

**SIGURD:
A POEM**

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Sigurd: A Poem by Arthur Peterson

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ARTHUR PETERSON

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By

ARTHUR PETERSON

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PHILADELPHIA

and

Note

THE story of Sigurd, or Siegfried (of which the best-known versions are probably the old Nibelungenlied, and Wagner's famous tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*), has been told by so many people, and in such a variety of ways, that no excuse is offered by the writer for adding one more variation to the collection. In the following poem the hero is depicted as a young Norse rover, a wanderer not only by land but by sea, this latter innovation seeming to lend itself quite naturally to the established legend. The action is supposed to take place about the middle of the fifth century, that eventful period which may be said to mark the end of the ancient, and the beginning of the modern, world.

The story of Sigurd, like most legendary stories, was probably based upon an actual historic occurrence; but when, where, or by whom the tale was first put together no one knows. It is found in the literature of all the Germanic peoples; and it was an especial favorite among the Norse races who, after the withdrawal of the Roman garrisons, settled in such preponderating numbers in Britain. It is natural, therefore, that it should be popular among the

descendants of those races—the English-speaking peoples of to-day.

The best blood of Norway, Sweden and Denmark (or what is commonly known as Scandinavia), seems to have passed over into the British Isles during the long period of colonization (about 600 years) between the fifth and the eleventh centuries; not only by direct migration and settlement, but by the indirect route of Normandy; for William the Conqueror and his Normans, though they had French names, were probably in lineage at least half Norse. By the best blood I mean not so much the best conducted and most peaceable persons, as the most energetic, aggressive, daring and adventurous. And there is little doubt that it is to the descendants of these restless, seafaring spirits that Great Britain owes her centuries of maritime supremacy and over-sea colonization. The English adventurers of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries were but repeating, on a larger scale, the exploits of their ancestors of a thousand years before; and the long line of ocean-heroes, in which Drake and Nelson are perhaps the most conspicuous figures, had its beginning in the bold Norse rovers who, while England was yet in the making, sailed forth upon "the swan's road." This idea is touched upon in the chapter entitled "Erda's Prophecy."

The Burgundians, with whom the fortunes of Sigurd become so closely connected, and among whom he

finally meets his death, were a Teutonic people whose former home had been the country between the Oder and the Vistula. They migrated toward the west and south, and at the time of our story were settled in the valley of the upper Rhine, in the neighborhood of Worms. The Burgundians afterward passed over into Gaul, and the territory occupied by them ultimately became part of the celebrated Duchy of Burgundy.

The Latin form *Scandia* has been used throughout the poem in preference to the commoner word *Scandinavia*, it being better suited to metrical composition.

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