

THE AFTER WORD.

SUCH is the story of Siegfried (or Sigurd), as we gather it from various German and Scandinavian legends. In this recital I have made no attempt to follow any one of the numerous originals, but have selected here and there such incidents as best suited my purpose in constructing one connected story which would convey to your minds some notion of the beauty and richness of our ancient myths. In doing this, I have drawn, now from the Volsunga Saga, now from the Nibelungen Lied, now from one of the Eddas, and now from some of the minor legends relating to the great hero of the North. These ancient stories, although differing widely in particulars, have a certain general relationship and agreement which proves beyond doubt a common origin. "The primeval myth," says Thomas Carlyle, "whether it were at first philosophical truth, or

historical incident, floats too vaguely on the breath of men: each has the privilege of inventing, and the far wider privilege of borrowing and new modelling from *all* that preceded him. Thus, though tradition may have but one root, it grows, like a banian, into a whole overarching labyrinth of trees."

If you would follow the tradition of Siegfried to the end; if you would learn how, after the great Hoard had been buried in the Rhine, the curse of the dwarf Andvari still followed those who had possessed it, and how Kriemhild wreaked a terrible vengeance upon Siegfried's murderers, — you must read the original story as related in the Volsung Myth or in the Nibelungen Song. Our story ends with Siegfried.

The episodes which I have inserted here and there — the stories of Ægir, and of Balder, and of Idun, and of Thor — do not, as you may know, belong properly to the legend of Siegfried; but I have thrown them in, in order to acquaint you with some of the most beautiful mythical conceptions of our ancestors.

A grand old people were those early kinsmen of ours, — not at all so savage and inhuman as our histories would sometimes make us believe. For however mistaken their notions may have been, and however

ignorant they were, according to our ideas of things, they were strong-hearted, brave workers; and, so far as opportunity was afforded them, they acted well their parts. What their notions were of true manhood, — a strong mind in a strong body, good, brave, and handsome, — may be learned from the story of Siegfried.