle of Cynewulf* and *Signy's Lament*. Baltimore: The Modern Language Association of America. 1902) it is suggested that the so-called First Riddle in the Exeter Book is in reality an Anglo-Saxon translation of a Norse “Complaint” spoken by the Volsung Signy. Evidence from metre and form is all in favour of this view, and the poem bears the interpretation without any straining of the meaning. Dr. Schofield's second contention, that the poem thus interpreted is evidence for the theory of a British origin for the Eddie poems, is not equally convincing. The existence in Anglo-Saxon of a translation from the Norse is no proof that any of the Eddie poems, or even the original Norse “Signy's Lament” postulated by Dr. Schofield, were composed in the West.

It seems unnecessary to suppose, with Dr. Schofield, an influence of British legend on the Volsung story. The points in which the story of Sigmund resembles that of Arthur and differs from that of Theseus prove nothing in the face of equally strong points of correspondence between Arthur and Theseus which are absent from the Volsung story.

Sinfjötli's Death. (Page 14.)

Munch (*Nordmændenes Gudelære*, Christiania, 1847) ingeniously identified the old man with Odin, come in person to conduct Sinfjötli to Valhalla, since he would otherwise have gone to Hel, not having fallen in battle; a stratagem quite in harmony with Odin's traditional character.

Sigmund and Sinfjötli. (Page 15.)

It seems probable, on the evidence of *Beowulf*, that Sigmund and Sinfjötli represent the Pan-Germanic stage of the national-hero, and Sigurd or Siegfried the Continental stage. Possibly Helgi may then be the Norse race-hero. Sigurd was certainly foreign to Scandinavia; hence the epithet Hunnish, constantly applied to him, and the localising of the legend by the Rhine. The possibility suggests itself that the Brynhild part of the story, on the other hand, is of Scandinavian origin, and thence passed to Germany. It is at least curious that the *Nibelungen Lied* places Prunhilt in Iceland.

Wagner and the Volsung Cycle. (Page 26.)

Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen* is remarkable not only for the way in which it reproduces the spirit of both the Sinfjötli and the Sigurd traditions, but also for the wonderful instinct which chooses the best and most primitive features of both Norse and Continental versions. Thus he keeps the dragon of the Norse, the Nibelungs of the German; preserves the wildness of the old Sigmund tale, and substitutes the German Hagen for his paler Norse namesake; restores the original balance between the parts of Brynhild and Gudrun; gives the latter character, and an active instead of a passive function in the story, by assigning to her her mother's share in the action; and by substituting for the slaying of the otter the bargain with the Giants for the building of Valhalla, makes the cause worthy of the catastrophe.

Ermanric. (Page 27.)

For examples of legend becoming attached to historical names, see Tylor's *Primitive Culture*.

The Helgi Lays. (Page 29.)

The Helgi Lays stand before the Volsung set in the MS.; I treat them later for the sake of greater clearness.

Helgi and Kara. (Page 30.)

Hromundar Saga Gripssonar, in which this story is given, is worthless as literature, and has not been recently edited. P.E. Müller's *Sagabibliothek*, in which it was published, is out of print. Latin and Swedish translations may be found in Björner's *Nordiske Kåmpa Dater* (Stockholm, 1737), also out of print.

Rebirth. (Page 31.)

Dr. Storm has an interesting article on the Norse belief in Re-birth in the *Arkiv for Nordisk Filologi*, ix. He collects instances, and among other arguments points out the Norse custom of naming a posthumous child after its dead father as a probable relic of the belief. The inheritance of luck may perhaps be another survival; a notable instance occurs in *Viga-Glums Saga*, where the warrior Vigfus bequeaths his luck to his favourite grandson, Glum. In the *Waterdale Saga* there are two instances in which it is stated that the luck of the dead grandfather will pass to the grandson who receives his name. Scholars do not, however, agree as to the place of the rebirth idea in the Helgi poems, some holding the view that it is an essential part of the story.

Hunding. (Page 32.)

It is possible that the werwolf story is a totem survival. If so, the Hunding feud might easily belong to it: dogs are the natural enemies of wolves. It is curious that the Irish werwolf Cormac has a feud with MacCon (*i.e.*, Son of a Dog), which means the same as Hunding. This story, which has not been printed, will be found in the Bodleian MS. Laud, 610.

THORGERD HOLGABRUD. (Page 33.)

Told in Saxo, Book ii. Snorri has a bare allusion to it.

HOLGER DANSKE, OR OGIER LE DANOIS. (Page 33.)

See *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*, vol. i. p. cxxx., and No. 10 of this series. The Norse version of the story (Helgi Thorisson) is told in the Saga of Olaf Tryggvason, and is summarised by Dr. Rydberg in the *Teutonic Mythology*, and by Mr. Nutt in the *Voyage of Bran*.

BALLADS. (Page 36.)

Professor Child is perhaps hasty in regarding the two parts of *Clerk Saunders* as independent. The first part, though unlike the Helgi story in circumstance, seems to preserve the tradition of the hero's hostility to his bride's kindred, and his death at their hands.

The Helgi story, in all its variants, is as familiar in Danish as in Border ballads. The distribution of the material in Iceland, Denmark, England and Scotland is strongly in favour of the presumption that Scandinavian legend influenced England and Scotland, and against the presumption that the poems in question passed from the British Isles to Iceland. The evidence of the Danish ballads should be conclusive on this point. There is an English translation of the latter by R.C.A. Prior (*Ancient Danish Ballads*, London, 1860).

THE EVERLASTING BATTLE. (Page 39.)

The Skald Bragi (before 850 A.D.) has a poem on this subject, given with a translation in the *Corpus*, vol. ii. Saxo's version is in the fifth book of his History. According to Bragi, Hild has a necklace, which has caused comparison of this story with that of the Greek Eriphyle. Irish legendary history describes a similar battle in which the slain revive each night and renew the fight daily, as occurring in the wanderings of the Tuatha De Danann before they reached Ireland. According to Keating, they learnt the art of necromancy in the East, and taught it to the Danes.

The latest edition of the *Gudrun* is by Ernst Martin (second edition, Halle, 1902). There is a modern German translation by Simrock.

ANGANTYR. (Page 42.)

The poems of this cycle are four in number—(1) *Hjalmar's Death-song*: (2) *Angantyr and Hervör*; (3) *Heidrek's Riddle-Poem*: (4) *Angantyr the Younger and Hlod*. All are given in the first volume of the *Corpus*, with translations.

Herrarar Saga was published by Rafn (Copenhagen, 1829–30) in *Fornaldar Sögur*, vol. i., now out of print. It has been more recently edited by Dr. Bugge, together with *Völsunga* and others. Petersen (Copenhagen, 1847) edited it with a Danish translation. Munch's *Nordmuendenes Gudelære* (out of print) contains a short abstract.

DEATH OF ANGANTYR. (Page 43.)

Angantyr's death is related by Saxo, Book v., with entire exclusion of all mythical interest.

TRANSMISSION OF LEGENDS. (Page 47.)

Müllenhoff's views are given in the *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, vol. x.; Maurer's in the *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, vol. ii. For Golther's views on the Volsung cycle see *Germania*, 33.

THE DRAGON MYTH. (Page 49.)

See also Hartland, *Science of Fairy-Tales*.

The eating of the dragon's heart (see p. 19) may possibly be a survival of the custom of eating a slain enemy's heart to obtain courage, of which Dr. Frazer gives examples in the *Golden Bough*.

ALIEN WIVES. (Page 49.)

For the theory of alien wives as a means of transmission, see Lang, *Custom and Myth* (London, 1893).

THE SISTER'S SON. (Page 51.)

See Mr. Gummere's article in the *English Miscellany*; and Professor Rhys' Presidential Address to the Anthropological Section of the British Association, 1900. The double relationship between Sigmund and Sinfjötli (not uncommon in heroic tales; compare Conchobhar and Cuchulainn, Arthur and Mordred) seems in this case due to the same cause as the custom which prevailed in the dynasty of the Ptolemies, where the king often married his sister, that his heir might be of the pure royal blood.

SWANMAIDS. (Page 51.)

See Hartland, *Science of Fairy-Tales.*

THE WAVERLOWE. (Page 51.)

Dr. Frazer (*Golden Bough*) gives instances of ritual marriages connected with the midsummer fires. For *Svipdag and Menglad*, see Study No. 12 of this series. If Rydberg, as seems very probable, is right in identifying Menglad and Svipdag with Freyja and the mortal lover who wins her and whom she afterwards loses, the story would be a parallel to those of Venus and Adonis, Ishtar and Tammuz, &c., which Frazer derives from the ritual marriage of human sacrifices to the Goddess of fertility. The reason given in the Edda for Brynhild's sleep, and her connexion with Odin, are secondary, arising from the Valhalla myth.

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