THE STORY OF SIEGFRIED



James Baldwin

Illustrated by Howard Pyle

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THE FORGING OF BALMUNG

Oh, dream not helm or harness

The sign of valor true;

Peace hath higher tests of manhood

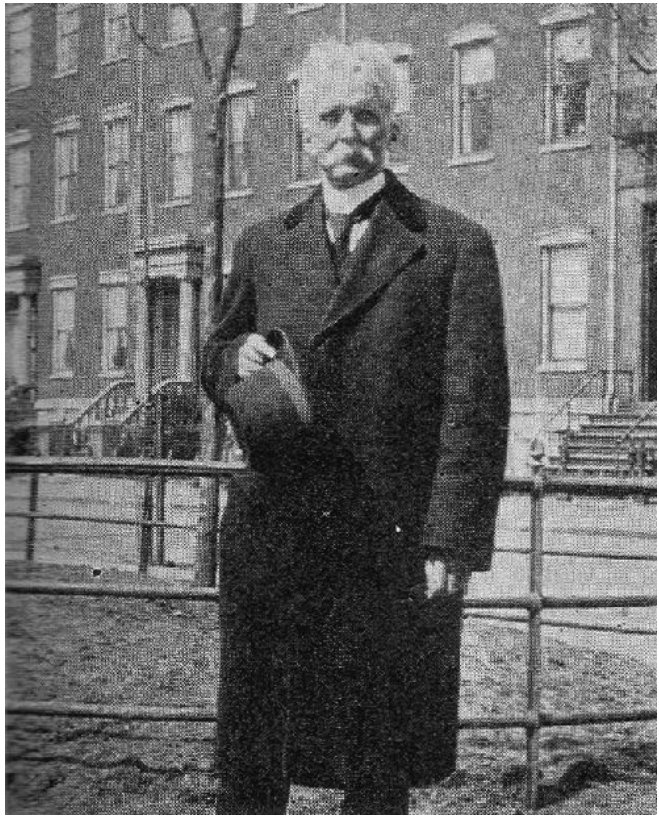
Than battle ever knew.

- John G. Whittier

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About the Author:



James Baldwin (1841 - 1925)

According to his biography in the *Junior Book of Authors* (1951), Baldwin, a native of Indiana and largely self-educated, began teaching at the age of 24. After several years he became superintendent of the graded schools in Indiana, a post he held for 18 ye-

ars. The last 37 years of his life he worked with publishers, first with Harper and Brothers and later with the American Book Company. In addition to editing school books, he started writing books of his own. After the publication in 1882 of *The Story of Siegfried*, he went on to write more than 50 others.

His influence was widely felt because at one time it was estimated that of all the school books in use in the United States, over half had been written or edited by him. Unfortunately, his works are much less widely known today. So far as known, only some of his books are in print and published today.

Books:

Date	Story	Category
1882	The Story of Siegfried	Legends
1883	The Story of Roland	Legends
1887	A Story of the Golden Age of Greek Heroes	Mythology
1895	Fairy Stories and Fables	Readers
1895	Old Greek Sto-	Mythology

	ries	
1896	Fifty Famous Stories Retold	Collective Biography
1897	Four Great Americans	Collective Biography
1903	The Wonder-Book of Horses	Mythology
1904	Abraham Lincoln, A True Life	----
1905	Thirty More Famous Stories Retold	Collective Biography
1905	Robinson Crusoe Written Anew for Children	Adapted Literature
1907	An American Book of Golden Deeds	Ethical Faith Stories
1910	Stories of Don Quixote Written A new for Children	Fiction
1912	The Sampo	Legends
1912	Fifty Famous People	Collective Biography
1914	In My Youth	Individual Biography

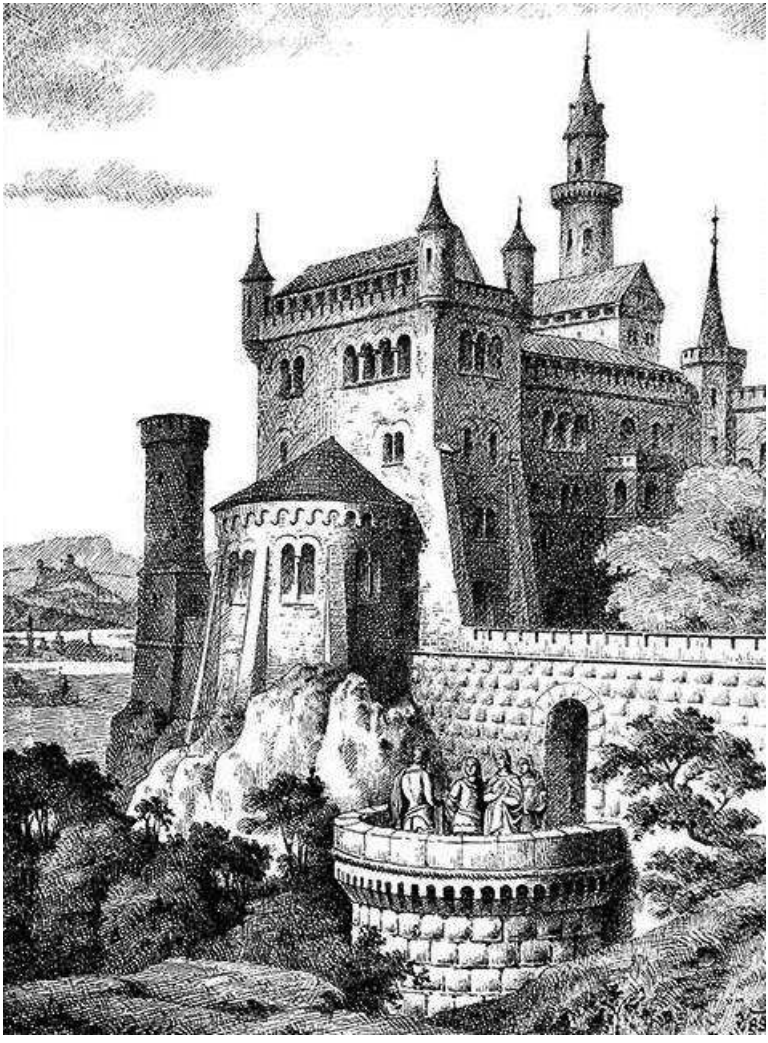
A SHORT VOCABULARY OF THE PRINCIPAL PROPER NAMES MENTIONED IN THIS STORY:

AEGIR. The god of the sea.
ALBERICH and ANDVARI. Dwarfs who guard the great Hoard.
ASA. A name applied to the gods of the Norse mythology.
ASGARD. The home of the gods.
BALDER. The god of the summer sunlight.
BRAGI. The god of eloquence and of poetry.
DRAUPNER. Odin's ring, which gives fertility to the earth.
FAFNIR. The dragon whom Siegfried slays.
FENRIS-WOLF. The monster who in the last twilight slays Odin.
FREYJA. The goddess of love.
FREY. The god of peace and plenty.
GRIPIR. The giant who gives wise counsel to Siegfried (Sigurd).
GUNTHER. In the older myths called Gunnar.
HEIMDAL. The heavenly watchman.
HELA. The goddess of death.
HERMOD. The quick messenger who is sent to Hela for Balder.
HODER. The winter-god. He slays Balder.
HOENIR. One of the three most ancient gods.
HUGIN. Odin's raven, Thought.
IDUN. The goddess of spring.
IVALD. A skilful dwarf.
JOTUNHEIM. The home of the giants.

KRIEMHILD. In the older myths called Gudrun.
LOKI. The mischief-maker. The god of evil.
MIMER. In the later German mythology a skilful smith. In the older mythology a wise giant.
NORNS. The three Fates,—Urd, Verdande, and Skuld.
ODIN. The chief of the gods.
REGIN. The teacher of Sigurd, by whom he is slain.
SIEGFRIED. In the older myths called Sigurd.
SIF. Thor's wife.
SLEIPNER. Odin's eight-footed horse.
TYR. The god of war.
THOR. The god of thunder. The foe of the giants.
VALHAL. The hall of the slain.
VALKYRIES. The choosers of the slain. Odin's handmaidens.
VIDAR. The silent god.
YMIR. The huge giant out of whose body the world was made.

* * *

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 care to explain the causes, 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 used it in the construction of the inimitable dramas, known collectively as "The Ring of the Nibelung;" 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 re-

cast 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 unaltered. 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.

MIMER, THE MASTER



SIGURD, OR NAMED "**SIEGFRIED**", WITH HIS SWORD

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.

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 Burgundyland—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 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 hilt 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 Burgundyland, 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 hilltop. 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. 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."

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 faraway 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 la-

ughed, 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 pretence 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. 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."

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?"