

STORIES OF SIEGFRIED

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SIEGFRIED

TOLD TO THE CHILDREN BY
MARY MACGREGOR



YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS
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**TO
DENIS**

Dear Denis,—Here is a story that I found in an old German poem called the Nibelungenlied. The poem is full of strange adventure, adventure of both tiny dwarf and stalwart mortal.

Some of these adventures will fill this little book, and already I can see you sitting in the nursery as you read them.

The door is opened but you do not look up. “Denis! Denis!” You are called, but you do not hear, for you are not really in the nursery any longer.

You have wandered away to Nibelheim, the home of the strange little people of whom you are reading, and you have ears only for the harsh voices of the tiny Nibelungs, eyes only for their odd, wrinkled faces.

Siegfried is the merry hero of the Nibelungenlied. I wonder will you think him as brave as French Roland or as chivalrous as your English favourite, Guy of Warwick? Yet even should you think the German hero brave and chivalrous as these, I can hardly believe you will read and re-read this little book as often as you read and re-read the volumes which told about your French and English heroes.—Yours affectionately,

MARY MACGREGOR

CONTENTS

	Page
I. Mimer the Blacksmith	1
II. Siegfried wins the Treasure	10
III. Siegfried comes home	16
IV. Kriemhild's Dream	20
V. Siegfried journeys to Worms	23
VI. Siegfried's Welcome to Worms	27
VII. Siegfried's Sojourn at Worms	36
VIII. Siegfried sees Kriemhild	49
IX. Siegfried goes to Isenland	53
X. Siegfried subdues Brunhild	58
XI. Siegfried goes to the Cave	66
XII. The Wedding Feast	72
XIII. Siegfried goes home with Kriemhild	77
XIV. Siegfried and Kriemhild go to Worms	82
XV. Siegfried is slain	88

CHAPTER I

MIMER THE BLACKSMITH

Siegfried was born a Prince and grew to be a hero, a hero with a heart of gold. Though he could fight, and was as strong as any lion, yet he could love too and be as gentle as a child.

The father and mother of the hero-boy lived in a strong castle near the banks of the great Rhine river. Siegmund, his father, was a rich king, Sieglinde, his mother, a beautiful queen, and dearly did they love their little son Siegfried.

The courtiers and the high-born maidens who dwelt in the castle honoured the little Prince, and thought him the fairest child in all the land, as indeed he was.

Sieglinde, his queen-mother, would oftentimes dress her little son in costly garments and lead him by the hand before the proud, strong men-at-arms who stood before the castle walls. Nought had they but smiles and gentle words for their little Prince.

When he grew older, Siegfried would ride into the country, yet always would he be attended by King Siegmund's most trusted warriors.

STORIES OF SIEGFRIED

Then one day armed men entered the Netherlands, the country over which King Siegmund ruled, and the little Prince was sent away from the castle, lest by any evil chance he should fall into the hands of the foe.

Siegfried was hidden away safe in the thickets of a great forest, and dwelt there under the care of a blacksmith, named Mimer.

Mimer was a dwarf, belonging to a strange race of little folk called Nibelungs. The Nibelungs lived for the most part in a dark little town beneath the ground. Nibelheim was the name of this little town and many of the tiny men who dwelt there were smiths. All the livelong day they would hammer on their little anvils, but all through the long night they would dance and play with tiny little Nibelung women.

It was not in the little dark town of Nibelheim that Mimer had his forge, but under the trees of the great forest to which Siegfried had been sent.

As Mimer or his pupils wielded their tools the wild beasts would start from their lair, and the swift birds would wing their flight through the mazes of the wood, lest danger lay in those heavy, resounding strokes.

But Siegfried, the hero-boy, would laugh for glee, and seizing the heaviest hammer he could see he would swing it with such force upon the anvil that it would be splintered into a thousand pieces.

MIMER THE BLACKSMITH

Then Mimer the blacksmith would scold the lad, who was now the strongest of all the lads under his care; but little heeding his rebukes, Siegfried would fling himself merrily out of the smithy and hasten with great strides into the gladsome wood. For now the Prince was growing a big lad, and his strength was even as the strength of ten.

To-day Siegfried was in a merry mood. He would repay Mimer's rebukes in right good fashion. He would frighten the little blacksmith dwarf until he was forced to cry for mercy.

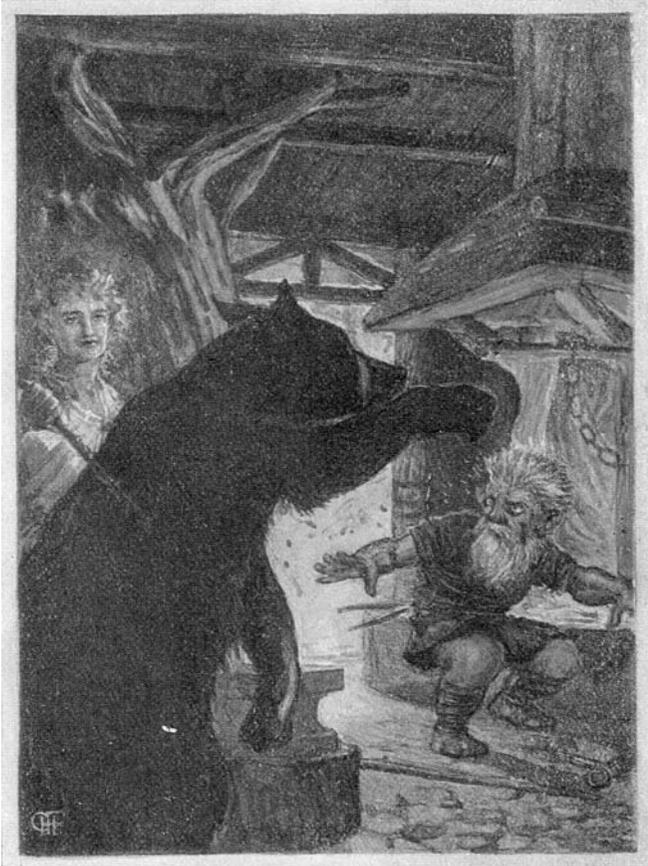
Clad in his forest dress of deerskins, with his hair as burnished gold blowing around his shoulders, Siegfried wandered away into the depths of the woodland.

There he seized the silver horn which hung from his girdle and raised it to his lips. A long, clear note he blew, and ere the sound had died away the boy saw a sight which pleased him well. Here was good prey indeed! A bear, a great big shaggy bear was peering at him out of a bush, and as he gazed the beast opened its jaws and growled, a fierce and angry growl.

Not a whit afraid was Siegfried. Quick as lightning he had caught the great creature in his arms, and ere it could turn upon him, it was muzzled, and was being led quietly along toward the smithy.

Mimer was busy at his forge sharpening a sword when Siegfried reached the doorway.

STORIES OF SIEGFRIED



Then Mimer saw the bear.

At the sound of laughter the little dwarf raised his head. It was the Prince who laughed. Then Mimer saw the bear, and letting the sword he held drop to the ground with a clang, he ran to hide himself in the darkest corner of the smithy.

Then Siegfried laughed again. He was no hero-boy to-day, for next he made the big bear hunt the little Nibelung dwarf from corner to corner, nor could the frightened little man escape or hide him-

MIMER THE BLACKSMITH

self in darkness. Again and again as he crouched in a shadowed corner, Siegfried would stir up the embers of the forge until all the smithy was lighted with a ruddy glow.

At length the Prince tired of his game, and unmuzzling the bear he chased the bewildered beast back into the shelter of the woodlands.

Mimer, poor little dwarf, all a-tremble with his fear, cried angrily, "Thou mayest go shoot if so it please thee, and bring home thy dead prey. Dead bears thou mayest bring hither if thou wilt, but live bears shalt thou leave to crouch in their lair or to roam through the forest." But Siegfried, the naughty Prince, only laughed at the little Nibelung's frightened face and harsh, croaking voice.

Now as the days passed, Mimer the blacksmith began to wish that Siegfried had never come to dwell with him in his smithy. The Prince was growing too strong, too brave to please the little dwarf, moreover many were the mischievous tricks his pupil played on him.

Prince though he was, Mimer would see if he could not get rid of his tormentor. For indeed though, as I have told you, Siegfried had a heart of gold, at this time the gold seemed to have grown dim and tarnished. Perhaps that was because the Prince had learned to distrust and to dislike, nay, more, to hate the little, cunning dwarf.

However that may be, it is certain that Siegfried played many pranks upon the little Nibelung,

STORIES OF SIEGFRIED

and he, Mimer, determined to get rid of the quick-tempered, strong-handed Prince.

One day, therefore, it happened that the little dwarf told Siegfried to go deep into the forest to bring home charcoal for the forge. And this Mimer did, though he knew that in the very part of the forest to which he was sending the lad there dwelt a terrible dragon, named Regin. Indeed Regin was a brother of the little blacksmith, and would be lying in wait for the Prince. It would be but the work of a moment for the monster to seize the lad and greedily to devour him.

To Siegfried it was always joy to wander afar through the woodland. Ofttimes had he thrown himself down on the soft, moss-covered ground and lain there hour after hour, listening to the wood-birds' song. Sometimes he would even find a reed and try to pipe a tune as sweet as did the birds, but that was all in vain, as the lad soon found. No tiny songster would linger to hearken to the shrill piping of his grassy reed, and the Prince himself was soon ready to fling it far away.

It was no hardship then to Siegfried to leave the forge and the hated little Nibelung, therefore it was that with right good-will he set out in search of charcoal for Mimer the blacksmith.

As he loitered there where the trees grew thickest, Siegfried took his horn and blew it lustily. If he could not pipe on a grassy reed, at least he could blow a rousing note on his silver horn.

MIMER THE BLACKSMITH

Suddenly as Siegfried blew, the trees seemed to sway, the earth to give out fire. Regin, the dragon, had roused himself at the blast, and was even now drawing near to the Prince.

It was at the mighty strides of the monster that the trees had seemed to tremble, it was as he opened his terrible jaws that the earth had seemed to belch out fire.

For a little while Siegfried watched the dragon in silence. Then he laughed aloud, and a brave, gay laugh it was. Alone in the forest, with a sword buckled to his side, the hero was afraid of naught, not even of Regin. The ugly monster was sitting now on a little hillock, looking down upon the lad, his victim as he thought.

Then Siegfried called boldly to the dragon, "I will kill thee, for in truth thou art an ugly monster."

At those words Regin opened his great jaws, and showed his terrible fangs. Yet still the boy Prince mocked at the hideous dragon.

And now Regin in his fury crept closer and closer to the lad, swinging his great tail, until he well-nigh swept Siegfried from his feet.

Swiftly then the Prince drew his sword, well tempered as he knew, for had not he himself wrought it in the forge of Mimer the blacksmith? Swiftly he drew his sword, and with one bound he sprang upon the dragon's back, and as he reared himself, down came the hero's shining sword and pierced into the very heart of the monster. Thus as

STORIES OF SIEGFRIED



“I will kill thee, for in truth thou art an ugly monster.”

Siegfried leaped nimbly to the ground, the dragon fell back dead. Regin was no longer to be feared.

Then Siegfried did a curious thing. He had heard the little Nibelung men who came to the smithy to talk with Mimer, he had heard them say that whoever should bathe in the blood of Regin the

MIMER THE BLACKSMITH

dragon would henceforth be safe from every foe. For his skin would grow so tough and horny that it would be to him as an armour through which no sword or spear could ever pierce.

Thinking of the little Nibelungs' harsh voices and wrinkled little faces, as they had sat talking thus around Mimer's glowing forge, Siegfried now flung aside his deerskin dress and bathed himself from top to toe in the dragon's blood.

But as he bathed, a leaf from off a linden tree was blown upon his shoulders, and on the spot where it rested Siegfried's skin was still soft and tender as when he was a little child. It was only a tiny spot which was covered by the linden leaf, but should a spear thrust, or an arrow pierce that tiny spot, Siegfried would be wounded as easily as any other man.

The dragon was dead, the bath was over, and clad once more in his deerskin, Siegfried set out for the smithy. He brought no charcoal for the forge; all that he carried with him was a heart afire with anger, a sword quivering to take the life of the Nibelung, Mimer.

For now Siegfried knew that the dwarf had wished to send him forth to death, when he bade him go seek charcoal in the depths of the forest.

Into the dusky glow of the smithy plunged the hero, and swiftly he slew the traitor Mimer. Then gaily, for he had but slain evil ones of whom the world was well rid, then gaily Siegfried fared through the forest in quest of adventure.

CHAPTER II

SIEGFRIED WINS THE TREASURE

Now this is what befell the Prince.

In his wanderings he reached the country called Isenland, where the warlike but beautiful Queen Brunhild reigned. He gazed with wonder at her castle, so strong it stood on the edge of the sea, guarded by seven great gates. Her marble palaces also made him marvel, so white they glittered in the sun.

But most of all he marvelled at this haughty queen, who refused to marry any knight unless he could vanquish her in every contest to which she summoned him.

Brunhild from the castle window saw the fair face and the strong limbs of the hero, and demanded that he should be brought into her presence, and as a sign of her favour she showed the young Prince her magic horse Gana.

Yet Siegfried had no wish to conquer the warrior-queen and gain her hand and her broad dominions for his own. Siegfried thought only of a

SIEGFRIED WINS THE TREASURE

wonder-maiden, unknown, unseen as yet, though in his heart he hid an image of her as he dreamed that she would be.

It is true that Siegfried had no love for the haughty Brunhild. It is also true that he wished to prove to her that he alone was a match for all her boldest warriors, and had even power to bewitch her magic steed, Gana, if so he willed, and steal it from her side.

And so one day a spirit of mischief urged the Prince on to a gay prank, as also a wayward spirit urged him no longer to brook Queen Brunhild's haughty mien.

Before he left Isenland, therefore, Siegfried in a merry mood threw to the ground the seven great gates that guarded the Queen's strong castle. Then he called to Gana, the magic steed, to follow him into the world, and this the charger did with right good-will.

Whether Siegfried sent Gana back to Isenland or not I do not know, but I know that in the days to come Queen Brunhild never forgave the hero for his daring feat.

When the Prince had left Isenland he rode on and on until he came to a great mountain. Here near a cave he found two little dwarfish Nibelungs, surrounded by twelve foolish giants. The two little Nibelungs were princes, the giants were their counsellors.

STORIES OF SIEGFRIED

Now the King of the Nibelungs had but just died in the dark little underground town of Nibelheim, and the two tiny princes were the sons of the dead king.

But they had not come to the mountain-side to mourn for their royal father. Not so indeed had they come, but to divide the great hoard of treasure which the King had bequeathed to them at his death.

Already they had begun to quarrel over the treasure, and the twelve foolish giants looked on, but did not know what to say or do, so they did nothing, and never spoke at all.

The dwarfs had themselves carried the hoard out of the cave where usually it was hidden, and they had spread it on the mountain-side.

There it lay, gold as far as the eye could see, and farther. Jewels, too, were there, more than twelve waggons could carry away in four days and nights, each going three journeys.

Indeed, however much you took from this marvellous treasure, never did it seem to grow less.

But more precious even than the gold or the jewels of the hoard was a wonderful sword which it possessed. It was named Balmung, and had been tempered by the Nibelungs in their glowing forges underneath the glad green earth.

Before the magic strength of Balmung's stroke, the strongest warrior must fall, nor could his armour save him, however close its links had been welded by some doughty smith.

SIEGFRIED WINS THE TREASURE

As Siegfried rode towards the two little dwarfs, they turned and saw him, with his bright, fair face, and flowing locks.

Nimble as little hares they darted to his side, and begged that he would come and divide their treasure. He should have the good sword Balmung as reward, they cried.

Siegfried dismounted, well pleased to do these ugly little men a kindness.

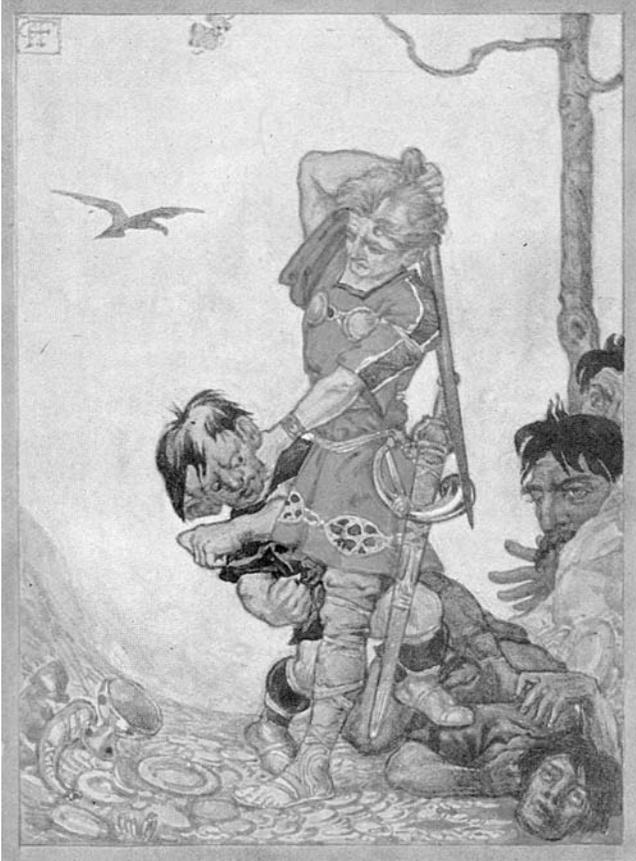
But alas! ere long the dwarfs began to mock at the hero with their harsh voices, and to wag their horrid little heads at him, while they screamed in a fury that he was not dividing the treasure as they wished.

Then Siegfried grew angry with the tiny princes, and seizing the magic sword, he cut off their heads. The twelve foolish giants also he slew, and thus became himself master of the marvellous hoard as well as of the good sword Balmung.

Seven hundred valiant champions, hearing the blast of the hero's horn, now gathered together to defend the country from this strange young warrior. But he vanquished them all, and forced them to promise that they would henceforth serve no other lord save him alone. And this they did, being proud of his great might.

Now tidings of the slaughter of the two tiny princes had reached Nibelheim, and great was the wrath of the little men and little women who dwelt in the dark town beneath the earth.

STORIES OF SIEGFRIED



Seizing the magic sword, he cut off their heads.

Alberich, the mightiest of all the dwarfs, gathered together his army of little gnomes to avenge the death of the two dwarf princes and also, for Alberich was a greedy man, to gain for himself the great hoard.

SIEGFRIED WINS THE TREASURE

When Siegfried saw Alberich at the head of his army of little men he laughed aloud, and with a light heart he chased them all into the great cave on the mountain-side.

From off the mighty dwarf, Alberich, he stripped his famous Cloak of Darkness, which made him who wore it not only invisible, but strong as twelve strong men. He snatched also from the dwarf's fingers his wishing rod, which was a Magic Wand. And last of all he made Alberich and his thousands of tiny warriors take an oath, binding them evermore to serve him alone. Then hiding the treasure in the cave with the seven hundred champions whom he had conquered, he left Alberich and his army of little men to guard it, until he came again. And Alberich and his dwarfs were faithful to the hero who had shorn them of their treasure, and served him for evermore.

Siegfried, the magic sword Balmung by his side, the Cloak of Darkness thrown over his arm, the Magic Wand in his strong right hand, went over the mountain, across the plains, nor did he tarry until he came again to the castle built on the banks of the river Rhine in his own low-lying country of the Netherlands.