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Illustrations of northern antiquities, from the earlier Teutonic and Scandinavian romances

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Adventure XXXVI. - How Rudiger was slain

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Against the champions of the Huns a full long summer's day :
Ho! how many a noble blade dead before them lay !

At the turn of summer¹ was done this murd'rous deed :
'Twas for the Lady Chrimhilt the champions bold did bleed :
There fell her nearest kindred, and many a man of fame ;
For which King Etzel never more knew nor joy nor game.

She never thought such battle fierce among them would be fought ;
For she had bent her mind all only to have brought
To the death the hero Haghen ; but while his blood she sought,
All this bloody mischief by the foul fiend was wrought.

Gunter and his brothers now issued before the hall, and demanded truce, which was refused to them by King Etzel. He was, however, willing to allow them to come out and rest from the fight, but Chrimhilt ordered her champions to drive them in, and set fire to the hall. The heroes of Burgundy, now reduced to six hundred, were driven to the last extremity. They had no means to quench the raging thirst caused by the fire, till, by the advice of Haghen, they drank the blood of their enemies.² Fortunately the hall-roof was arched, which prevented a general conflagration. They remained quiet till the morning, when they were attacked by twelve hundred Huns, allured by the offers of Chrimhilt, who were slain to the last man.

ADVENTURE XXXVI. HOW RUDIGER WAS SLAIN.—Rudiger was disconsolate to see such dreadful havoc among his friends. A Hun, who saw him standing unarmed, upbraided him with cowardice, but was struck dead to the ground by the hand of the margrave. Both Etzel and Chrimhilt used every prayer, and even fell on their knees, to persuade him to attack the Burgundians. Long did he deny their request, pleading his friendship for them, and the hospitality which they

¹ See the note on p. 170.

² This circumstance has been transferred, with considerable improvements, into the Danish ballad of Lady Grimild's Wrack, printed in this volume.

had enjoyed in his house. At length the tears of Chrimhilt prevailed, and he prepared himself and his men, with heavy hearts, for the attack. He told the knights of Burgundy to get ready to withstand him, and informed them that he was only persuaded to it by the commands and entreaties of Etzel and Chrimhilt. Haghen told him that the shield he had presented to him at Bechelaren was hewn to pieces; and Rudiger insisted that he should accept the one he then bore in return. Touched with the generosity of the gift, Haghen vowed not to attack Rudiger, and Folker followed his example. The battle became general, and was very bloody. In the end, Ghernot and Rudiger met. The latter wounded his opponent in the head mortally, but was in return struck dead by the very sword he had given to Ghernot. The remainder of Rudiger's knights were slain, one after another. When Chrimhilt heard that the noise had ceased, she supposed that Rudiger had made his peace with her brothers, and upbraided him aloud for his treachery. But Folker shewed her his dead body, and she began to despair of accomplishing her vengeance.

ADVENTURE XXXVII. HOW DIETRICH'S CHAMPIONS WERE SLAIN.—

A champion of Dietrich of Bern heard the lamentations of the Huns, and dreading that Etzel himself was slain, communicated his fears to his master. Wolfhart, the nephew of Dietrich, and one of his bravest knights, offered to inquire the truth of the Burgundians; but the hero of Bern fearing his rashness, sent Helfrich, who returned with the intelligence that the noble Rudiger had been slain. Dietrich then ordered old Hildebrand to demand the dead body. Wolfhart and all the others prepared themselves to accompany him, notwithstanding the command of their master to the contrary. When they entered the hall, and found Rudiger lying dead, their lamentations were excessive, and Wolfhart could not refrain from insulting the heroes of Burgundy, who had refused delivering the body. Folker answering him in the same style, he broke loose from Hildebrand, and struck the fiddler a mighty blow, but was felled down by him in return. Nothing could now restrain the heroes from the fight. Folker slew Sigbestab,