Moore

The Legend of Siegfried
THE LEGEND OF SIEGFRIED

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IRENE HOLBROOKE MOORE

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Luna Holbrook Moore

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The Legend of Siegfried.

The story of Siegfried, the legendary hero of the Teutons, has its roots deeply buried in an unrecorded epoch in the life of the German people, and since the rebirth of German antiquity it has been the center of scientific investigation, and the foundation upon which some of the best of the nation's literature and art has been based. A tradition handed down from century to century, and carried by wandering minstrels throughout all the Germanic tribes, as well as into the far North and westward across the Channel to the British Isles, must inevitably lose its original unity and be subjected to endless variations and reconstructions as it comes into contact with the myths and legends of the lands into which it is carried. Thus it is that no single version of the "Siegfriedsage" presents an absolute whole, and it is only by uniting and comparing the elements of many versions that investigators have succeeded in tracing the outline of the original story.

Although purely Germanic in origin, the legend has been incorporated into the traditions of many other lands; and we find echoes of it in the remains of early songs in Iceland, Greenland, and Scandinavia. In the Anglo-Saxon national epic, it loses most of its German characteristics, and takes on the spirit of the dying Anglo-Saxon civilization and the rising nation made up of Anglo-Saxons, Danes, and Norsemen. Many of the events of the story, however, bear striking resemblance to the old German legend; for instance, the account of Sigmund the Waelsing, who slew a dragon guarding a ring-hoard, became the possessor of the treasure, lived to perform many valiant deeds, and after his death became far famed. The name of the hero in the Anglo-Saxon story is the same as that of his father in the German
story; but such a slight discrepancy is not to be wondered at, in view of the fact that no written form of the legend was in existence, and minstrels were prone to vary their songs at will. The name of Sinfjötli (the son of Sigmund and Signy in the Völsungasaga) is also found in Beowulf; and Gibich, Attila, and Gunther, three well-known characters of the German legend, appear in Anglo-Saxon poems as Gífica, Aetla, and Gúþhere, the last name being a direct translation of the Middle High German word "Gunther".

A comparison of the Siegfriedsage with the Iliad also shows interesting similarities, although Goethe has condemned the attempt as a "pernicious endeavor." In the large, the two stories show some points of resemblance; for each accompanies the life of its nation through all the stages in its advancing civilization, and is the expression of the thoughts and emotions of a young and vigorous people overrunning an older, finer, and more stable nation, and gradually absorbing the civilization of the conquered people. There is also some similarity in detail; for example, the hero of each was invulnerable except for one small spot on his body, and met his death as a result of the betrayal of that fact.

The progress of civilization and the development of national life have left their traces upon the original conception of the character of Siegfried, and have brought about the introduction of new incidents and characters not wholly consistent with the old forms. As the old elements have faded and disappeared, they have been replaced in each nation by new ones characteristic of that particular civilization, and the result has been the development of as many separate versions as there were civilizations possessing a knowledge of the original version. In Scandinavia the story became permeated with the spirit of the Viking period, and came into closest relation with the old stories of the gods. There
is a tendency throughout the northern versions to trace the genealogies of the main characters back to the gods as ancestors, while the German version shows no such characteristic. There is no evidence of Christianity in the northern version, which indicates that the story was carried to the Norsemen before the influence of Christianity had made any considerable impression upon the German form. In the German versions, particularly the Nibelungenlied, the influence of medieval court civilization is easily traceable, and Christianity and knighthood have wrought marvelous changes in the rugged characters of the medieval epic. The Siegfried of the Nibelungenlied, painted in the knightly colors of the Hohenstaufen period, is hardly to be recognized as the hero of the Seyfriedslied, who captured lions and hung by their tails, or the Sivard of the old Danish ballads, who tore up an oak and stuck it into his girdle. The gentle lover of Kriemhilde is, however, the same stalwart, invincible warrior as the old heroes, but softened and made courtly in character by later narrators, who were under the influence of the changed conception of life which knighthood and Christianity brought with them.

Peculiar to the German legend is the introduction of the two Christian characters, Margrave Rüdiger of Bechlarn and Dietrich von Bern; the funeral ceremony of Siegfried; the concern of Kriemhilde and her brothers over the advisability of her marrying a heathen; and her determination to have her son baptized, although his father was not a Christian. All these and many others are elements which have no place in the original story, but have developed with the spread of Christianity over Europe. Beneath them there can still be traced the old Germanic conception of morality and "Treue" (best personified in Hagen), which was a curious blending of absolute and unswerving loyalty to a master and the basest of treachery to an enemy. The chris-
tian church is purley external, and the idea of a Supreme Being which controls the destinies of men is lacking.

In spite of the variations resulting from differences in locality, civilization, and so on, the legend in all of its versions is composed of three essential elements: the story of Siegfried's origin and youth, the Burgundensage, and a connecting link of human interests which weaves the first two elements together into a continuous narrative. The question of how much of the Siegfriedsage is based upon historical fact and how much is pure invention, has been hotly contested by investigators for many years; and a study of the arguments and evidence produced by the defenders of different theories in support of their contentions leads to many interesting discoveries.
II

History of Legend.

The fact that the Siegfriedsage existed so long before it was put into written form makes the determination of the age of the story a difficult problem. We have evidence that Gregory of Tours, in the sixth century, knew of "Siegfried, der Held von den Niederlanden", and the existence in the same century of certain names closely resembling those of the characters of the story supports the belief in a widespread knowledge of the Saga among the people at that time. In the "Lex Burgundionum", Gundobald, who died in 516, mentioned as ancestors the following four kings: Gibica, Godomar (Guttorm in the northern version), Gislahari, and Gundahari (Gunnar in the northern version). These names, in slightly different form, are familiar to all who know the Siegfriedsage, and their occurrence at this time is of no small significance in tracing the history of the legend. The oldest literary record which proves the early knowledge of the tradition in Germany is the Waltharilied, written in the tenth century. This was a Latin poem based on an old Germanic alliterative hero-song, long since lost. In it appear such familiar figures as Attila, Hageno Trojanus, Gibicho (a Frankish king ruling at Worms), and his son Guntharius. At the end of the twelfth century the Nibelungenlied appeared, and the thirteenth century produced the Klage, the Seyfriedslied, the Thidreksage, the Eddas and the Völlungasaga, all of which will be considered later. In "Biterolf" and the "Rosengarten zu Worms", two other German poems of the thirteenth century, references are made to the Saga, and echoes of it were heard at the same time in the songs of the Faröe Islands and the Danish island of Hven.

It is generally conceded that the legend was carried to the northern lands in the eighth century; for by a careful study of word for-
mations existing in the northern versions, it has been shown that the Saga must have been known in the North before the ninth century, and yet we have no traces of it before the eighth. The close resemblances to the German Saga of parts of Widsið and Beowulf, two of the earliest Anglo-Saxon poems, make it seem reasonable to assume that the story was carried to England during the period of the invasion, at least before the close of the sixth century.

All the important sources of the legend as yet discovered may be divided into two general groups, the Norse and the German.* The important sources for the Norse version are the Older or Lieder-Edda, the Younger or Snorra-Edda, and the Völsungasaga. These versions of the legend are considered more nearly the pure preservations of the original form than are the German, perhaps for the reason that Christianity in the North did not make such efforts to wipe out the old pagan traditions as it did in Germany. In 1643 Brynjulf Sveinson, an Icelandic bishop, found a thirteenth century manuscript containing a collection of songs in honor of gods and heroes. Thinking he had found the source of the Snorra-Edda, he gave the collection the name "Older Edda", and recognized as the author the Icelandic scholar Saemund Sigfusson who died in 1133. Later his entire assumption was proved to be false; but the name "Edda", once applied to the collection, was destined to last, and the songs have been called the Older Edda to the present day.

This collection contains thirty-five separate songs, all written for the first time in the thirteenth century, although varying in age from the ninth to the twelfth century, and originating in all regions where the Norwegian language was known. The songs of the Older Edda are not folksongs in the proper sense of the word, for in the form

* See Jiriczek's "Die Deutsche Heldensage".
in which they were discovered they were undoubtedly the work of individual poets. While Sveinson's assertions as to their authorship have been disproved, no satisfactory suggestions have been made as to the real author or authors; and we know positively, only this; that they are a collection of old Norse poems, of which many have been forever lost; and that they give us a fairly complete picture of Norse mythology, an idea of the ethics and ideals of the period, and an account, in many places disconnected, of the legendary heroes of the race. Breaks in the continuity of the stories are supplied by prose interpolations, showing that the original poems contained verses which have since been forgotten. Only three of the twenty heroic songs are based upon themes of northern origin, all the rest being of Germanic origin (one Wielandlied, two songs from the Ermanrichsage, and fourteen poems of the Nibelungen circle.)

The authorship of the Snorra-Edda is regarded as a settled fact, investigators unanimously attributing it to Snorri Sturluson (1179-1241), who on the strength of his political and literary work might well be called the most talented man in the history of Iceland.*

The Snorra-Edda is a prose text book of poetics, an "Ars Poetica", and was recognized as an authority by many later Icelandic poets. The form in which it has reached us is considerably changed from the original; but as Snorri Sturluson wrote it, it was arranged in three parts: the "Gylfaginning," a compendium of the old mythology, fast dying out; the "Skáldsksaparmál", a dictionary of poetical expressions; and the "Háttatal", a series of poems so constructed as to exemplify the use and kinds of meter. The meaning of the word "Edda" is obscure, although various explanations have been offered. The old idea that

* F. Carpenter's "The Eddas"- Library of World's Best Literature, vol. XIII.
the word meant "Great-grandmother" (a definition which can still be found in many dictionaries) is not inappropriate, but probably has no foundation. Some investigators contend that the word means simply "the art of poetry" or "poetics", while others suggest that it may possibly mean "Bock of Oddi."

The third of the northern sources, the Völsungasaga, is a prose story of the fates of the whole tribe of the Völsungen, founded particularly on the songs of the Edda, of which the author evidently had more knowledge than we have today. It was written as a section of a greater Saga, which includes the legendary story of the Danish Viking leader Ragnar Lodbrók and his sons. Its appearance in Norway earlier than in Iceland may account for the author's tendency to trace the genealogy of the Norwegian royal house to the Völsungen.

Among the German versions, the most important sources in High German are the Nibelungenlied, the Klage, and the Seyfriedslied; and in Low German, the Thidreksaga and the Kaempeviser, medieval Danish ballads used as dance music. The Nibelungenlied, written at the end of the twelfth century, is a poem of thirty-eight sections, telling in the first half the story of the youth Siegfried, his marriage to Kriemhilde, his winning of the fierce Brünhild for Gunther, and his death through the treachery of Hagen; and in the Second half the marriage of Siegfried's widow to Etzel, the king of the Huns, and her terrible revenge upon the murderers of her husband. There are thirty or more manuscripts of the Nibelungenlied, but only three are of any great importance.

These are:

A- In Munich, copied near the end of the thirteenth century

* See F.E. Sandbach's "Nibelungenlied".
by at least two hands;
E- (text often termed the Vulgate), in St. Gallen, copied by three hands, about the middle of the thirteenth century; and
C- in Donauesschingen, belonging to the first half of the thirteenth century.

All three of these manuscripts contain the "Klage", but in C about one hundred and forty stanzas of the Nibelungenlied itself are missing. In spite of this fact, C has the longest text, and A the shortest. C closes with the words "Das ist der Nibelunge liet", while A and B belong to the group of manuscripts closing with "Das ist der Nibelung not." The first discovery of a Nibelungenlied manuscript was made in 1755, and at first it was not recognized as a version of the old Germanic Heldensage.

The Klage is a sort of sequel to the Nibelungenlied, and was composed in couplets about 1190. It carries the story of the Nibelungenlied on to include the lamentation over the slain warriors at both Etzel's court and Gunther's, and the departure of Hildebrand and Dietrich von Bern to their own country. It is found in many manuscripts of the Nibelungenlied, but is of no great value to the legend as a whole. The Seyfriedslied, probably composed in the thirteenth century, although we have no written record until three hundred years later, is a poem of one hundred and seventy-nine strophes, the first fifteen of which tell the story of a wild and powerful youth, brought up in a forest by a poor blacksmith. The rest of the poem deals with a dragon's capture of Kriemhilde, the daughter of Gibich, king at Worms, her rescue by Seyfried, and their marriage. In general form this poem agrees with the Nibelungenlied, but the capture of Kriemhilde by the dragon is found only in the Seyfriedslied.

The Thidreksaga is really a Norwegian poem, composed about the
year 1350, by a man whose name has been forgotten. Is is a story of Dietrich von Bern and his heroes, but into it is woven all the German legendary lore of which the author had any knowledge. It is based partly on old epic songs carried by wandering minstrels and partly upon the narratives of Germans of Münster and Bremen. The Kaempeviser are Danish ballads, but can be traced back in many instances to North-German songs, and among them are three songs which handle the theme of Kriemhilde's revenge. They do not, however, offer any very important contributions to the legend.

When Germany entered into the disastrous and demoralizing struggles of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, her national pride sank to its lowest ebb, and for almost three centuries her national epic lay in total oblivion. A crushed and shattered people, reduced to one-fourth their former number, and living in a land devastated by incessant wars, could find little pleasure in looking back upon the glories and ambitions of the past; and in the literature of the sixteenth century there is no mention of the Siegfriedsage, except by a few obscure historians who used the Nibelungenlied as a historical document.*

The Emperor Maximilian, who had a manuscript of the Nibelungenlied made, was the last person who took any apparent interest in the story. During the Thirty Years' War in the seventeenth century, it was so completely forgotten that Opitz, the literary dictator of that day, knew nothing of it except what he had learned from Lazius, an Austrian scholar who had quoted some strophes from the Nibelungenlied in his "History of the Migrations".

As late as the middle of the eighteenth century literary authorities were ignorant of the existence of the legend; and when in 1755

* See Genung's "Nibelungenlied"-Library of World's Best Literature, Vol. XXVII.
the Swiss physician Obereit found a manuscript of the Nibelungenlied at the Castle of Hohenems, it created no excitement at all in the literary world. Herder, Lessing, Klopstock, Wieland and others most interested in the folk-lore of Germany gave it only a casual glance, and throughout the country it was treated as a curiosity rather than as a valuable discovery. In 1757 the Swiss Professor Bodmer published the second part and the Klage, under the title "Kriemhilde's Revenge". After two other manuscripts had been discovered, C. H. Myller of Berlin published a complete edition of the Nibelungenlied in 1783. Frederick the Great frankly pronounced it "wretched stuff", and Goethe did not take the trouble to read the copy which Myller sent to him.

The awakening of interest in the early nineteenth century is due primarily to the work of the Romanticists. In 1802 and 1803 the poem was treated in detail by A. W. von der Schlegel in a series of lectures, which, however, were not printed. Von der Hagen heard Schlegel's discussions, and immediately began a translation of the poem, which he published in 1807. In 1810 a critical edition came out; in 1816 and 1820 other editions appeared; and in 1824 a second edition of Hagen's translation was printed with explanatory notes. Languid curiosity soon grew into active interest, and an increasing desire to seek the origins, history, and meaning of the Siegfriedsage was felt among literary circles. Karl Lachmann, in his critical edition of 1826, blazed the trail into a wilderness of scientific investigation, which was for many years only a confused mass of argument, out of which each side selected whatever seemed favorable to its contentions, and rejected all the rest. The questions of authorship and the authenticity of the various manuscripts were most bitterly contested, and all manner of impossible authors suggested. Lachmann stood firmly for the "Liedertheorie", the idea of many authors, and recognized A as the authentic manuscript; while Holtzmann and Zarncke believed in the
unity of the poem, and defended the authenticity of manuscript C. Since these controversies caused intensive investigation, and brought to light much valuable information which might otherwise have been neglected, they have already proved their worth, even if no agreement is reached upon the disputed points.
III
The Two Versions.

Neither the northern nor the German version can be found in its entirety in any single source, but the structure must be built up out of the several sources mentioned before, by selecting the most complete account of each element of the Saga, from whatever source may contain it. Professor O. L. Jiriczek, in his excellent construction of the northern version as a unit, took the story of the hoard from the Edda song Reginsmál; the explanation of Sigurd's lineage from the Völsungasaga; his youth, and his experience with the "schlafende Jungfrau" from the Edda songs Reginsmál, Fáfnismál, and Sigdrifumál; his murder from the "Kurzes Sigurdlied"; and the destruction of the Burgundians from the Edda song Atlakvipa. A brief outline of the northern version, according to Jiriczek's plan of construction, is as follows:

The Gods Odin, Hoenir, and Loki in their wanderings through the world come upon a waterfall in which the dwarf Andvari in the figure of a pike is fishing for food. Otr, the son of Hreidmar, in the form of an otter, is devouring a salmon. Loki kills Otr with a stone, and skins him. The same night the gods seek lodging with Otr's father Hreidmar, who, with his sons Fafnir and Regin, immediately recognizes Otr's skin, and demands of the Gods as atonement that they fill and cover it with gold. Loki is sent out to procure the gold, and catches the dwarf Andvari in a net, demanding all his gold as the price of his release. Andvari gives him all the gold except a magic ring, which has the power of producing more gold, but Loki takes the ring as well. Andvari in his wrath curses the gold, and predicts destruction for every future possessor. When Odin presents the gold to Hreidmar, he covers a protruding hair with the ring, thus trans-
ferring the curse to Hreidmar. Both sons demand a share in the treasure; and when their father refuses, Fafnir kills him, takes the gold, and denies his brother any share. In the form of a dragon he lies upon the Gnitaheide and protects his treasure, while Regin plans revenge.

King Völsung, a descendant of Odin, has a son Sigmund and a daughter Signy. He gives Signy against her will to Siggeir of Gautland. In the midst of the wedding feast a mysterious figure enters, thrusts a sword into a tree, and promises it as a gift to the one who can pull it out. Sigmund alone is able to do it, and his refusal to give the sword to Siggeir causes the latter to depart in anger, planning vengeance. Signy follows, with grave forebodings of evil. At Siggeir's invitation, Völsung and his sons go to Gautland, in spite of Signy's warnings. Völsung and his followers are killed, but his ten sons are captured and left in the wood to be eaten by Siggeir's mother, a wolf. With Signy's aid, Sigmund overcomes the wolf and escapes, to live alone in the forest for many years. Neither of Signy's children proves able to act as avenger of his grandfather, and Sigmund kills them both at Signy's request. Sinfjötli; a son of Sigmund and Signy, stands the test of bravery by kneading into dough a bag of flour containing an adder, and the time seems ripe for revenge. While hiding in the king's hall, Sigmund and Sinfjötli are captured and buried alive; but Signy gives them Sigmund's sword, and they cut their way through the stone, and set fire to Siggeir's palace at night. Signy refuses to flee with them, preferring to die with the man with whom she did not want to live. Sigmund returns to his home and marries Borghild, who poisons her stepson Sinfjötli. Sigmund then divorces Borghild and marries Hjördis. Later his land is overcome by Lyngvi, son of Hunding, and Sigmund falls in battle.
Hjördis finds him, but he will not allow her to bind his wounds, saying that Odin wills his death. He tells her to have the fragments of his sword forged into a new sword; for she will have a son who will wield it, and be famous so long as the world lasts. Hjördis is captured by the Vikings, and becomes the wife of Alf, the son of the Danish king. The wonderful child is born as predicted, and is called Sigurd.

The boy Sigurd is cared for at Alf's court by the dwarf Regin, the brother of the dragon Fafnir. Regin forges Sigmund's sword into a new one so sharp that it will cut a strand of wool in the water, and strong enough to shatter an anvil. The dwarf tries to incite Sigurd to kill Fafnir, but he will not consider it until after he has conquered the sons of Hunding, and avenged his father's murder. Then he goes with Regin to the Gnitaheide, digs a pit in the path of the dragon and conceals himself in it, piercing the heart of the monster as he passes over the pit. The dying Fafnir warns Sigurd that the treasure will bring him destruction, and that Regin is planning to injure him. Sigurd cooks the heart of the dragon, and in testing it burns his finger and thrusts it into his mouth. Immediately he understands the language of the birds, who warn him of Regin's treachery. He springs upon Regin and murders him. The birds advise him to take the treasure, which he does. They also tell him of a sleeping maiden on a high rock, surrounded by fire, who is awaiting her deliverer. Sigurd rushes through the flames, removes the armor from the sleeping maiden, and thus awakens her. She tells him that Odin has put her to sleep, and decreed that she shall never enter battle again, but become the wife of a human. She prophesies misfortune in Sigurd's future and tries to warn him against it, but admits that he is destined to live a very short life. They profess
their love for each other, and become engaged.

They are not destined to marry, however, for Sigurd chances to visit Högni and Gunnar, the sons of king Gjuki on the Rhine. They take an oath of friendship, and Sigurd marries Gudrun, the daughter of Gjuki (after having taken unawares a magic potion prepared by Grimhild, Gudrun's mother, to make him forget his former sweetheart). Gunnar desires to win Brynhild for his wife, but is unable to go through the flames. Sigurd changes persons with Gunnar and wins the maiden for him. But Brynhild loves Sigurd, and is constantly jealous of Gudrun. A quarrel between the two queens over which should stand above the other while bathing in a stream, leads Gudrun to taunt Brynhild with the facts of her wooing. Brynhild is furious, and demands that Gunnar murder Sigurd. He consults with Högni; and as neither is willing to break the oath of fidelity, they persuade Guttorm, their half brother, to do the deed. He murders Sigurd in bed, but the dying hero hurls his sword at the youth and kills him instantly. Gudrun's wild lamentations rouse the whole court. Brynhild laughs wickedly, and then commits suicide, requesting that she and Sigurd be buried side by side, never to be parted again.

After the death of Sigurd, Atli, the king of the Huns*, sues for Gudrun's hand. She foresees evil, and hesitates, but finally yields to the advice of her mother and brothers, and marries him. Atli desires to gain possession of the treasure which the Gjukungen own after Sigurd's death, and treacherously invites Gunnar to visit him, promising him precious gifts. Gudrun sends him a ring wound with a wolf's hair as a warning against the journey; but Gunnar determines to go, in spite of Högni's advice to the contrary. When the princes reach Atli's court Gudrun rushes to them, begging them to get their

*Later northern version calls him Brynhild's brother.
troops together if they wish to save themselves. But it is too late for any defense to be possible, and they are all overpowered and imprisoned. Atli demands of Gunnar the whereabouts of the hoard, but he refuses to disclose his secret, even when Högni’s heart is presented before him. Atli casts him into a dungeon of vipers; but Gunnar meets death without flinching, and the secret of the hoard is forever lost. Atli returns to his court, where a great feast is held. When he asks for his children, he is coolly informed by his wife that he has just eaten their hearts and drunk their blood in his wine. Atli, senseless and completely intoxicated, is carried off to bed, where he is murdered by his wife in revenge for her brothers’ death. The castle bursts into flames, and all perish together.

The German version may be obtained almost entirely from the Nibelungenlied, except for the story of Siegfried’s youth, which is given only a very brief treatment, and is entirely inconsistent with the accounts in all the other German sources. The Seyfriedslied and the Thidreksage both contain complete accounts of Siegfried’s early days, the one contained in the Seyfriedslied being perhaps the better. The following is a brief outline of the German version, as taken from the Seyfriedslied and the Nibelungenlied:

Sigmund, a powerful king of the Netherlands, has a son Seyfried, who is so incorrigible that he sends him out into the world to shift for himself. The youth becomes apprenticed to a blacksmith; but does so much damage in his wild rages that the poor smith sends him into a forest where a dragon is known to dwell, hoping that he will be destroyed. Seyfried kills the dragon, as well as many other monsters, and bathes his body with their molten scales, thus becoming invulnerable except for one spot between his shoulders, where he is destined later to receive his deathwound. He finds the fatal hoard of the
dwarf Nybling in a cave.

Gybi, king at Worms on the Rhine, has three sons, Hagen, Gunther, and Gernot, and a daughter Kriemhilde. A dragon kidnap the maiden and holds her captive on a high rock. Seyfried, wandering through the forest, meets Eugel, king of the dwarfs, who tells him of the dragon and the captive maid. Seyfried resolves to free her, and overcomes Kuperan, who has the key to the rock. With a sword which Kuperan gives him, he kills the dragon, and departs with the maiden, to be married at Gybi's court. He buries his treasure in the Rhine, because Eugel has prophesied an early death for him. The brothers of Kriemhilde are jealous of his power, and Hagen treacherously kills him in the Ottenwald.

(Thus the Seyfriedalied disposes of the hero very shortly, and the rest of the story must be taken from the Nibelungenlied. The Nibelungenlied version of Siegfried's origin differs from the above story in several points: Hagen was the vassal of Gunther, instead of the brother; Sigfried was brought up at his father's court, and upon hearing of Kriemhilde's wonderful beauty, went to her father's court and served him as a vassal for a year in order to win her. No mention is made of Kriemhilde's capture by a dragon; and Siegfried won the hoard, not from a dragon, but from the Nibelung dwarfs.)

While serving as vassal at the court at Worms, Siegfried accompanies Gunther on a journey to "Island" to win the fiery warrior-maiden Brünhild for his wife. Siegfried makes himself invisible by means of his Tarnkappe, a magic cloak, and performing the feats demanded of Gunther, overcomes the Jungfrau. She goes back with them to Worms, and becomes the wife of Gunther on the same day that Siegfried marries Kriemhilde. She cannot understand why a vassal should be permitted to marry the king's daughter, but Gunther refuses to
explain. In her wrath she overpowers him, binds him, and hangs him on a nail. Gunther confesses him predicament to Siegfried; and the latter, making use of his Tarnkappe again, overcomes the bride and takes away her girdle, the secret of her great strength. He gives the girdle, together with a ring of Brünhild's to his wife. Siegfried presently departs with his wife for his native land, where he succeeds his father on the throne.

Ten years later he is invited by Gunther to come with his following to a festive celebration at the court at Worms. For ten days everything proceeds smoothly, but on the eleventh, while the two queens are seated together watching the games, Kriemhilde unwisely boasts of her husband's wonderful powers. The haughty Brünhild reminds her that after all he is only Gunther's vassal, and a violent quarrel ensues. The next day they carry it on into a dispute over which shall precede the other into the church. Kriemhilde becomes so wild with rage that she loses all discretion, and reproaches Brünhild in insulting terms, producing the ring and girdle as proofs of her statements. Brünhild is inconsolable, and demands Siegfried's death. Gunther, knowing all the facts in the case, is loath to have him killed; but Hagen determines to avenge his queen, and soon wins over the weak-willed king to his point of view. False messengers are sent to the court to announce war with Liudeger and Liudegast, two kings against whom Siegfried has previously led Gunther's army. Kriemhilde, in her anxiety over Siegfried's safety, tells Hagen of the vulnerable spot between her husband's shoulders, and gains Hagen's promise to watch it. She sews a cross on his garment, so that Hagen can locate the spot. Before the warriors have completed their preparations for departure, news of peace is brought to the court, and a hunt is substituted for the expected battle. Siegfried excels in
prowess, and wins the praise of all. When they seat themselves for
the repast, the wine is found to be lacking, and Hagen suggests that
they race to the nearest brook for water. Siegfried wins the race,
but waits for Gunther to drink first. In the meantime Hagen stealth-
ily removes the sword which Siegfried has rested against a tree, and
as the hero bends over the water he thrusts the sword through the
cross on his garment and into his heart. Siegfried strikes Hagen
with his shield, the only available weapon, but becomes weak and
faint, and soon dies. He begs Gunther to protect Kriemhilde, if he
has any honor left in him, and tells the Burgundians that in killing
him they have wrought their own destruction. Hagen shows no remorse,
only relief that Siegfried is out of the way. The body is carried
back to the court at night, and deposited before the door of Kriem-
hilde's bedchamber, where a servant finds it early the next morning.
Kriemhilde's grief is heartrending, and she holds an elaborate Christ-
ian burial service. As Hagen approaches the corpse, the wounds open
and bleed afresh, showing the widow who the real murderer is. She
breaks off all relations with Hagen and Gunther, but finally becomes
reconciled to her brother. The merciless Hagen covets the Nibelungen
treasure, and, through Gunther, persuades Kriemhilde to have it
brought to Worms. Kriemhilde's great generosity in bestowing her
treasure so lavishly upon the people arouses Hagen's anxiety lest she
may obtain a strong following; and he buries the whole treasure in
the Rhine, sharing the secret of its whereabouts only with Gunther.
Kriemhilde now has two causes for seeking revenge.

After thirteen years of widowhood, Kriemhilde is approached by
the embassies of Etzel, king of the Huns, with an offer of marriage.
At first she refuses even to consider it; but upon being assured by
Rüdiger, Etzel's representative, that any wrongs which have ever been
done her will be avenged, she becomes interested at once. Hagen opposes the marriage, fearing Kriemhilde's revenge for the murder of Siegfried; but the wedding takes place, and Kriemhilde becomes queen of the Huns. She has a son, who is called Ortlieb, and has him christened in the Christian faith. After thirteen more years she persuades Etzel to invite Gunther and his men to visit the court at Wien; and they come, in spite of Hagen's warning that it is their death journey. On the way they encounter some water nymphs who prophesy their destruction, telling them that only the chaplain will escape. Eckewart and Dietrich von Bern also warn them of the dangers of the journey. Etzel, innocent of the great plot, receives them graciously; but Kriemhilde reproaches Hagen with Siegfried's death. The defiant Hagen remains seated before the queen, with Siegfried's own sword across his knees! The guests are given a broad hall in which to sleep; and during the night a band of Huns sent by Kriemhilde creep stealthily up, but are frightened away when they find the hall guarded. The next morning Hagen and his men attend mass fully armed. Kriemhilde fails to persuade Dietrich to help her; but Blödelin, Etzel's brother, consents to lead the Huns against the Burgundians. As he approaches Dankwart the Marshall, the Burgundian strikes off his head, and the fearful carnage begins. The head of Ortlieb is cut off, and falls into his mother's lap. Dietrich von Bern and Rüdiger are allowed to leave the hall unharmed, with the king and queen. The other Huns are murdered, and their bodies thrown out the doors. Kriemhilde offers a rich reward to any man who will bring her Hagen's head; but while many attempt to kill him, no one succeeds. Kriemhilde then demands that the Burgundians surrender Hagen, but they refuse. She has the hall set on fire; but the Burgundians ward off the falling brands with their shields, and extinguish them in the blood of their dead.
The next morning there are still six hundred Burgundians left, to Kriemhilde's great surprise. Rüdiger, torn between his friendship for the Burgundians and his loyalty to Etzel and Kriemhilde, finally takes up his weapons in defense of the Huns, and soon falls with all his men. The loud wailing which arises over his destruction reaches the ears of Dietrich von Bern, and he sends Hildebrand to inquire who has been killed. Hildebrand and all his men become involved in the struggle; and finally only Gunther, Hagen, and Hildebrand remain alive. Hildebrand, seriously wounded, reports to Dietrich the loss of all his men; and the griefstricken king asks Gunther and Hagen to surrender, promising them safe conduct home. They refuse, and he fights with Hagen, wounds him, and presents him, bound hand and foot, to Kriemhilde. He overcomes Gunther also and delivers him to the queen, on condition that the lives of both captives are to be spared. Kriemhilde offers Hagen his life if he will disclose the hiding place of the Nibelungen hoard, but he refuses to tell so long as his master lives. Kriemhilde has the head of Gunther presented to him, but still Hagen refuses, and she kills him with Siegfried's sword. The aged Hildebrand, enraged that a woman should murder such a brave warrior, murders Kriemhilde, and so the tragic story ends. The Klage goes on to tell of the lamentation over the dead, but is not of sufficient importance to be narrated here.

In the brief representation of the two versions as outlined above, it will be noticed that the general trend of the story is the same in both, but that there are some noticeable differences in plot as well as in general atmosphere. The Seyfriedslied story of Siegfried's youth is very similar to the northern version, but the Nibelungenlied's conception of him as a carefully nurtured child of the court has no parallel anywhere in the northern stories. In both versions
he is a man of extraordinary strength and courage, and possessed with almost absolute invulnerability; but there is a tendency in the Nibelungenlied to soften his character and make it gentler, as is evident in the accounts of his wooing of Kriemhilde.

A sword story appears in every version, differing in details, but always fundamentally the same. The killing of the dragon is mentioned in both versions; but the northern legends tell of the dragon killing and the winning of the hoard as related incidents, while the Nibelungenlied mentions them as entirely separate occurrences. The Fafnir story is not known at all in the German version, and the betrothal of Siegfried and Brünhild is mentioned only in the Völsungasaga. In all German forms of the legend Hagen appears as the murderer of Siegfried; but the northern version does not hold consistently to that representation. Guttorm, the half brother of Gunther, is named as the murderer in the short Sigurdlied. The place of the murder is described by German traditions as a forest just across the Rhine from Worms, while the Norse legend has the murder take place in Siegfried's bedchamber. There are discrepancies and inconsistencies within each version; for instances, in the northern form of the Saga, Brünhild's revenge is in some cases the result of her hopeless love for Siegfried, and in others, of her wrath over having been deceived. As mentioned before, there are within the German form two distinctly different accounts of Siegfried's early life, although both stories are agreed upon his origin.

In the Norse version Brünhild appears as the sister of Attila, a situation not to be reconciled with the German conception of her story. There is considerable evidence of shifting of characters and names in the two representations; for instance, the German Kriemhilde is the Gudrun, and her mother Uote the Grimhild, of the northern
version. Hagen of the German legend is the vassal of Gunther, while in the Norse version he is the brother of Gunnar. Brünhild commits suicide after Siegfried's death, according to the short Sigurdlied; but in the Nibelungenlied she merely drops out of the story, and is mentioned only in an unimportant connection in the account of Rüdiger's visit to the court at Worms. The only reason given by the German story for Gunther's consent to Siegfried's murder is the pressure brought to bear upon him by Hagen and Brünhild, in their insatiable thirst for revenge; but the northern form furnishes as an additional motive his desire to gain possession of the hoard.

There are many other minor points upon which the two versions do not agree, but the largest and most important difference lies in the motives for Kriemhilde's revenge. In the German Saga she is avenging her husband's death upon her brothers, but the Norse version pictures her as avenging the death of her brothers upon Attila. She is equally fiendish and relentless in both instances; and her character throughout is portrayed in very much the same way in the two forms of the legend, showing her transformation from a gentle, timid maiden to a noble, loving wife, and finally to a raging "Teufelsweib", as she is treacherously robbed of everything worth while that life holds for her. The general tone of the two versions shows clearly the differences in civilization of the two lands in which they have grown up. Throughout the Norse form the spirit of the "Gottersage" prevails, and the intervention of the Gods in the determination of human destinies is the dominant tone. In the German forms the influence of Christianity has made itself felt, and no attempt is made to trace Siegfried's ancestry to the Gods. Mythology and the spirit of prophecy pervade the Norse legends, while the whole atmosphere of the German story contains the idea of faithfulness, the reverential honoring
of women, and the spirit of Christianity, mingled with a curious fatalism, which is especially evidenced in the character of Hagen.
IV

Origin of the Legend.

The questions of the origin of the legend have been in some measure settled, but many points are still being hotly debated. There seems to be no doubt in the minds of investigators that it is of German origin, and bears the historical stamp of the migration period; but whether it came from the Franks or the Burgundians is not so certain. Ziriczek, Sandbach, and others hold the opinion that it originated among the Rhine-Franks about the end of the fifth century, and spread from there throughout Germany and into other lands*. The boundary between historical fact and mythological phantasy is not sharply marked, and some enthusiasts have attempted to explain the whole legend upon the basis of mythology. This theory can be exploded easily with regard to the last half of the story; for historical foundations for the story of the destruction of the Burgundians are too evident to leave room for argument. A common explanation for the early part of Siegfried's life, including the finding and awakening of Brünhild, and his final destruction, regard the accounts as based on a myth representing the phenomena of nature throughout the course of a day or a year.** Siegfried is the personification of Day, slaying the Mist-dragons of the morning, and awakening the Sun (Brünhild). His death at the hands of his enemies represents the approach of night. The same cycle can be enlarged to represent the course of the seasons. It is hardly reasonable to assume that a people in such an early stage of civilization would have worked out so complete a legend to typify the seasons; it would be just as likely that the pure pleasure of the phantasy had been their inspiration.

*Compare Jiriczek's "Die Germanische Heldensage"—"Allgemeine Einleitung".
**Sandbach's "Nibelungenlied"—page 27.
The Norse stories of Siegfried undoubtedly bear a close resemblance to some of the old god-myths, and consequently Siegfried has been accepted by many as representing an incarnate god; but it is entirely possible for the legend to have been influenced by prevailing myths without having originated from them. The latter view seems the more reasonable one, in the face of other evidence which will be considered later. Another interpretation, the "Märchentheorie", attempts to show that the story is founded on fairy tales. Panzer is the chief advocate of this theory, and calls attention to the similarity between the Sage and certain "Märchen" he has found. Granting the similarity, how is it to be proved which influenced the other, since the exact date of the origin of neither can be determined? There is much phantastical and märchen-like material used, such as the Tarnkappe, the ring, and the wonderful sword, as well as the dragons, the prophetic birds, etc.; but the spread of fairy tales along with the legend might easily have resulted in the introduction of such elements.

Let us turn from the consideration of a possible mythological basis to the more tangible historical foundations. Gundicarius, the king of the Burgundians, whose historical existence is proved by a passage in the "Lex Burgundionum", is very probably the Gunther of the Nibelungenlied; for the Latin name is almost the exact form of the old German word Gundahari. Etzel and Atli are the historical Attila, although the mild, generous, and high-minded Etzel of the Nibelungenlied is hardly an accurate portrayal of the Hun as we know him in history. Dietrich von Bern is Theoderic the Great; and since he is said to have been driven from his kingdom in Lombardy by Odoacer, his presence at the court of the Huns would not be surprising; although he could not have been the guest of Attila, for he was born after Attila's death.
There are a number of other minor characters which have been identified more or less certainly with historical personages, but the real contention is over the question of whether or not Siegfried, the youth "mit den blitzenden hellen Augen", is the same person as Arminius, the "Savior of the German people." There has been much opposition to this theory, many authorities rejecting it utterly; but even a brief consideration of certain points advanced by its advocates will show that the assumption is far from unreasonable. The legendary Siegfried is a remarkable youth, distinguished in battle, who is finally murdered by his relatives for the possession of his wealth.

What parallel features does the story of Arminius offer? In the first place, the descriptions which the Roman writers have left of Arminius, with his large, handsome figure and his bold, gleaming eyes, are much like those of Siegfried. His prowess in battle was like that of the valiant conqueror of Liudger and Liudegast; and finally, his death through the treachery of his relatives is very much like that of Siegfried at the hands of Kriemhilde's brother. His Roman name is due to the fact that he distinguished himself in the Roman military service, where he learned Roman methods of warfare, and incidentally became aware of Roman intentions upon German territory. It is very likely that his German name, if not Siegfried, was something closely akin to it; for Velleius the Roman chronicler gives his father's name as Segimerus, that of one of his uncles as Segestes, and other family names as Segimundus and Segithancus. Upon the defeat of Varus in the Teutoburger Wald, Arminius undoubtedly won great treasures; for relics recently unearthed in Germany have borne witness to the richness of Varus' whole equipment; and it was for the possession of this treasure that Arminius was murdered, presumably by his brothers-in-law. In the face of these striking similarities, why
reject the theory that the hero of the national epic represents the hero of the nation?

The story of the tragic fate of the Burgundians is clearly historical; for in the year 437 A.D. Gundicar, with all his people, fell in battle against the Huns, although Attila probably did not witness their slaughter. The other details can be obtained from any history, and are too familiar to need repition here. The story of Attila's marriage to a German girl "Ildico", and his mysterious death, supposedly at the hands of his wife, (although he is reported to have died of hemorrhage), gave ample foundation for the later story of Kriemhilde's revenge. His wife Helche is no doubt his historical wife Kerka.

After the revival of interest in the Nibelungenlied, there arose the question "Nibelungenlied or Nibelungenlieder?" Lachimann pointed out the discrepancies in the existing form of the poem, and contended that such wide variations in version could not exist if the legend had once been a unified whole. He considered the songs of the Nibelungen twenty independent lays, loosely strung together by the first compiler; and he held that the story was originally only a floating mass of legend, which the early singers and writers put together as suited their fancy. He has had many supporters in his theory, as Müllenhoff, Muth, Henning and others. Prominent among those who have defended the unity of the poem are Holtzmann, Zarncke, and Pfeiffer. Pfeiffer tried to prove that Kürenberger of the thirteenth century was the sole author, chiefly on the strength of the argument that the Nibelungen strophe form was the same as some of the lyrics attributed to Kürenberger, and that in the thirteenth century the originator of a strophe form became its exclusive owner. The most generally accepted theory now is that some single genius collected
and shaped the legends of his country into one masterful song. His identity remains unknown, and perhaps will remain so forever; but, as Carlyle has expressed it, "what good were it that the four or five letters composing his name could be printed and pronounced with absolute certainty? All that was mortal in him is gone, and only the voice he uttered, in virtue of its inspired gift, yet lives and will live".

V

Conclusion.

In spite of all the foreign elements which have entered into the Siegfriedsage, and of the widely varying interpretations which have been put upon it as it has passed on from generation to generation, the spirit and frame work of the legend have lasted through the years, and are today as full of life and interest as when the story first came into existence. It is a human story, full of love and hate, justice and revenge, faithfulness and treachery, a story of human nature as it is and always has been; and for this reason it has lived on, and will continue to live, so long as the world is a world of human beings. A vigorous and mighty people, crossing the boundary between medieval and modern history, erected this monument to their pride and power, and as such it has stood the test of centuries, and proved its right "to take rank among the great national epics of the world's literature".