
The Wibelungen

By Richard Wagner

Translated by William Ashton Ellis



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Edition 1.0

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About this Title

Source

The Wibelungen

By Richard Wagner

Translated by William Ashton Ellis

In Paris and Dresden

Richard Wagner's Prose Works

Volume 7

Pages 258-298

Published in 1898

Original Title Information

Die Wibelungen. Weltgeschichte aus der Saga.

Published in 1848

Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen : Volume II

Pages 115-155

Reading Information

This title contains 13885 words.

Estimated reading time between 40 and 69 minutes.

Notes are indicated using parenthesis, like (1).

Page numbers of the original source are indicated using square-bracketed parentheses, like [62].

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The Wibelungen.

World-History as told in Saga.

In the stimulating recent past I too was occupied with the reawakening of *Frederick the Red-beard*, so longed for by so many, and strove with added zeal to satisfy an earlier wish to use my feeble breath to breathe poetic life into the hero-Kaiser for our acting stage. The outcome of the studies by which I sought to master my subject I have embodied in the following work: though its details may contain nothing new to the researcher or student of that branch of literature, yet their allocation and employment seemed interesting enough to some of my friends to justify the printing of the little sketch. I consented the more readily, as this prelude will remain the only fruit of my labours on the stuff itself; labours which themselves impelled me to abandon my dramatic plan, for reasons that will not escape the attentive reader.

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The Ur-Kinghood.

(1)

THEIR coming from the East has lingered in the memory of European peoples down to farthest times: Sagas preserved this recollection, however much disfigured. The maintenance of the Kingly power among the different nations, its restriction to one favoured race, the fidelity with which it was accorded solely to that race even in the latter's deepest degeneracy,—must have had a deep foundation in the people's consciousness: it rested on the memory of the Asiatic ur-home, on the origin of folk-stems in the Family, and on the might of the family's Head, the Stem-father "sprung from the Gods."

To gain a concrete idea of this, we must think of that ur-Folk somewhat as follows.—

At the epoch which most Sagas call the "Sint-Fluth" or Great Deluge, when our earth's Northern hemisphere was about as much covered by water as now is the Southern, (2) the largest island of this northern world-sea [260] would have been the highest mountain-range of Asia, the so-called Indian Caucasus: upon this island, i.e. these mountains, we have to seek the cradle of the present Asiatic peoples, as also of those who wandered forth to Europe. Here is the ancestral seat of all religions, of every tongue, of all these nations' Kinghood.

But the Ur-kinghood is the Patriarchate: the father was the bringer-up and teacher of his children; to them his discipline and doctrine seemed the power and wisdom of a higher being, and the larger grew the family, the more prolific in collateral branches, the more peculiar and divine must seem to it the mould of its original head, to whom it owed not only its body, but also all its spiritual life and customs. As this Head laid down both discipline and doctrine, in him the royal and priestly powers united of themselves, and his authority was bound to grow in measure as the family became a Stem, above all in degree as his original might descended to his body's heirs direct: as the stem became accustomed to behold in these its chieftains, at last the long-deceased Stem-father, from whom that undisputed honour flowed, was certain to appear a god himself, or at least the earthly avatar of an ideal god; and this idea in turn, enshrined by age, could only serve to perpetuate the fame of that ur-race whose most immediate scions formed the chieftains of the day. (3)

Now, when the waters retreated from the northern hemisphere to flood the southern once again, and the earth thus took its present guise, the teeming population of that mountain-isle descended to the new-found valleys, the gradually emerging plains. What brought about the hardening of the Patriarchate to a Monarchic despotism among the races dwelling in the broad and fruitful plains of Asia, has been sufficiently set forth: the races wandering farther westwards, and reaching Europe in the end, [261] commenced a livelier and freer evolution. Constant war and want in rawer climes and regions brought forth betimes the feeling and consciousness of the racial unit's independence, with its immediate result in the formation of the Commune. Every head-of-a-family exerted his power over his nearest of kin in similar fashion as the Stem-head claimed the right of ancient usage over the whole stem: in the bond of all the heads of families the king thus found his counterpart, and finally his limitation. The weightiest point, however, was that the king soon lost his priestly office, i.e. the first interpreting of God's decree—the sight of God—since this was now fulfilled for his immediate clan by every single head-of-family with the same authority as the Ur-father had fulfilled it for his family. The King accordingly was left with little more than the application and execution of the god's decree, as rendered by the members of the commune, in the equal interest of all and pursuant to the customs of the tribe. But the more the voice of the community was busied with ideas of worldly Right, i.e. with Property and the Individual's right to its enjoyment, the more that Sight of God—which originally had ranked as an

essentially higher prerogative of the Stem-father—would pass to a personal verdict in matters of worldly dispute, and consequently the religious element of the patriarchate would dwindle more and more. Only to the person of the King and his immediate kinsmen, would the feeling of the stem still cleave: he was the visible point-of-union of all its members; in him they saw the successor to the Ur-father of the widely-branching fellowship, and in each member of his family the purest of that blood whence the whole Folk had sprung. Though even this idea grew dim in time, yet awe and honour of the royal stem abode the deeper in the people's heart the more incomprehensible to it the reason for original distinction of this house, of which the sole unchanged tradition said that from no other must its kings be chosen. This relation we find in almost all the stems that wandered into Europe, and plainly recognise its bearing [262] on the tribal kings of Greek pre-history; but it manifests itself the clearest in the German stems, and above all in the ancient royal lineage of the *Franks*, in which, under the name of the "Wibelingen" or "Gibelingen," an ur-old royal claim advanced to the demand of world-dominion.

The Frankish royal race makes its first appearance in history under the name of "Merovingians" ("*Merwingen*"): we know that, even in the deepest degeneration of this race, it never occurred to the Franks to choose their kings from any other; every male member of this family was competent to rule; could men not tolerate the vices of the one, they sided with the other, but never left the family itself; and this at a time of such corruption of the national code by willing acceptance of the Romanic taint that almost every bond of noble wont was loosed, so that the Folk indeed could hardly have been recognised without its Royal race. 'Twas as if the people knew that, sans this royal stem, it would cease to be the Folk of Franks. The idea of the inalienable title of this race must therefore have been as deeply rooted, as it needed centuries of fearful struggles to root it out when it had reached its highest ideal meaning, and with its death begin a wholly new ordainment of the world. We refer to the going-under of the "Ghibelines."

The Nibelungen.

The ceaseless strain of men and races toward never-compassed goals will mostly find a clearer explanation in their Ur- and Stem-sagas than can be gathered from their entrance into naked History, which tells us but the consequences of their essential attributes. If we read the Stem-saga of the Frankish royal race aright, we find therein an explanation of its historic deeds past anything obtainable on other paths of scrutiny.

Unquestionably the *Saga of the Nibelungen* is the birthright [263] of the Frankish stem. Research has shewn the basis of this saga, too, to be of religio-mythic nature: its deepest meaning was the ur-conscience of the Frankish stem, the soul of its royal race, under whatsoever name the primal Asiatic highlands may first have seen that race arise.—

For the moment we will neglect the oldest meaning of the myth, in which we shall recognise *Siegfried* as God of Light or Sun-god: to prepare ourselves for its connection with history, we now will merely take the saga where it clothes itself with the more human garb of ancient hero-dom. Here we find Siegfried as the winner of the *Nibelung's Hoard* and with it might unmeasurable. This Hoard, and the might in it residing, becomes the immovable centre round which all further shaping of the saga now revolves: the whole strife and struggle is aimed at this Hoard of the Nibelungen, as the epitome of earthly power, and he who owns it, who governs by it, either is or becomes a Nibelung.

Now the Franks, whom we first meet in history in the region of the Lower Rhine, have a royal race in which appears the name "Nibelung"; especially among its purest scions, who even before the time of Chlodwig were ousted by a kinsman, Merwig [5th cent.], but regained the kingship later as Pippingen or Karlingen [Pepins or Carolingians]. Let this suffice for the present, to shew, if not the genealogic, at least the mythical identity of the Frankish royal family with those Nibelungen of the saga; which has adopted unmistakable features from the history of this stem into its later, more historical development, where the focus still remains possession of that Hoard, the cynosure of earthly rule.—

After the founding of their reign in Roman Gallia, the Frankish Kings attacked and overthrew the other German national stems, the Allemani, Bavarians, Thuringians and Saxons; so that the latter henceforth bore the relation of [264] subjects to the Franks, and though their tribal usages were mostly left them, they had to suffer the indignity of being totally robbed of their royal races, so far as these had not already disappeared; this loss brought home to them the full extent of their dependence, and in the deprivation of its symbol they mourned the downfall of their native freedom. Though the heroic lustre of Karl the Great [Charlemagne]—in whose might the germ of the Nibelungen-hoard appeared to reach its fullest force—diverted for some time the German stems' deep discontent, and made them gradually forget the fame of their own dynasties, yet never did their loathing vanish quite away; under Karl's successors it leapt so strongly back to life, that the division of the great Reich, and the severance therefrom of stricter Germany, must be mainly attributed to the struggle of the downtrod German stems for freedom from the Frankish rule. A total severance from that royal Stem of Rulers, however, was not to take place before still later times; for though the purely German stems were now united in one independent kingdom, yet the bond of this union of earlier autonomous and severed national stems consisted ever in the Kingly function, and this could only be arrogated by a member of that Frankish ur-race. The whole inner movement of Germany therefore made for independence of the separate stems under new derivatives of old stem-races, and through annulment of the unifying royal power exerted by that hated foreign race.

With the death of the last male Karling in Germany we consequently are brought to the point when a total sundering of the German stems almost arrived, and would surely have arrived in full, had there still existed any plainer vestiges of the ur-old royal races of the single stems. The German Church in the person of its virtual patriarch, the Archbishop of Mainz, then saved the (always tottering) unity of the Reich by delivering the royal authority to Duke Konrad von Franken, who likewise sprang on the female side from the ancient race of kings: only the weakness of his rule, [265] again, brought the inevitable reaction to a final head, as shewn in the attempt to choose a king from among the strongest of the earlier subject, but now no longer manageable German folk-stems.

In the choice of the Saxon Duke *Heinrich*, however, and as if for hallowing it, the consideration may have counted, that his race also was allied by marriage with the Karlingen. But what a resistance the whole new Saxon royal-house had constantly to combat, is evident from the mere fact that the Franks and Lothringians, i.e. those peoples who numbered themselves with the originally ruling stem, would never recognise as lawful King the scion of a folk once conquered by them, whilst the other German stems felt just as little called to pay allegiance to a king imposed upon them by a stem no higher than their own, and equally subjected by the Franks in former times. Otto I. was the first to subdue the whole of Germany, and chiefly through his rousing against the violent and proud hostility of the strictly Frankish stems the national feeling of the Allemani and Bavarians—German stems once trodden down by them—so that the combination of their interests with his kingly interest supplied the force to crush the old Frankish pretensions. The consolidation of his sovereignty, however, appears to have been no little helped by his attainment of the Romish Cæsarate, renewed in former days by Karl the Great; for this conferred on him the lustre of the old Frank ruling-stem, compelling a respect not yet extinct. As if his family had plainly seen this, his successors made incessant journeys to Rome and Italy; to return with that halo of reverence so evidently meant to veil their native lineage in oblivion and translate them to the rank of that ur-race alone equipped for rule. They thus had won the "Hoard" and turned to "Nibelungen."

The century of kingship of the Saxon house, however, forms a relatively short interregnum in the infinitely longer empire of the Frankish stem; for after extinction of the Saxon house the royal power returned to a scion of that Frankish stem, Konrad the Salier,—in whom, again, a [266] female kinship with the Karlingen was proved and taken in view,—and remained with it until the downfall of the "Ghibelines." The choice of Lothar of Saxony, between the extinction of the male Frankish stem and its continuation by descendants on the distaff side, the Hohenstaufen, may be deemed a mere reactionary attempt, and this time of little durability; still more so, the later choice of the Guelph Otto IV. Only with the beheading of young Konrad at Naples can one view the ur-old royal race of the "Wibelingen" as totally extinct; strictly speaking, we must recognise that after him there were no more German Kings, and still less Kaisers, in the high ideal import of that dignity indwelling in the Wibelingen.

Wibelingen or Wibelungen

The name *Wibelingen*, designating the Kaiser-party in opposition to the *Welfen*, is of frequent occurrence, especially in Italy, where the two opponents gained their ideal scope; upon a closer search, however, we find how utterly impossible it is to explain these highly significant names by *historical* documents. And this is natural: bare History scarcely ever offers us, and always incompletely, the material for a judgment of the inmost (so to say, instinctive) motives of the ceaseless struggles of whole folks and races; that we must seek in Religion and Saga, where we mostly shall find it in convincing clearness.

Religion and Saga are the pregnant products of the people's insight into the nature of things and men. From of old the Folk has had the inimitable faculty of seizing its own essence according to the Generic idea, and plainly reproducing it in plastic personification. The Gods and Heroes of its religion and saga are the concrete personalities in which the Spirit of the Folk portrays its essence to itself: however sharp the individuality of these personages, their content (*Inhalt*) is of most universal, wide-embracing type, and therefore lends these shapes a strangely lasting lease [267] of life; as every new direction of the people's nature can be gradually imparted to them, they are always in the mood to suit it. Hence the Folk is thoroughly sincere and truthful in its stories and inventions, whereas the learned historian who holds by the mere pragmatic surface of events, without regard to the direct expression of the people's bond of solidarity, (4) is pedantically untrue because unable to understand the very subject of his work with mind and heart, and therefore is driven, without his knowing it, to arbitrary subjective speculations. The Folk alone understands the Folk, because each day and hour it does and consummates in truth what of its very essence it both can and should; whereas its learned schoolmaster cudgels his head in vain to comprehend what the Folk does purely of itself.

If—to prove the truthfulness of the people's insight with reference to our present case—instead of a history of Lords and Princes we had a Folk-history, we certainly should also find there how the German peoples always knew a name for that wondrous Frankish race of Kings which filled them all with awe and reverence of a higher type; a name we find again in history at last, Italianly disguised as "*Ghibelini*." That this name applied not only to the Hohenstaufen in Italy, but already to their forerunners in Germany, the Frankish Kaisers, is historically attested by Otto von Freisingen: the current form of this name in the Upper Germany of his time was "*Wibelingen*" or "*Wibelungen*." Now this title would entirely conform with the name of the chief heroes of the ur-Frank stem-saga, as also with the demonstrably frequent family-name among the Franks, of Nibelung, if the change of the initial letter N to W could be accounted for. The linguistic difficulty here is met with ease, if we rightly weigh the origin of just that consonantal change; this [268] lay in the people's mouth, which, following the German idiom's native bent, made a Stabreim of the two opposing parties, Welfs and Nibelungs, and gave the preference to the party of the German folk-stems by placing first the name of the "*Welfen*" and making that of the foes of their independence come after it as rhyme. "*Welfen und Wibelungen*" the Folk will long have known and named or ever it occurred to learned chroniclers to plague themselves with the derivation of these, to them, recondite popular nicknames. The Italian people, likewise standing nearer to the Welfs in their feud against the Kaisers, adopted these names from the German folk-mouth, and turned them quite according to their dialect to "*Guelphi*" and "*Ghibelini*." But the learned agony of Bishop Otto of Freisingen inspired him to derive the title of the Kaiser-party from the name of a wholly indifferent hamlet, Waiblingen—a charming trait that plainly proves how fit are clever folk to understand phenomena of world-historic import, such as these immortal names in the people's mouth! The Swabian Folk knew better who the "*Wibelungen*" were, for it called the *Nibelungen* so, and from the time of the ascendance of its native

blood-related Welfs.

If we borrow from the Folk its conviction of the identity of this name with that of the ur-old Frankish dynasty, the consequences for an exact and intimate understanding of this race's wondrous strivings and ambitions, as also of the doings of its physical and spiritual opponents, in Folk and Church, are so incalculable that its light alone will let us look into the mainsprings of one of the most eventful periods of world-historic evolution with clearer eye and fuller heart than our dry-as-dust chronicles ever can give us; for in that mighty Nibelungen-saga we are shewn as if the embryo of a plant, whose natural conditions of growth, of flower-time and death, are in it certainly foretold to the attentive observer.

So let us embrace that conviction: and we cannot do so with a stronger confidence than it inspired in the popular [269] mind of the Middle Ages coeval with that race's deeds; a confidence that survived to the poetic literature of the Hohenstaufen period, where we may plainly distinguish in the Christian-chivalrous poems the Welfian element become at last a churchly one, in the newly-furbished Nibelungenlieder that utterly contrasting Wibelingian principle with its often still ur-pagan cut.

The Welfen.

Before proceeding to a minuter examination of the point last touched, it is requisite to define more closely the direct opponents of the Wibelungen, the party of the *Welfen*. In the German language "Welfe" means sucklings, at first of dogs, and then of quadrupeds in general. The notion of pure descent and nurture at the mother's breast was easily conjoined to this, and in the poetic people's-mouth a "whelp" would soon be tantamount to a pure-bred son, born and suckled by the lawful mother.

In the times of the Karlingen, at its ancient Swabian stem-seat there enters history a race in which the name of *Welf* is handed down to farthest generations. It is a Welf who first arrests the eye of History by declining to accept enfeoffments from Frankish kings; as he could not stop his sons from entering relations partly connubial and partly feudal with the Karlings, the old father left his lands in deep disgust and withdrew into the wilderness, to be no witness of his race's shame.

If the dry chronicles of that time thought good to record this trait, to them so unimportant, we certainly may assume that it was far more actively embraced and spread abroad by the people of the downtrod German stem; for this incident, whose like may have often occurred before, expressed with energy the proud yet suffering self-consciousness of all the German stems as against the ruling tribe. Welf may thus have been acclaimed a "true whelp," a genuine son of the genuine stem-mother; and, [270] with the constantly increasing wealth and honour of his race, it might easily end in the people's viewing the name *Welf* as synonymous with German tribal independence against the feared but ne'er-beloved Frankish sovereignty.

In Swabia, their ancestral seat, the Welfs at last beheld in the advancement of the petty Hohenstaufen through intermarriage with the Frankish Kaisers and arrival at the dignity of Swabian, and thereafter Frankish Dukes, a fresh shame put upon them; and King Lothar used their natural embitterment against this race as chief means of resistance to the Wibelungen, who openly impugned his royal right. He increased the power of the Welfs to a degree unknown before by granting them the two dukedoms of Saxony and Bavaria at the same date, and only through the great assistance thus obtained was it possible for him to assert his kingship against the clamour of the Wibelungen, ay, so to humble them that they themselves held it not unadvisable to found a future stronghold among the German stems by intermarriage with the Welfs. Repeatedly did the possession of the major part of Germany devolve on the Welfen, and though his Wibelung predecessors had deemed expedient to withdraw it from them, Friedrich I. appears to have seen in the recognition of such an estate itself the surest means of reconciliation with an invincible National party and lastingly laying the hatred of ages; in a sense, he pacified them by material possession, the less disturbedly to realise his own ideal of the Kaiserdom, which he had grasped as none before.

What part is to be ascribed to the Welfs in the final foundering of the Wibelungen, and with them of the stricter German monarchy, is plainly told in history: the latter half of the thirteenth century shews us the fulfilled reaction of the narrower national spirit of the German stems, in their thirst for independence, against the royal yoke originally imposed upon all by the Franks. That these stems themselves were almost entirely disbanded till then, is to be explained, among other things, by their having lost their royal families as result of their first [271] subjection to the Franks; their other noble houses, the nearest of kin to the former, could therefore more easily make themselves absolute (directly holding from the Reich,—*reichsunmittelbar*) under the shelter and pretext of inherited imperial fiefs, and thus induce the thorough disgregation of the stems in whose broader national-interest the fight against the supremacy of the Wibelungen had first been waged. The ultimately successful reaction was therefore founded less upon an actual triumph of the stems, than on the collapse of the central kingly power undermined from of old by that fight. That it did not take place in

the sense of the Folk, but in the interest of lords who were splitting up the folk-sterns, is thus the ugly feature in this historical occurrence, however much that issue lay appointed by the nature of the existing historic elements themselves. Yet we may call everything related hereto the "Welfic" principle (devoid of any stem-saga), in opposition to that of the Wibelungen, which developed into nothing less than a claim to world-dominion.

The Nibelungen-hoard in the Frankish Royal race.

Clearly to grasp the inner relation of the Nibelungen-saga to the historical significance of the Frankish Kingship, let us once more turn back, and at somewhat greater length, to a consideration of the historic doings of this ancient princely race.

In what state of inner dissolution of their tribal system the Frankish stems at last arrived at their historic seat, the present Netherlands, cannot be strictly ascertained. We at first distinguish Salic and Ripuarian Franks; and not merely this distinction, but also the fact that larger districts (*Gaue*) had their independent Princes, makes it obvious that the original Stem-kingship had suffered a strongly democratic devolution through the roving and most varied partings, as also the later re-uniting of branch-races. One thing is certain, that only from the [272] members of the whole stem's oldest race were Kings or Commanders chosen: their power over the single components was evidently hereditary, for, though a chief of all the assembled stems was chosen for great enterprises in common, it could only be, as said, from out the branches of the ur-old race of Kings.

In "Nibelgau" we see established the undoubtedly oldest and most genuine section of the race: *Chlojo*, or *Chlodio*, may be regarded as the earliest historic holder of the strictly Royal authority, i.e. the Hoard of the Nibelungen. Victoriously had the Franks invaded the Roman world already, dwelt under the name of Confederates in the former Roman Belgia, and Chlojo ruled a subject province with something like a proconsul's power. Very probably a decisive battle with Roman legions had preceded this final seizure, and in the spoil there may have been found, beyond the war-chest, the full insignia of Roman empire. In these treasures, these insignia, the stem-saga of the Nibelungen-hoard would reap new realistic matter for its freshening, and renew alike its ideal import by the increase to the royal stability of the old stem-ruling race. The previously divided royal authority thus won a sure combining-point, material and ideal at once, against which the licence of the degenerate tribal system broke in vain. To the many collateral branches of the royal house the advantage of this newly-risen power would be equally obvious, and they persistently strove to wrest it to themselves. Such an immediate kinsman was *Merwig*, chieftain of the Merwegau, to whose protection the dying Chlojo gave his three infant sons; instead of parcelling out their birthright to his charges, the faithless cousin seized it for himself and drove the helpless children out: this trait we meet in the full-fledged Nibelungen-saga, where Siegfried von Morungen, i.e. Merwungen has to divide the heirloom Hoard among the sons of Nibelung, but likewise keeps it for himself. The power and right residing in the Hoard had thus passed over to the Nibelungen's blood-relations, the Merwungen: in effect, [273] they stretched its physical significance to ever fuller width by constant conquest and addition to the royal might, and the latter more especially by a systematic rooting-out of all the blood-relations of their house.

One of the sons of Chlojo was saved, however; his descendants fled to Austrasia, regained the Nibelgau, established themselves at Nivella, and finally re-appeared in history as the "Pipingen," a name unquestionably given them by the hearty sympathy of the Folk with the fate of those little sons of Chlojo, and hereditarily accepted in due gratitude for this people's helping and protecting love. For these it was reserved, after recovery of the Nibelungen-hoard, to raise the material value of the worldly power upbuilt thereon to its uttermost pitch: Karl the Great, whose predecessor had entirely set aside at last the puffed-up and degenerate race of the Merwungen, gained and governed the whole German world, together with the former West-Roman Empire so far as German peoples dwelt therein; he accordingly might deem himself de facto successor to the rights of the Roman Cæsars, and claim their confirmation by the Romish Pontiff.

Arrived at this high stand-point, we now must prepare ourselves for a survey of the world's condition at that time, and indeed in the sense of the mighty Nibelung himself; for this is the

point from whence the historic import of that often-mentioned Frankish saga is to be taken more clearly in eye.

When Karl the Great looked down from the height of his West-Roman Kaiser-throne upon the world he knew, the first thing to strike him, must have been that solely in himself and family had the German ur-Kingship survived: all the royal races of the German stems related to him, so far as language proved a common origin, had passed away or been destroyed by subjugation, and he thus might deem himself the only representative and lawful heir of German Ur-Kinghood. This state of affairs would very naturally lead him and his nearest kin, the Franks, to regard themselves as the peculiarly-privileged, the oldest and most imperishable stem-race of all the German nation, and [274] eventually to find an ideal right to that pretension in their primitive stem-saga. In that stem-saga, as in every ur-old saga of like kind, an originally religious core is plainly visible. Though we left that kernel on one side at its earliest mentioning, it now is time to view it closer.

Origin and evolution of the Nibelungen-myth.

Man receives his first impressions from surrounding Nature, and none of her phenomena will have reacted on him so forcibly from the beginning, as that which seemed to him to form the first condition of the existence, or at least of his knowledge, of everything contained in Creation: and this is *Light, the Day, the Sun*. Thanks, and finally worship, would be paid this element the first; the more so, as its opposite, Darkness, Night, seemed joyless, hence unfriendly and fear-compelling. Now, as man drew all his joy and animation from the light, it soon would come to mean the very fount of Being: it became the begetter, the father, the god; the breaking of day out of night at last appeared to him the victory of Light over Darkness, of Warmth over Cold, and so forth; and this idea may have been the first to breed in man a moral consciousness and lead him to distinction of the useful and the harmful, the friendly and hostile, Good and Bad.

So far, at anyrate, this earliest nature-impression must be regarded as the common basis of all Religions of every people. In the individualising of these general ideas derived from physical observation, however, is to be sought the gradually-conspicuous cleavage of religions according to the character of different nations. Now the stem-saga of the Franks has the high pre-eminence that, in keeping with the stem's peculiarity, it developed more and more from this beginning to historic life, whereas a similar growth of the religious myth into a genealogic saga is nowhere to be found among the other German stems: in exact degree as these lagged behind in active influence on history, did their stem-sagas stop short at the religious myth (superlatively [275] the case with the Scandinavians), or get lost in wholly undeveloped fragments at the first shock with historic nations more alive.

At the farthest point to which we can trace it, the Frank stem-saga shews the individualised Light or Sun-god, who conquers and lays low the monster of ur-Chaotic night:—this is the original meaning of *Siegfried's fight with the Dragon*, a fight like that Apollo fought against the dragon Python. Yet, as Day succumbs to Night again, as Summer in the end must yield to Winter, Siegfried too is slain at last: so the god became man, and as a mortal man he fills our soul with fresh and stronger sympathy; for, a sacrifice to his deed of blessing us, he wakes the moral motive of Revenge, i.e. the longing to avenge his death upon his murderer, and thus renew his deed. The ur-old fight is now continued by ourselves, and its changeful issue is just the same as that eternal alternation of day and night, summer and winter,—and lastly of the human race itself, in ceaseless sway from life to death, from triumph to defeat, from joy to grief, and thus perennially rejuvenating in itself the active consciousness of the immortal fund of Man and Nature. The quintessence of this constant motion, thus of Life, at last in "*Wuotan*" (Zeus) found expression as the chiefest God, the Father and Pervader of the All. Though his nature marked him as the highest god, and as such he needs must take the place of father to the other deities, yet was he nowise an historically older god, but sprang into existence from man's later, higher consciousness of self; consequently he is more abstract than the older Nature-god, whilst the latter is more corporeal and, so to phrase it, more personally inborn in man.

If this may pass as a general statement of the evolutionary path of Saga, and finally of History, from the ur-Myth, our next concern will be that weighty point in the fashioning of the Franks' stem-saga which gave this race its quite specific physiognomy,—to wit, the *Hoard*.

In the religious mythos of the Scandinavians the term [276] *Nifelheim*, i.e. Nibel=Nebelheim [the Home of Haze] comes down to us as designation of the (subterranean) sojourn of the Night-spirits, "Schwarzalben," in opposition to the heavenly dwelling of the

"Asen" and "Lichtalben" ["Light-elves"]. These Black-elves, "Niflûngar," children of Night and Death, burrow the earth, find out its inner treasures, smelt and smith its ore: golden gear and keen-edged weapons are their work. Now we find the name of "Nibelungen," their treasures, arms and trinkets, again in the Frankish stem-saga, but with the distinction that the idea originally shared by all the German stems has here evolved to ethical historic import.

When Light vanquished Darkness, when Siegfried slew the Nibelungen-dragon, he further won as victor's spoil the Nibelungen-hoard it guarded. But the possession of this Hoard—whose properties increase his might beyond all measure, since he thereby rules the Nibelungen—is also reason of his death: for the dragon's heir now plots to win it back. This heir despatches him by stealth, as night the day, and drags him down into the gloomy realm of Death: *Siegfried thus becomes himself a Nibelung*. Though doomed to death by acquisition of the Hoard, each sequent generation strives to seize it: its inmost essence drives it on, as with necessity of Nature, as day has ever to dethrone the night anew. For in the Hoard there lies withal the secret of all earthly might: *it is the Earth itself with all its splendour, which in joyous shining of the Sun at dawn of day we recognise as our possession to enjoy, when Night, that held its ghostly, gloomy dragon's-wings spread fearsomely above the world's rich stores, has finally been routed*.

If we look closer at this Hoard, *the Nibelungen's special work*, in it we recognise at first the metal bowels of the earth, and next what is prepared therefrom: arms, ruler's-ring, and stores of gold. So that Hoard included in itself the means of gaining and insuring mastery, as also the one Talisman of Rule: the hero-god who won it first, and thus became a Nibelung partly through his power and partly through his death, left as heirloom to his race the active [277] right to claim the Hoard: to avenge the slain and keep or win the Hoard afresh, this stress makes out the soul of all the race; by this it may be recognised throughout the saga, and above all in its history, that race of the Nibelungen-Franken.

Now, should it be thought too daring to assume that even in the ur-home of the German tribes that wondrous race once reigned above them all, or, if the other German stems have sprung from it, that at their head it once had ruled all other peoples on that Asiatic mountain-isle, at least a later phase is irrefutable,—that it actually governed all the German stems in Europe, and at their head, as we soon shall see, both claimed and strove for the dominion of every nation in the world. That deeply innate stress, now stronger and now weaker, this race of Kings appears to have referred in every age to its prime origin; and Karl the Great knew perfectly what he was doing, and why, when he had all songs of the stem-saga most carefully collected and transcribed: he knew they would confirm the Folk's belief in the ur-old right of his dynasty.

The rank of Romish Kaiser and the Roman stem-saga.

The sovereign-instinct of the Nibelungen, till then more brutal in its satisfaction, was led at last by Karl the Great towards an ideal aim: this psychologic moment (*der hierzu anregende Moment*) must be sought in Karl's assumption of the *Roman Cæsardom*.

If we cast a glance upon the extra-German world, so far as it lay bare to Karl the Great, we find the selfsame kingless plight as with the subject German stems. The Romanic nations ruled by Karl had long since lost their royal races through the Romans; the Slavonic nations, little valued in themselves and destined for a more or less thorough Germanising, had never won for their ruling races, now also falling to decay, a recognition equal to the German's. Rome alone retained historic claim to rule, [278] and that to rule the world; that world-dominion had been exerted by the Cæsars in the name of a people, not of an ur-old royal race, but nevertheless in form of Monarchy. These Cæsars, in latter days capriciously selected first from this, then that component of the brew of nations, had never had to prove a racial right to the highest sovereignty in all the world. The deep corruption, impotence, and shameful foundering of this Roman Cæsarate—propped up at last by nothing but the German mercenaries, who had possession of the Roman Empire long years before its actual extinction—had certainly not faded from the memory of its Frankish conquerors. Yet, for all the personal weakness and depravity of the emperors known to the Germans, a deep awe and reverence of that rank under whose authority this highly-cultured Roman world was ruled had been implanted in the minds of the barbaric intruders, and there had stayed until these later times. And in that feeling there might lurk, not only respect for a higher culture, but also an old remembrance of the first brush of the German peoples with the Romans, who under *Julius Cæsar* once had reared a strong and lasting dam against their restless inroads.

Already German warriors had hunted Gauls and Celts, with hardly a stand, over the Alps and across the Rhine; the conquest of the whole of Gallia was easily within their grasp, when suddenly in Julius Cæsar they encountered a force unknown to them before. Beating them back, vanquishing and partly subjugating them, this supernal captain must have made an indelible impression on the Germans; and confirmed was their deep awe of him when they later learnt how all the Roman world had bent to him, how his patronymic "Cæsar" had been hallowed to the title of the highest earthly might, whilst he himself had been translated to the Gods from whom his race had sprung.

This divine descent was grounded on an ur-old Roman saga, according to which the Romans issued from a primordial race that, coming once from Asia, had settled [279] on the banks of the Tiber and Arno. The quick of the religious halidom committed to the offspring of this race indisputably made out for ages the weightiest heritage of the Roman nation: in it reposed the force that bound and knit this active people; the "sacra" in the keeping of the oldest, immemorially-allied patrician families, compelled the heterogeneous masses of plebeians to obedience. Deep awe and veneration of the holy things, whose sense enjoined a vigorous abstemiousness (as practised by the sorely-tried ur-father), make out the oldest, inconceivably effective laws whereby the headstrong folk was governed; and the "*pontifex maximus*"—the unchanging successor of Numa, the moral founder of the Roman State—was the virtual (spiritual) king of the Romans. Actual Kings, i.e. hereditary holders of the highest worldly rulership, are unknown in Roman history: the banished Tarquins were Etruscan conquerors; in their expulsion we have less to recognise a political act of insurrection against the royal power, than the old stem-races' national act of shaking-off a foreign yoke.

Now, when the plebs was no longer to be held in check by these stern and spiritually-armoured ancient races; when through constant warfare and privation it had made its strength so irresistible that, to avoid a destructive discharge thereof against the inmost core of the Roman State-system, it must be loosed upon the outer world in conquest, then, and still

more as result of this world-conquest, the last bond of ancient customs slowly snapped, and religion dropped into its utter opposite through the most material worldlifying: dominion of the world, enslavement of its peoples—no more dominion of the inner man, subdual of his egoistic animal passions—was henceforth Rome's religion. The Pontificate, though it still stood outward token of the ancient Rome, passed over to the worldly Emperor as his weightiest attribute, significantly enough; and the first man to combine both powers was just that Julius Cæsar, whose race was lauded as the very oldest emigrant from Asia. Troja (*Ilion*), so [280] said the old stem-saga now ripened to historic consciousness, was that sacred town of Asia whence the Julian (*Ilian*) race had sprung: during the destruction of his father-town by the united Hellenic stems Æneas, son of a goddess, had rescued the holiest relic (the Palladium) preserved in this ur-people's city, and brought it safe to Italy: from him descend the primal Roman races, and most directly of them all the Julian; from him, through the possession of that ur-folk's halidom, was said to date the core of Romandom, their old religion.

Trojan descent of the Franks.

How full of meaning is the historically-attested fact that, shortly after the foundation of their rule in Roman Gallia, the Franks gave themselves out as likewise *sprung from Troy*. The chronicle-historian gives a pitying smile to such a stale conceit, which cannot hold a grain of truth. But he whose purpose is to vindicate the deeds of men and races by their inmost views and impulses, will find it of the highest moment to note what they *believed*, or tried to make others believe, about themselves. And no feature can be of more striking historic importance, than this naïve utterance of the Franks' belief in their ur-right to rule, upon their entry on that Roman world whose culture and whose past inspired them with reverence, yet to rule which they were proud enough to base their right directly on the principles of classic Romandom itself. So they, too, sprang from Troy; in fact it was their royal race that governed once in Troy. For one of their ancient stem-kings, *Pharamond*, was none other than *Priamus*, the very head of the Trojan royal family, who after the destruction of the city, so they said, had journeyed into distant parts with a remnant of his people. The first point for us to notice here, is that the naming of towns or transformation of their names by an addendum, as also the poetic adaptations of the Trojan War and incidents allied therewith in [281] vogue until the later Middle Ages, afford sufficient evidence of the wide spread and lasting influence of this new saga. Whether it was in all respects as new as it looks, and does not contain a germ far older than its new disguise in the Græco-Roman dress,—this certainly is worth inquiry.

The legend of an ur-old town or castle, built by the earliest human races and circled with Cyclopean walls to guard their holiest fetish, we find with almost every nation of the world, and especially with those of whom we may assume that they spread westward from those ur-hills of Asia. Did the archetype of these fabled cities not actually once exist in these peoples' earliest home? Surely there was one oldest, first walled city, which held in it the oldest and most venerable race, the well-spring of all patriarchy, i.e. of Kingdom joined with Priesthood. The farther did the stems move westward from their ancient home, the holier would grow their memory of that ur-town; it became to them a city of the Gods, the Asgard of the Scandinavians, the Asciburg of the related Germans. On their Olympos we find again among the Greeks the dwelling of the Gods; before the Romans' Capitol, no less, it may originally have hovered.

Certain it is, that wherever the stems, now grown to nations, made their abiding home, there that ur-town was copied in reality: to it, the new stem-seat of the ruling oldest race of Kings and Priests, the sanctity of the primordial city was gradually transferred; and the farther did the races journey from it in its turn, and build again, the more accountably would wax the glamour of this new stem-city also. Very naturally, however, with the freer evolution of these branch-communities, and their growing sense of self-reliance, the desire for independence would arise; and in exact degree as the ancient ruling-race, that governed from the new stem-city, endeavoured to imprint its sovereignty on the offshoot communes, or cities, and met their stiffening recusance with added tyranny. The first national Wars of Independence were therefore those waged by Colonies against the Mother-cities; and so [282] obstinate must have grown their enmity, that nothing less than the destruction of the old stem-city, with the extirpation or total banishment of the hereditary ruling-race, could still the hate of the epigoni or lay their fears of fresh oppression. All the greater historic nations that followed in each other's footsteps from the Indian Caucasus to the Mediterranean Sea know such a holy city, copied from the ur-old city of the Gods on earth, as also its destruction by new generations: very probably they even nursed the memory of an ur-old war of earliest races against the eldest ruling-race in that Gods'-city of their hoariest home, and of that town's destruction: this may have been, in fact, the first general tussle for the Nibelung's Hoard.

Nothing do we know of great Mother-cities founded by our German stems on that

Ur-town's model in their long North-westward wandering, which was finally arrested by the German Ocean and the sword of Julius Cæsar. On the other hand, the memory of the Gods'-city in their oldest home itself had lingered with them; and, un-perpetuated to the eye by material reproduction, it had settled to the more abstract notion of a Gods'-abode in Asgard. Not till we come to their new and stabler home, our present Germany, do we meet with signs of Asenburgs.

Different had been the evolution of the peoples thrusting South-westwards, among whose Hellenic stems the last distinct remembrance, of their united fight-for-independence against the Priamids and the razing of Troy, as the most signal outset of a new historic life, had almost totally extinguished every other memory. Now, as the Romans, after a closer acquaintance with the historic stem-saga of the Hellenes, had held themselves completely justified in linking on the dim remembrances of their forefathers' descent from Asia to that sharp-cut myth of the better-cultured nation (as if to represent their subjugation of the Greeks as a reprisal for the destruction of Troy), just so did the Franks lay hand on it, perhaps with no less title, when they came to know the legend and its sequel. If the German memories were less distinct, at least they were [283] still older, for they clung directly to the earliest home, the burg (Etsel-, i.e. Asci-burg) in which was stored the Nibelungen-hoard once won by their Stem-god and left to them and their strong arm; thus the burg whence they had once already ruled all kindred folks and races. The Grecian Troy became for them that cradle city, and the King of immemorial right, dislodged therefrom, in them revived his ancient privilege.

At last confronted with the history of the South-west wanderers, must not his race regard its wondrous preservation as a token of the gods' eternal preference? All peoples now descended from the races that had waged a patricidal war against the oldest royal race in the cradle-home, and, victorious then, had forced this race to journey toward the raw inhospitable North while they fenced in the fertile South for leisurely expansion,—all these the Franks found *kingless*. Long since extinct and rooted out, were the oldest tribes in which these stems had erst known Kings; a last Greek Stem-King, the Macedonian *Alexander*—offspring of Achilles, that foremost vanquisher of Troy—, had un-kinged the whole southern Orient itself, up to the cradle of mankind in central Asia, as if in last fulfilment of that earliest patricidal war: with him his race expired too, and from that time none had rule except unrightful raiders of the royal power, who all had finally succumbed beneath the weight of *Julian Rome*.

After extinction of the Julian race even the Roman Emperors were arbitrarily elected, in any case not racially legitimate, dictators: their empire, or ever they themselves became aware of it, had long since ceased to be a "Roman" empire as from of old it had only been bound up by force, and a force maintained through wellnigh naught but armies, so, now that the Romanic nations were completely degenerated and effeminate, these armies were formed of almost none but hired troops of German origin. Hence, gradually renouncing all material worldly might, after long estrangement from itself the Roman spirit necessarily turned back upon itself, to its ur-nature; [284] and thus, adopting Christianity, it gave birth to a new development, the Roman Catholic Church: the Emperor again became all Pontifex, Cæsar again Numa, in new peculiarity of import. Now the *Pontifex maximus*, or *Pope*, was approached by the full-blooded representative of Ur-world-Kinghood, *Karl the Great*: the bearers of the oldest Kinghood and the oldest Priesthood, dissevered since the razing of that cradle city (according to the Trojan saga: the *royal Priamos* and the *pious Æneas*) met after centuries of parting, and touched as body and spirit of mankind.

Joyful was their meeting: nothing should ever part them more; the one should give the other troth and shelter: the Pontifex crowned the Cæsar, and to the nations preached obedience toward their lawful King; the Kaiser installed the Priest of God in his supreme pastorate, in whose exercise he undertook to shield him with the arm of worldly strength against all caitiffs.

Now, if this king was de facto master of the West-Roman empire, and might the thought of the ur-kingly title of his race awake in him the claim to perfect sovereignty of the world, in the Kaisership he gained still stronger title to that claim, especially through his entrustment with the shelter of that Christian Church which was to span the world. For the further development of that majestic world-relation, however, it is most important to remark that this spiritual title set up no altogether novel claim of the Frankish royal race, but simply woke to plainer terms a claim ingenerate in the germ of the Frankish stem-saga, though veiled till then in dimmer consciousness.

Material and Ideal contents of the Nibelungen-Hoard.

With Karl the Great the often-cited ur-old myth attains its most material confirmation in a grand harmonious juncture of world-history. Thenceforward in exact degree [285] as its real embodiment dissolved and fell to pieces, its essential *ideal* content was to mount to such a point that, entirely divested of the Real, the pure Idea steps plainly formulated into History, and finally withdraws therefrom to pass, even as to its outward garment, completely back to Saga.

Whereas in the century after Karl the Great, under his more and more incompetent successors, the actual kingdom and the sovereignty over subject peoples had crumbled up and lost in power, all the atrocities of the Karlings sprang from one root-instinct common to them all, the longing for sole possession of the Nibelungen-hoard, i.e. of rule supreme. Since Karl the Great this seemed to need confirming by the Kaisership, and he who won the Kaiser-throne believed himself the true possessor of the Hoard, whatever the diminution of its worldly wealth (in landed property). The Kaiserhood, with the supreme authority to it alone attaching, was thus invested with a more and more ideal meaning; and during the period of total defeat of the Frankish ruling-stem, when the Saxon Otto seemed to be restoring the real Cæsarate of Karl the Great in fresh conjunction with Rome, its *ideal* aspect would appear to have come to ever clearer consciousness in the mind of that old stem. The Franks and their ducal race of one blood with the Karlingen, thinking of the saga, may have told themselves something like this: "What though the real possession of the land is torn from us, and once more we're thrown upon ourselves,—can we but regain the Imperial rank, for which we'll never cease to strive, with it we win again our ancient title to mastery of the world; and then we'll know to ply it better than these usurpers of the Hoard, who do not even understand its use."

In effect, as soon as the Frankish stem regained the Kaiserdom, the world-question hinging on that dignity advanced to an ever more important stage, and that through its relation with the Church.

In measure as the worldly power had lost in real estate [286] and approached a more ideal development, the originally purely ideal Church had attained to worldly possession. Each party seemed to comprehend that, for its perfect establishment, it must draw into itself what had lain at first without it; and so from both sides the original antithesis was mounting to an open fight for exclusive world-dominion. Through the growing consciousness of both parties to this more and more stubborn fight, of the prize at stake for winning or retaining, the Kaiser at last was forced to the necessity of acquiring the spiritual dominion of the world, if he meant to safeguard his material title;—the Pope, on the other hand, must annihilate these material claims, or rather take them to himself if he meant to remain or become the actual governor and overseer of the World-Church.

The resultant demands of the Pope were insofar grounded upon Christian Reason (*Vernunft*) as he felt bound to adjudge to Spirit the power over Body, consequently to God's Vicar on earth the supremacy over His creatures. The Kaiser, on the contrary, saw that his prime concern was to prove his power and claims quite independent of any hallowing or ratifying, to say nothing of bestowal, by the Pope; and for this he found what he deemed a perfect title in the old belief of his stem-race in their origin.

In its earliest form, the stem-saga of the Nibelungen went back to the memory of a divine Ur-father, not only of the Franks, but perhaps of all the nations issued from the Asiatic home. Very naturally in this Ur-father, as we find with every patriarchal system, the royal and priestly powers had been combined as one and the same authority. The later severance of these powers would rank in any case as consequence of a dissension in the race, or, had the priestly power devolved on all the fathers of the commune, in them at most could it be

recognised, but never in an upstart Priest opponent to the King; for the fulfilment of the priestly office, so far as it was to be assigned to one sole person for them all, could fall to no [287] one but the King, as Father of the racial whole. That there was no need for those ur-old notions to be sacrificed in toto on the conversion to Christianity, not only is proved by facts, but may be deduced with little pains from the essential content of the old traditions. The abstract Highest God of the Germans, Wuotan, did not really need to yield place to the God of the Christians; rather could he be completely identified with him: merely the physical trappings with which the various stems had clothed him in accordance with their idiosyncrasy, their dwelling-place and climate, were to be stripped off; the universal attributes ascribed to him, for the rest, completely answered those allotted to the Christian's God. And Christianity has been unable to our day to extirpate the elementary or local Nature-gods: quite recent legends of the Folk, and a wealth of still-prevailing superstitions, attest this in our nineteenth century.

But that one native Stem-god, from whom the races all immediately derived their earthly being, was certainly the last to be given up: for in him was found the striking likeness to Christ himself, the Son of God, that he too died, was mourned and avenged,—as we still avenge Christ on the Jews of to-day. Fidelity and attachment were transferred to Christus all the easier, as one recognised in him the Stem-god once again; and if Christ, as Son of God, was father (at least the spiritual) of *all* men, that harmonised the better and more conclusively with the divine Stem-father of the Franks, who thought themselves indeed the oldest race and parent of all others. Christianity therefore, with their incomplete and physical understanding of it, would rather strengthen the Franks in their national faith, particularly against the Roman Church, than make them falter; and in rejoinder to this vital obstinacy of the Wibelingian superstition, we see the natural instinct of the Church attacking with almost a mortal dread this last, but sturdiest survival of paganism in the deeply hated race.

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The "Ghibeline" Kaiserdom and Friedrich I.

Now it is highly noteworthy that the stress toward Ideal vindication of their claims becomes more pronounced in the Wibelingen or Wibelungen (to name them with the historic folk-mouth) in measure as their blood departs from immediate kinship with the ur-old ruling race. If in Karl the Great the drift of blood was still at height of its ancestral strength, in the Hohenstaufian *Friedrich I.* we see almost nothing but the ideal stress: it had become at last the very soul of the Imperial entity, that could find less and less legitimation in its blood and real estate, and therefore sought it in the Idea.

Under the last two Kaisers of the Frankish ducal race of the Salier the great fight with the Church had begun in deadly earnest. Heinrich V., previously supported by the Church against his hapless father, had scarcely reached the rank of Kaiser than he felt the fateful craving to renew his father's wrestle with the Church, and, as if the only means of combating her claims, to extend his title over her as well: he must have divined that the Kaiser were impossible, should his world-dominion not include dominion of the Church herself. It is characteristic, on the other hand, that the interim non-Wibelingian Kaiser Lothar adopted an attitude of peaceful submission to the Church: he did not fathom what the Kaiser-rank implied; *his* claims did not extend to world-dominion,—those were the heirloom of the Wibelingen, the old-legitimist contenders for the Hoard. But clearly and plainly as none before, great *Friedrich I.* took up the heir-idea in its sublimest sense. The whole inner and outer deprivation of the world appeared to him the necessary consequence of the weakness and incompleteness with which the Kaiser's power had been exerted thitherto: the material might, already in sorry case, must be perfectly amended by the Kaiser's ideal dignity; and that could only come to pass when its extreme pretensions were enforced. The ideal lines of the great fabric that rose before Friedrich's energetic soul may be drawn (in the [289] freer mode of speech allowed to-day) somewhat as follows:—

"In the German Folk survives the oldest lawful race of Kings in all the world: it issues from a son of God, called by his nearest kinsmen *Siegfried*, but *Christ* by the remaining nations of the earth; for the welfare of his race, and the peoples of the earth derived therefrom, he wrought a deed most glorious, and for that deed's sake suffered death. The nearest heirs of his great deed, and of the power won thereby, are the 'Nibelungen,' to whom the earth belongs in name and for the happiness of every nation. The Germans are the oldest nation, their blue-blood King is a 'Nibelung,' and at their head he claims world-rulership. There can therefore exist no right to any sort of possession or enjoyment, in all this world, that does not emanate from him and need its hallowing by his feoffment or sanction: all property or usufruct not bestowed or sanctioned by the Kaiser is lawless in itself, and counts as robbery; for the Kaiser enfiends and sanctions for the good, possession or enjoyment, of *all*, whereas the unit's self-seized gain is a theft from all.—In the German Folk the Kaiser grants these feoffments or confirmations himself; for all other nations their Kings and Princes are attorneys of the Kaiser, from whom all earthly sovereignty originally flows, as the planets and their moons receive their radiance from the sun.—Thus too the Kaiser delegates the high-priestly power, originally no less pertaining to him than the earthly might, to the Pope of Rome: the latter has to exercise the Sight-of-God in his name, and to acquaint him with the God's-decree, that he may execute the Heavenly Will in name of God upon the earth. The Pope accordingly is the Kaiser's most important officer, and the weightier his office, the more does it behove the Kaiser to keep strict watch that the Pope exerts it in the meaning of the Kaiser, i.e. for the peace and healing of all nations upon earth."—

No lower must we reckon Friedrich's estimate of his rank supreme, his right divine, if we

are properly to judge the motives brought to clearest daylight in his actions.

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We see him in the first place making firm the base of his material might by composing the territorial strife in Germany through reconciliation with his relatives the Welfen, and compelling the princes of bordering peoples, in particular the Danes, Poles and Hungarians, to accept their lands in fee from him. Thus fortified he fared to Italy, and, as arbiter over the Lombards in the Roncalian Diet, for the first time published to the world a systematic digest of the Kaiser's claims; in which, for all the influence of Imperial Roman principles, we recognise the strictest consequences of the aforesaid view of his authority: his Imperial Right was here extended even to the grant of air and water.

No less determined were his claims against and over the Church herself, after an initial period of reserve. A disputed Papal election gave him the opportunity of exerting his supreme right: with strict observance of what he deemed fit priestly forms, he had the election scrutinised, deposed the Pope who seemed to him at fault, and installed the vindicated rival in his place.

Every trait of Friedrich's, every undertaking, each decree, bears most indisputable witness to the energetic congruence with which he ever strove to realise his high ideal. The unwavering firmness with which he opposed the no less obstinate Pope Alexander III., the almost superhuman rigour—in a Kaiser by no means prone to cruelty by nature—with which he doomed to overthrow the equally undaunted Milan, are incorporate moments of the grand Idea informing him.

Two mighty foes, however, stood up against the heaven-storming World-king; the first at starting-point of his material power, in the German landed system,—the second at the terminus of his ideal endeavour, the Catholic Church established in the conscience of Romanic peoples in particular. Both foes joined forces with a third, on which the Kaiser, in a sense, himself had first bestowed its consciousness: the *instinct of freedom in the Lombard communes*.

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If the earliest resistance of the German stems had had its origin in the thirst for freedom from their Frankish rulers, that bent had gradually passed over from the shattered tribal fellowships to the lords who snatched these fragments to themselves: although the effort of these princes had all the evil attributes of selfish lust-of-mastery, yet their longing for its independent satisfaction might rank in their eyes as a fight for freedom, however less exalted it must seem in ours. The bent-to-freedom of the Church was more ideal by far, more universal: in Christian terminology it might count as struggle of the soul for liberation from the fetters of the sensual world, and undoubtedly it passed for such in the minds of her greatest chiefs; she had been forced to share too deeply in the world's material taste of might, however, and her ultimate victory could therefore be gained through nothing but the ruin of her inmost soul.

But the spirit of freedom shews out the purest in the Lombard townships, and precisely (alas! almost solely) in their decisive fights with Friedrich. These fights are insofar the most remarkable event of a critical historic period, as in them, for the first time in the history of the world, the spirit of ur-human freedom embodied in the Burgher-commune girds up itself to a fight for life and death with an old established, all-embracing sovereignty. Athens' fight against the Persians was patriotic opposition to a huge monarchic piracy: all similar famous deeds of single townships, until the time of the Lombardians, bear the selfsame character of defence of ancient *racial* independence against a foreign conqueror. Now, this ancestral freedom, that cleaves to the root of a nationality till then untroubled, was in nowise present with the Lombard communes: history has seen the population of these cities, compounded of

all nations and bare of any old tradition, fall shameful victim to the greed of every conqueror; through a thousand years of total impotence, in these cities lived no nation, i.e. no race with any consciousness of its earliest origin : in them dwelt merely [292] *men*, men led by the need of mutual insurance of an undisturbed prosperity to an ever plainer evolution of the principle of Society, and its realisation through the Commune (*Gemeinde*).

This novel principle, devoid of racial lore or chronicle arising purely of and for itself; owes its historic origin to the population of the Lombard cities, who, imperfectly as they could understand and turn it to a lasting good, yet evolved themselves thereby from deepest feebleness to agents of the highest force;—and if its entry into history is to count as the spark that leaps from the stone, then Friedrich is the steel that struck it from the stone.

Friedrich, the representative of the last racial Ur-Folk-Kinghood, in mightiest fulfilment of his indeviably destiny, struck from the stone of manhood the spark before whose splendour he himself must pale. The *Pope* launched his ban, the *Welf Heinrich* forsook his king in his direst want,—but the sword of the *Lombard band of brothers* smote the imperial warrior with the terrible rout at Lignano.

Ascent of the Ideal content of the Hoard into the "Holy Grail."

The World-ruler recognised from whence his deepest wound had come, and who it was that cried his world-plan final halt. *It was the spirit of free Manhood loosed from the nature-soil of race*, that had faced him in this Lombard Bond. He made short work of both the older foes: to the High-priest he gave his hand,—he fell with crushing force upon the selfish Guelphs; and so, once more arrived at summit of his power and undisputed might,—he *spake the Lombards free, and struck with them a lasting peace*.

At Mainz he gathered his whole Reich around him; (5) all his feudatories, from the first to the last, he fain would [293] greet once more: the clergy and the laity surrounded him; from every land Kings sent ambassadors with precious gifts, in homage to his Kaiser-might. But *Palestine* sent forth to him the cry to save the Holy Tomb.—To the land of morning Friedrich turned his gaze: a force resistless drew him on toward Asia, to the cradle of the nations, to the place where God begat the father of all Men. Wondrous legends had he heard of a lordly country deep in Asia, in farthest India,—of an ur-divine Priest-King who governed there a pure and happy people, immortal through the nurture of a wonder-working relic called "*the Holy Grail*."—Might he there regain the lost Sight-of-God, now garbled by ambitious priests in Rome according to their pleasure?—

The old hero girt him up; with splendid retinue of war he marched through Greece: he might have conquered it,—what bootied that?—unresting he was drawn to farthest Asia. There on tempestuous field he broke the power of the Saracens; unchallenged lay the promised land before him; he could not wait for the construction of a flying bridge, but urged impatient Eastwards,—on horse he plunged into the stream: none saw him in this life again.

Since then, the legend went that once the *Keeper of the Grail* had really brought the holy relic to the Occident; great wonders had he here performed: in the Netherlands, the Nibelungen's ancient seat, a Knight of the Grail had appeared, but vanished when asked forbidden tidings of his origin;—then was the Grail conducted back by its old guardian to the distant morning-land;—in a castle on a lofty mount in India it now was kept once more.

In truth the legend of the Holy Grail, significantly enough, makes its entry on the world at the very time when the Kaiserhood attained its more ideal direction, and the Nibelung's Hoard accordingly was losing more and more in material worth, to yield to a higher spiritual content. The spiritual ascension of the Hoard into the Grail was accomplished in the German conscience, and [294] the Grail, at least in the meaning lent it by German poets, must rank as the Ideal representative or follower of the Nibelungen-Hoard; it, too, had sprung from Asia, from the ur-home of mankind; God had guided it to men as paragon of holiness.

It is of the first importance that its Keeper was priest and king alike, that is, a Master (*Oberhaupt*) of all Spiritual Knighthood, such as was introduced from the Orient in the twelfth century. So this Master was in truth none other than the Kaiser, from whom all Chivalry proceeded; and thus the real and ideal world-supremacy, the union of the highest kingdom and priesthood, seemed completely attained in the Kaiser.

The quest of the Grail henceforth replaces the struggle for the Nibelungen-Hoard, and as the occidental world, unsatisfied within, reached out past Rome and Pope to find its place of healing in the tomb of the Redeemer at Jerusalem,—as, unsatisfied even there, it cast its yearning gaze, half spiritual half physical, still farther toward the East to find the primal shrine of manhood,—so the Grail was said to have withdrawn from out the ribald West to the pure, chaste, reachless birth-land of all nations.—

To pass the ur-old Nibelungen-saga in review, we see it springing like a spiritual germ from an oldest race's earliest glance at Nature (*Naturanschauung*); we see this germ develop to a mighty plant on ever more material soil, especially in the Historic evolution of the saga, so that in Karl the Great it seems to thrust its knotty fibres deep into the actual earth; till finally in the Wibelingian Kaiserdom of Friedrich I. we see this plant unfold its fairest flower to the light: with him the flower faded; in his grandson Friedrich II., the highest mind of all the Kaisers, the wondrous perfume of the dying bloom spread like a lovely fairy-spell through all the world of West and East; till with the grandson of the last-named Kaiser, the youthful Konrad, the leafless withered stem [295] was torn with all its roots and fibres from the ground, and stamped to dust.

Historic residue of the Material content of the Hoard, in "Real Property."

A shriek of horror rang through every country when the head of Konrad fell in Naples to the blows of that *Charles d'Anjou* who in every lineament presents the perfect archetype of all post-Wibelungian Kinghood. He sprang from the oldest of the newer royal races: in France the Capets had long succeeded to the last French Carolingian. Hugo Capet's origin was well beknown; everybody knew what his race had been before, and how he arrived at the throne: cunning, policy, and violence at a pinch, were the tools of him and his successors, compounding for the right they lacked in 'the people's eyes. These Capets, mn all their later branches, were the pattern for the modern King- and Prince-hood: in no belief in ur-racial descent could it seek foundation for its claims; of every prince the world, coeval and posterior, knew by what mere grant, at what purchase-price, or through what deed of violence, he had attained to power, and by what art or means he must contrive to keep it.

With the foundering of the Wibelungen, mankind had been torn from the last fibre whereby it still hung, in a sense, to its racial-natural origin. The Hoard of the Nibelungen had evaporated to the realm of Poetry and the Idea; merely an earthly precipitate remained as its dregs: *real property*.

In the Nibelungen-myth we found expressed by all the generations who devised, developed and enacted it, an uncommonly clear idea of the *nature of property, of ownership*. If in the oldest religious view the Hoard appeared to be the splendour of the Earth laid bare to all by day light, we later see it take more compact form as the hero's might-conferring booty, won as guerdon of the bravest, [296] most astounding deed from a vanquished odious adversary. This Hoard, this talisman of might, 'tis true, is henceforth claimed as with hereditary right by the descendants of that godlike hero; yet it has this foremost characteristic, that it is never gained afresh in lazy peace, by simple contract, but only through a deed akin to that of its first winner. Moreover, this constantly-repeated deed of heritage has all the moral meaning of vendetta, of retribution for the murder of a kinsman: so we see blood, passion, love, hate, in short—both physically and spiritually—purely-human springs and motives at work in the winning of the Hoard; man restless and suffering, man doomed to conscious death by his own deed, his victory, and most by his possession, at the head of all ideas of the root-relation of acquirement.—These views, which honoured *Man* as focus of all power, entirely corresponded with the mode of treating property in actual life. If in earliest antiquity there certainly prevailed the simplest and most natural principle of all, namely that the measure of possession or enjoyment must be meted by man's Need, among conquering nations with excess of goods the strength and prowess of the best-famed fighters became as naturally the measure-giving Subject to the Object of more enjoyable and richer spoils. In the historic *Feudal system*, so long as it retained its pristine purity, we see this heroic-human principle still plainly voiced: the grant of a fief was merely to this one particular human being who had earned the right to claim reward for some decisive deed, some weighty service. From the moment when a fief became *hereditary*, the man, his personal excellence, his acts and deeds, lost value,—which passed over to his property: hereditary possession, no longer personal virtue, now gave their standing to his heirs, and the resulting deeper and deeper depreciation of Man, against the higher and higher appreciation of Property, at last took body in the most contra-human institutions, such as those of Primogeniture; from which, in strange perversity, the later Noble drew all conceit and arrogance, without reflecting [297] that by deriving his worth from a stiffened family-possession he was openly disowning any actual *human nobleness*.

So—after the fall of the heroic-human Wibelungen—this hereditary ownership, then

property *in general, de facto possession*, became the title for all rights existing or to be acquired; and Property gave Man that right which man had theretofore conveyed to property. It was this dreg of the vanished Nibelungen-Hoard, then, that the sobered German lords had kept them: though the Kaiser might soar to the highest peak of the Idea, what clung there to the ground below, the Duchies, Palatinates, Marks and Counties, all ranks and offices enfeoffed by the Kaiser, in the hands of his utterly un-idealistic vassals condensed to mere *possession, property*. Possession now was consequently *Right*, and upright was it kept by all Established and Approved being henceforth drawn from that one right on a more and more elaborate system. He who had a share in property, or managed to acquire one, *from that instant* ranked as a natural pillar of the State (*der öffentlichen Macht*). But this also must be hallowed: what the most glorious Kaisers had claimed in good faith as their ideal title to rule the world, these practical gentry now applied to their possessions; the old divine ur-right was arrogated to himself by every former crown-official; the God's-decree was expounded by Justinian's Roman Rights, and, to the bewilderment of property-enslaved mankind, transcribed in Latin law-books. Kaisers were still appointed, though directly after the downfall of the Wibelungen their rank had already been hawked to the highest bidder; no sooner were they chosen, than to work they set to "*acquire*" a goodly family-seat "by grace of God," as one henceforth styled the forcible appropriation or nibbling-off of districts. Grown wiser, one gladly left the World-dominion to dear God, who behaved by far more leniently and humanely to the actually-reigning most selfish and depraved vulgarity of the Sons of the Holy Roman Empire than erewhile the old heathen Nibelung warriors, who for any act of meanness [298] made no bones of packing off a man from court and holding.—

The "*poor Folk*" sang, read, and printed in time, the Nibelungenlieder, its only keepsake from the Hoard belief in it never wavered; only, one knew it was no longer in the world,—for it had been sunk into an old God's-hill again, a cave like that whence Siegfried once had won it from the Nibelungen. The great Kaiser himself had brought it back to that hill, to save it up for better times. There in the Kyffhäuser he sits, the old "Redbeard Friedrich"; all round him the treasures of the Nibelungen, by his side the sharp sword that one-time slew the dreaded Dragon.

Notes

Note 1 on page 7

Die Wibelungen originally appeared as a pamphlet, issued by Wigand of Leipzig at the end of 1849, evidently with the prefatory note on the opposite page. In Wagner's *Letters to Uhlig* we read under date Sep. 16, 1849, "Up to now I have only been able to scribble in a common-room, and to this circumstance you must attribute my compliance with your wish that I should get my Wibelistic essay ready for publication. In fair-copying it, however, I have made a good many alterations; so that it perhaps may interest you to compare the accompanying manuscript with the older version, when I would direct your particular attention to chapters 3 and 12, dealing with real property, in which you will find an abundant use of the material."—The "material" would seem to be the late events in Dresden, possibly also some work of Feuerbach's that Wagner had recently been reading, for chapter 3 bears strong evidence of the Feuerbachian cast of sentence, and I find that this is the same letter to which I referred in my Preface to Vol. 1.—which see.—Tr.

Note 2 on page 7

This hypothesis, I have lately been assured, is not quite tenable.—Ed. [i.e. R. Wagner, 1871.]

Note 3 on page 7

For the use of the prefix "ur" I must refer the reader to my [footnote to Vol. I. p. 169](#). When translating that volume I felt somewhat timid as regards the introduction of a neologism, but now that I find the prefix very widely adopted by learned translators, I am emboldened to employ it more frequently, albeit merely about half as often as it occurs in the original.—Tr.

Note 4 on page 11

"Das Volk ist somit in seinem Dichten und Schaffen durchaus genial und wahrhaftig, wogegen der gelehrte Geschichtsschreiber, der sich nur an die pragmatische Oberfläche der Vorfällenheiten hält, ohne das Band der wesenhaften Volksallgemeinheit nach dem unmittelbaren Ausdrücke desselben zu erfassen," etc.—

Note 5 on page 31

It is impossible not to recognise how much of the idea of this Friedrich I. has passed into Wagner's Wotan.—Tr.