

**VÖLSUNGA SAGA. THE STORY
OF THE VOLSUNGS & NIBLUNGS
WITH CERTAIN SONGS FROM
THE ELDER EDDA. [1870]**

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[1870] by Eiríkr Magnússon & William Morris

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EIRIKR MAGNUSSON & WILLIAM MORRIS

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VÖLSUNGA SAGA.

THE STORY

OF THE

VOLSUNGS & NIBLUNGS

WITH CERTAIN SONGS

FROM THE

ELDER EDDA.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ICELANDIC

BY

EIRÍKR MAGNÚSSON,

TRANSLATOR OF 'SCENES OF ICELAND.'

AND

WILLIAM MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF 'THE GARTER PARADE.'

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MDCCLXXX.

PREFACE.

IN offering to the reader this translation of the most complete and dramatic form of the great Epic of the North, we lay no claim to special critical insight, nor do we care to deal at all with vexed questions, but are content to abide by existing authorities, doing our utmost to make our rendering close and accurate, and, if it might be so, at the same time, not over prosaic: it is to the lover of poetry and nature, rather than to the student, that we appeal to enjoy and wonder at this great work, now for the first time, strange to say, translated into English: this must be our excuse for speaking here, as briefly as may be, of things that will seem to the student over well known to be worth mentioning, but which may give some ease to the general reader who comes across our book.

The prose of the *Völsunga Saga* was composed probably some time in the twelfth century, from floating traditions no doubt; from songs which, now lost, were then known, at least in fragments, to the Sagaman; and finally from songs, which, written down about his time, are still existing: the greater part of these last the reader will find in this book; some inserted amongst the prose text by the original story-teller, and some by the present translators, and the remainder in the latter part of the book, put together as nearly as may be in the order of the story, and forming a metrical version of the greater portion of it.

These Songs from the *Elder Edda* we will now briefly compare with the prose of the *Volsung Story*, premising that these are the only metrical sources existing of those from which the Sagaman told his tale.

Except for the short snatch on p. 24 of our translation, nothing is now left of these till we come to the episode of *Heiðr* Hundings-bane, *Sigurd's* half-brother; there are two songs left relating to this, from which the prose is put together; to a certain extent they cover the same ground; but the latter half of the second is, wisely

as we think, left untouched by the Sagaman, as its interest is of itself too great not to encumber the progress of the main story; for the sake of its wonderful beauty however, we could not refrain from rendering it, and it will be found first among the metrical translations that form the second part of this book.

Of the next part of the *Saga*, the deaths of *Sinfjotli* and *Sigmund*, and the journey of *Queen Hjordis* to the court of *King Aif*, there is no trace left of any metrical origin; but we meet the *Edda* once more where *Regin* tells the tale of his kin to *Sigurd*, and where *Sigurd* defeats and slays the sons of *Hunding*: this lay is known as the *Lay of Regin*.

The short chap. xvi. is abbreviated from a long poem called the *Prophecy of Gripir* (the *Gripir* of the *Saga*), where the whole story to come is told with some detail, and which certainly, if drawn out at length into the prose, would have forestalled the interest of the tale.

In the slaying of the *Dragon* the *Saga* adheres very closely to the *Lay of Fafnir*; for the insertion of the song of the birds to *Sigurd* the present translators are responsible.

Then comes the waking of Brynhild, and her wise rede; to Sigurd, taken from the Lay of Sigrdrifa, the greater part of which, in its metrical form, is inserted by the Sagaman into his prose; but the stanzas relating Brynhild's awaking we have inserted into the text; the latter part, omitted in the prose, we have translated for the second part of our book.

Of Sigurd at Hlymdale, of Gudrun's dream, the magic potion of Grimhild, the wedding of Sigurd consequent on that potion; of the wooing of Brynhild for Gunnar, her marriage to him, of the quarrel of the Queens, the brooding grief and wrath of Brynhild, and the interview of Sigurd with her—of all this, the most dramatic and best-considered part of the tale, there is now no more left that retains its metrical form than the few snatches preserved by the Sagaman, though many of the incidents are alluded to in other poems.

Chap. xxx. is met by the poem called the Short Lay of Sigurd, which, fragmentary apparently at the beginning, gives us something of Brynhild's awakening wrath and jealousy, the slaying of Sigurd, and the death of Brynhild herself; this poem we have translated entire.

The Fragments of the Lay of Brynhild are what is left of a poem partly covering the same ground as this last, but giving a different account of Sigurd's slaying; it is very incomplete, though the Sagaman has drawn some incidents from it; the reader will find it translated in our second part.

But before the death of the heroine we have inserted entire into the text as chap. xxxi. the First Lay of Gudrun, the most lyrical, the most complete, and the most beautiful of all the Eddaic poems; a poem that any age or language might count among its most precious possessions.

From this point to the end of the Saga it keeps closely to the Songs of Edda; in chap. xxxii. the Sagaman has rendered into prose the Ancient Lay of Gudrun, except for the beginning, which gives again another account of the death of Sigurd; this lay also we have translated.

The grand poem, called the Hell-ride of Brynhild, is not represented directly by anything in the prose, except that the Sagaman has supplied from it a link or two wanting in the Lay of Sigdrifa; it will be found translated in our second part.

The betrayal and slaughter of the Giokings or