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VOLSUNGA SAGA.

The London Athenaum, in a review of a translation of the ancient "Volsunga Saga; or the Story of the Volsungs and Niblungs,' translated from the Icelandish by William Morris and Eirikr Magnusson, gives the following abstract of the story, which those who are familiar with the famous German epic "Nibelungen Lied" will recognize as a variation of the same theme:-

The story, as here given to us, is in fortythree chapters, of which the first twelve may be considered as introductory. The thirteenth tells of "the Birth and Waxing" of Sigurd (the Siegfried of the 'Nibelungen Lied'), the hero, the Achilles, of the tale. His foster-father, Regin, teaches him "all manner of arts, the chess-play, and the lore of runes, and the talking of many tongues, even as the wont was with kings' sons in those days," and helps him in the choosing of a horse, "Grani, the best of all the horses of the world." One day Regin tells young Sigurd of a great treasure of gold, guarded by a man turned into the shape of a dragon, 'and Fafnir is his name,' and Regin, after several trials, makes Sigurd a sword, which is called Gram, able to shear a floating lock of wool, and to cleave an anvil in twain, and with this Sigurd slays the great and evil "worm," the man-dragon, called Fafnir, and takes the heap of gold. Sigurd drinks of the blood of Fafair and eats of his heart, and straightway knows "the voice of all fowls" and what they speak of; from which he learns many things. After this, going forth upon adventures,

"By long roads rides Sigurd, till he comes at the last up on to Hindfell, and wends his way south to the land of the Franks; and he sees before him on the fell a great light, as of fire burning, and flaming up even unto the heavens; and when he came thereto, lo, a shield-hung castle before him, and a banner on the topmost thereof: into the castle went Sigurd, and saw one lying there asleep, and all armed. Therewith he takes the helm from off the head of him, and sees that it is no man, but a woman.

This is the noble Brynhild, the beautiful warrior maid, who is also full of wisdom; and after some grave talk they come to an interesting personal subject with praiseworthy di-

"Sigurd spake, 'None among the sons of men can be found wiser than thou; and thereby swear I, that thee will I have as mine own, for near to my heart thou liest.' She answers, 'Thee would I fainest choose, though I had all men's sons to choose from.' And thereto they plighted troth both of them." There is a fine simple dignity in this. As

to the hero's looks:-"Now, the hair of this Sigurd was golden red of hue, fair of fashion, and falling down in great locks; thick and short was his beard. and of no other color; high-nosed he was, broad and high-boned of face; so keen were his eyes that few durst gaze up under the brows of him; his shoulders were as broad to look on as the shoulders of two; most duly was his body fashioned betwixt height and breadth, and in such wise as was seemliest; and this is the sign told of his height, that when he was girt with his sword Gram, which same was seven spans long, as he went through the full-grown rye-fields, the dew-shoe of the said sword smote the ears of ng corn; and, for all that g was his strength than his growth : well could he wield sword, and cast forth spear, shoot shaft, and hold shield, bend bow, back horse, and do all the goodly deeds that he learned in his youth's days. Wise he was to know things yet undone; and the voice of all fowls he knew, wherefore few things fell on him nnawares. Of many words he was, and so fair of speech withal, that whensoever he made it his business to speak, he never left speaking before that to all men it seemed full sure that no otherwise must the matter be than as he said. His sport and pleasure it was to give aid to his own folk, and to prove himself in mighty matters, to take wealth from his unfriends and give them to his friends. Never did he lose heart, and of naught was he adrad."

Again met Sigurd and Brynhild, and their love waxed ever deeper and stronger, and Sigurd said, "I swear by the gods that thee shall I have for mine own, or no woman else: but Brynhild, having gift of foreboding, said sadly, "Thou shalt wed Gudrun, the daughter of Giuki." And even so it befell; for Sigurd coming to the realm of King Giuki, the Queen Grimchild gives him one day unaware a certain drink, whereby he forgets Brynhild, and consents to marry the fair Gudrun; and after Queen Grimchild, who is an inveterate matchmaker, advises her son Gunnar to woo the famous Brynchild, and takes Sigurd with him on the expedition. The two princes reach Brynhild's castle, and after strange adventures, wherein Sigurd's powers enable Gunnar to overcome the trials put in his way, the war-like maiden is forced to own herself conquered, and submits, though with deep misgivings, to be Gunnar's wife.

But when Brynhild and Gudrun, the wife of Sigurd, meet, then woe begins. They are envious and jealous of each other, and it soon rises to an angry quarrel with bitter words. Brynbild learns that it was only through Sigurd's help that Gunnar won her hand, and her fury against Sigurd, whom she has loved, nay, whom she still loves passionately, is beyond all control. She persuades Guttorm, her husband's brother, to slay Sigurd:—

"But of these evil wiles naught at all knew Sigurd, for he might not deal with his shapen fate, nor the measure of his life-days, neither deemed he that he was worthy of such things at their hands. So Guttorm went in to Sigurd the next morning as he lay upon his bed, yet durst he not do aught against him, but shrank back out again; yea, and even so he fared a second time, for so bright and eager were the eyes of Sigurd that few durst look upon him. But the third time he went in, and there lay Sigurd asleep; then Guttorm drew his sword and thrust Sigurd through in such wise that the sword-point smote into the bed beneath him; then Sigurd awoke with that wound, and Guttorm gat him unto the door; but therewith Sigurd caught up the sword Gram, and cast it after him, and it smote him on the back, and struck him asunder in the midst, so that the feet of him fell one way, and the head and hands back into the chamber. Now Gudrun lay asleep on Sigurd's bosom, but she woke up unto woe that may not be told of, all swimming in the blood of him, and in such wise did she bewail her with weeping and words of sorrow, that Sigurd rose up on the bolster, and spake, 'Weep not,' said he, 'for thy brothers live for thy delight; but a young son have I, too young to be ware of his foes; -and an ill turn have these played against their own fortune; for never will they get a mightier brother-in-law to ride abroad with them; nay, nor a better son to their sister, than this one, if he may grow to man's estate. Lo, now is that come to pass which was foretold me long ago, but from mine eyes has it been hidden, for none may fight against his fate and prevail. Behold she "went about laughing now, and gave this has Brynhild brought to pass, even she them to drink from mighty beakers." But

who loves me before all men; but this may I | when they were gone, she went to her bower, swear, that never have I wrought ill to Gun- | with heart swollen with sorrow, and thought nar, but rather have ever held fast to my oath with him, nor was I ever too much a friend to his wife. And now if I had been forewarned, and had been afoot with my weapons, then should many a man have lost his life or ever I had fallen, and all those brethren should have been slain, and a harder work would the slaying of me have been than the slaying of the mightiest bull or the mightiest boar of the wild-wood. And even therewithal life left the King; but Gudrun moaned and drew a weary breath, and Brynhild heard it, and laughed when she heard her mosning. Then said Gunnar, 'Thou laughest not because thy heartroots are gladded, or else why doth thy visage wax so wan? * *
And Gudrun said, 'My kinsmen have slain my husband; but ye, when we next ride to the war and are come into the battle, then shall ye look about, and see that Sigurd is neither on the right hand nor the left, and ye shall know that he was your good-hap and your strength; and if he had lived and had sons, then should ye have been strengthened

by his offspring and his kin." How simply and deeply pathetic! Brynchild, finding life intolerable, "caught up a sword and thrust it beneath her armpits," praying for a last boon that her body be burned on one funeral pile with Sigard's; "and then died Brynhild, and was burned there by the side of Sigurd, and thus their life-days ended." After a time Gudrun was persuaded to marry King Atli, though full of evil foreboding. "Thus, then, must it needs befall, however against the will of me, and for little joy shall it be and for great grief;" and so the bridal feast was held: "but never did her heart laugh on him, and little sweet and kind was their life together.'

Atli covets the hoard of gold won by Signrd when he slew the man-dragon, and now held by Gunnar and his brethren. Therefore Atli treacherously invites these to his realm, and in spite of warnings from Gudrun and boding dreams of their own wives, Gunnar, Hagli, and other of the best heroes of the Niblungs—otherwise called Giukings—set forth by ship, and at last reach King Atli's burg and hall. Here they are set upon by a host of armed men, but defend themselves fiercely and skilfully, slaying great numbers.
"Now King Atli eggs on his folk to set on

fiercely, and eagerly they fight, but the Giukings fell on so hard that King Atli gave back into the hall, and within doors was the fight, and fierce beyond all fights. That battle was the death of many a man, but such was the ending thereof that there fell all the folk of those brethren, and they twain alone stood up on their feet, and yet many more must fare to hell first before weapons. And now fell on Gunnar the king, and because of the host of men that set on him was hand laid on him, and he was cast into fetters; afterwards fought Hogni, with the stoutest heart and the greatest manlihood; and he felled to earth twenty of the stoutest of the champions of King Atli, and many he thrust into the fire that burnt amidst the hall, and all were of one accord that such a man might scarce be seen; yet in the end was he borne down by many and taken. Then said King Atli, 'A marvellous thing how many men have gone their ways before him! Cut the heart from out of him, and let that be his Hogni said, 'Do according to thy will; merrily will I abide whatso thou wilt do against me; and thou shalt see that my heart is not adrad, for hard matters have I made trial of ere now, and all things that may try a man was I fain to bear, whiles yet I was unhurt; but now sorely am I hurt, and thou alone henceforth wilt bear mastery in our dealings together." Then spake a counsellor of King Atli, Better rede I see thereto; take we the thrall Hjalli, and give respite to Hogni; for this thrall is made to die, since the longer he lives the less worth shall he be. The thrall hearkened, and cried out aloft, and fled away anywhither where he might hope for shelter, crying out that a hard portion was his because of their strife and doings, and an ill day for him whereon he must be dragged to death from his sweet life and his swine-keeping. But they caught him, and turned a knife against him, and he yelled and screamed or ever he felt the point thereof. Then in such wise spake Hogni as a man seldom speaketh who is fallen into hard need, for he prayed for the thrall's life, and said that these shrieks he could not do away with, and that it were a lesser matter to him to play out the play to the end; and therewithal the thrall gat his life as for that time; but Gunnar and Hogni are both laid in fetters. Then spake King Atli with Gunnar the king, and bade him tell out concerning the gold, and where it was, if he would have his life. But he answered, 'Nay, first will I behold the bloody heart of Hogni, my brother.' So now they caught hold of the thrall again, and cut the heart from out of him, and bore it unto King Gunnar, but he said—'The faint heart of Hjalli may ye here behold, little like the proud heart of Hogni, for as much as it trembleth now, more by the half it trembled whenas it lay in the breast of him.' So now they fell on Hogni even as Atli urged them, and cut the heart from out of him, but such was the might of his manhood that he laughed while he abode that torment, and all wondered at his worth, and in perpetual memory it is held sithence. Then they showed it to Gunnar, and he said—"The mighty heart of Hogni, little like the faint heart of Hjalli, for little as it trembleth now, less it trembled whenas in his breast it lay! But now, O Atli, even as

evil of aspect, that crept unto him and thrust its sting into him until it smote his heart; and in such wise with great hardihood he ended his life's days. Gudrun, mad with grief, kills her two young sons, and mixes their blood in the wine of King Atli, their father, and Atli himself she slays in his sleep. Other tragic adventures befall her before her death. Her daughter Swanhild is slain, and she sends men to avenge her; and before they started,

we die so shalt thou die; and lo, I alone wot

where the gold is, nor shall Hogni be to tell

thereof now; to and fro played the matter in

my mind whiles we both lived, but now have I myself determined for myself, and the

Rhine river shall rule over the gold, rather than the Huns shall bear it on the hands of

them. Then said King Atli, 'Have away the bondsman;' and so they did eat. But

Gudrun called to her men, and came

to Atli, and said:- 'May it fare ill

with thee now and from henceforth

even as thou hast ill held to thy word with

me!' So Gunnar was cast into a worm-close, and many worms abode him there, and his

hands were fast bound; but Gudrun sent him

a harp, and in such wise did he set forth his

craft that wisely he smote the harp, smiting

it with his toes, and so excellently well he

played, that few deemed they had heard

such playing, even when the hand had done it. And with such might and power

he played, that all the worms fell asleep

in the end, save one adder only, great and

over all that had befallen her:-" 'Ah! better would it be if Sigurd came to meet me, and I went my ways with him, for here bideth now behind with me neither son nor daughter to comfort me. Oh, mindest thou not, Sigurd, the words we spoke when we went into one bed together, that thou wouldst come and look on me; yea, even from thine abiding-place among the And thus had the words of her sorrow an end.

Many episodical and other matters are clustered around this, the main story. Though relieved with touches of tenderness and pathos, it represents a fierce and barbarous condition of humanity. Ferocity, tenacity as of bull-dogs, are qualities in highest esteem. Both men and women are violent and bloody. Revenge is a virtue and a duty ; yet withal there is a certain dignity always observed, and a certain loftily sad resignation

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