

SIGURD THE HERO.

IN TWO CHAPTERS.

Sigurd fought till he could scarce stand or wield his axe. Many a cruel wound weakened him, his eyes grew dim, his hand unsteady, his blows uncertain. He could do no more. The axe fell from his grasp, and he reeled back.

As he did so there rose, loud above the wind and above the howling of the wolves, a cry which caused Sigurd to start once more to his feet, and the wild beasts to pause midway in their mortal onslaught.

It was the deep-mouthed voice of a dog, and next moment a huge mastiff dashed from out of the thicket and fastened on the throat of the foremost wolf.

It was Sigurd's own watch dog Thor, whom some dear hand had loosed from his chain and sent forth into the forest to guard and maybe save his master.

At the sight of the great champion, and at sound of his bark, the cowardly wolves one by one slunk sullenly back into the woods, and Sigurd felt that he was saved.

A joyous meeting was that between gallant master and gallant hound.

"Thor, my brave dog," cried Sigurd, "is it to thee, then, I owe my life—my brother's life? Yet not to thee so much as to the fair lady who sent thee, a messenger of love and life to me. Thanks, Thor, thanks lady, thanks most to God. Now shall I reach Nifheim even yet."

Thor wagged his great tail and barked joyfully in answer.

All that night Sigurd lay secure, watched over by the sleepless Thor, whose honest bark was the sweetest music that ever lulled a hero to repose.

CHAPTER II.

THE ROBBERS.

For two days Sigurd trudged safely onward through that dense forest, with Thor, the dog, beside him. The way was hard and painful, and the hero's limbs, now his only support, crashed wearily through the thickets. But, faint and weary though he was, his bold heart and the thought of his brother carried him through.

Four days had come and gone since he quitted the Tower of the North-West Wind, and in three more Ulf would either be saved or slain. Sigurd, as he thought of it, strode sternly forward and shut his ears to all the backward voices.

And, with Thor at his side, all danger from the wolves seemed at an end. As the two pressed on many a distant howl fell on their ears, many a gaunt form stole out from among the trees to gaze at them, and then steal back. Thor's honest bark carried panic among those cruel hordes, while it comforted the heart of Sigurd.

For two days, without sleep, without rest, without proper food, the hero

walked on, till, on the fifth morning after quitting his castle, the light broke in among the trees, the woodman's cheerful axe resounded through the glades, the angry howling sounded far behind, and Sigurd knew he was on the other side of the forest.

In one day he would reach Jockjen, and scarce two hours' march beyond Jockjen lay Nifheim.

Thor seemed to guess his master's mind, and with a hopeful bark bounded forward. But Sigurd regarded his companion sadly and doubtfully. He called him to him, caressed him lovingly, and said,

"Good Thor, thou hast been like a messenger from God to bring me through this wood. Alas! that we must part."

Thor stopped short as he heard these last words, and moaned piteously.

"Yes, good Thor," said the hero, sadly, "for I cannot live another day without sending a message to my lady that I am safe, thanks to her and thee."

The dog, who seemed to understand it all, looked up in his master's face beseechingly, as if to persuade him against his resolve.

"The danger now is past," said Sigurd. "No wolves haunt the forest betwixt here and Jockjen, and in the town thy presence may discover me. So haste back, good Thor, to my lady with this my message."



"THE SOLDIER'S WEAPON BROKE, AND HE FELL BACKWARDS."