



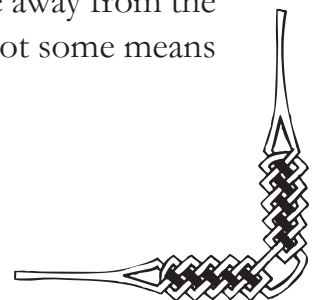
The Story of Siegfried

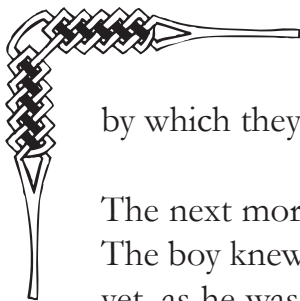
Adventure 2: Greyfell
by James Baldwin

Many were the pleasant days that Siegfried spent in Mimer's smoky smithy; and if he ever thought of his father's stately dwelling, or of the life of ease which he might have enjoyed within its halls, he never by word or deed showed signs of discontent. For Mimer taught him all the secrets of his craft and all the lore of the wise men. To beat hot iron, to shape the fire-edged sword, to smithy war-coats, to fashion the slender bracelet of gold and jewels,—all this he had already learned. But there were many other things to know, and these the wise master showed him. He told him how to carve the mystic runes which speak to the knowing ones with silent, unseen tongues; he told him of the men of other lands, and taught him their strange speech; he showed him how to touch the harp-strings, and bring forth bewitching music: and the heart of Siegfried waxed very wise, while his body grew wondrous strong. And the master loved his pupil dearly.

But the twelve apprentices grew more jealous day by day, and when Mimer was away they taunted Siegfried with cruel jests, and sought by harsh threats to drive him from the smithy; but the lad only smiled, and made the old shop ring again with the music from his anvil. On a day when Mimer had gone on a journey, Veliant, the foreman, so far forgot himself as to strike the boy. For a moment Siegfried gazed at him with withering scorn; then he swung his hammer high in air, and brought it swiftly down, not upon the head of Veliant, who was trembling with expectant fear, but upon the foreman's anvil. The great block of iron was shattered by the blow, and flew into a thousand pieces. Then, turning again towards the thoroughly frightened foreman, Siegfried said, while angry lightning-flashes darted from his eyes,—“What if I were to strike you thus?” Veliant sank upon the ground, and begged for mercy. “You are safe,” said Siegfried, walking away. “I would scorn to harm a being like you!”

The apprentices were struck dumb with amazement and fear; and when Siegfried had returned to his anvil they one by one dropped their hammers, and stole away from the smithy. In a secret place not far from the shop, they met together, to plot some means





by which they might rid themselves of him whom they both hated and feared.

The next morning Veliant came to Siegfried's forge, with a sham smile upon his face. The boy knew that cowardice and base deceit lurked, ill concealed, beneath that smile; yet, as he was wont to do, he welcomed the foreman kindly. "Siegfried," said Veliant, "let us be friends again. I am sorry that I was so foolish and so rash yesterday, and I promise that I will never again be so rude and unmanly as to become angry at you. Let us be friends, good Siegfried! Give me your hand, I pray you, and with it your forgiveness." Siegfried grasped the rough palm of the young smith with such a gripe, that the smile vanished from Veliant's face, and his muscles writhed with pain.

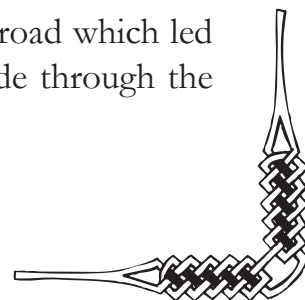
"I give you my hand, certainly," said the boy, "and I will give you my forgiveness when I know that you are worthy of it."

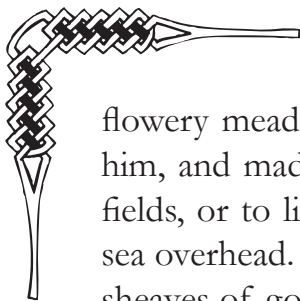
As soon as Veliant's aching hand allowed him speech, he said,—

"Siegfried, you know that we have but little charcoal left for our forges, and our master will soon return from his journey. It will never do for him to find us idle, and the fires cold. Some one must go to-day to the forest-pits, and bring home a fresh supply of charcoal. How would you like the errand? It is but a pleasant day's journey to the pits; and a ride into the greenwood this fine summer day would certainly be more agreeable than staying in the smoky shop." "I should like the drive very much," answered Siegfried; "but I have never been to the coal-pits, and I might lose my way in the forest."

"No danger of that," said Veliant. "Follow the road that goes straight into the heart of the forest, and you cannot miss your way. It will lead you to the house of Regin, the master, the greatest charcoal-man in all Rhineland. He will be right glad to see you for Mimer's sake, and you may lodge with him for the night. In the morning he will fill your cart with the choicest charcoal, and you can drive home at your leisure; and, when our master comes again, he will find our forges flaming, and our bellows roaring, and our anvils ringing, as of yore."

Siegfried, after some further parley, agreed to undertake the errand, although he felt that Veliant, in urging him to do so, wished to work him some harm. He harnessed the donkey to the smith's best cart, and drove merrily away along the road which led towards the forest. The day was bright and clear; and as Siegfried rode through the





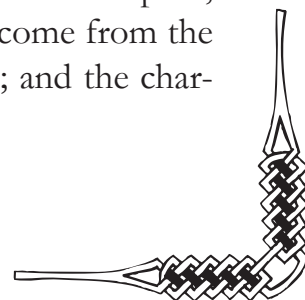
flowery meadows, or betwixt the fields of corn, a thousand sights and sounds met him, and made him glad. Now and then he would stop to watch the reapers in the fields, or to listen to the song of some heaven-soaring lark lost to sight in the blue sea overhead. Once he met a company of gayly dressed youths and maidens, carrying sheaves of golden grain,—for it was now the harvest-time,—and singing in praise of Frey, the giver of peace and plenty.

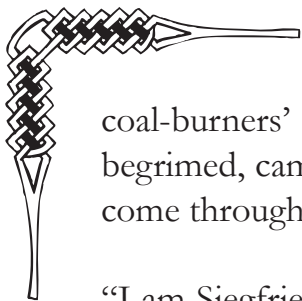
“Whither away, young prince?” they merrily asked. “To Regin, the coal-burner, in the deep greenwood,” he answered.

“Then may the good Frey have thee in keeping!” they cried. “It is a long and lonesome journey.” And each one blessed him as they passed.

It was nearly noon when he drove into the forest, and left the blooming meadows and the warm sunshine behind him. And now he urged the donkey forwards with speed; for he knew that he had lost much precious time, and that many miles still lay between him and Regin’s charcoal-pits. And there was nothing here amid the thick shadows of the wood to make him wish to linger; for the ground was damp, and the air was chilly, and every thing was silent as the grave. And not a living creature did Siegfried see, save now and then a gray wolf slinking across the road, or a doleful owl sitting low down in some tree-top, and blinking at him in the dull but garish light. Evening at last drew on, and the shadows in the wood grew deeper; and still no sign of charcoal-burner, nor of other human being, was seen. Night came, and thick darkness settled around; and all the demons of the forest came forth, and clamored and chattered, and shrieked and howled. But Siegfried was not afraid. The bats and vampires came out of their hiding-places, and flapped their clammy wings in his face; and he thought that he saw ogres and many fearful creatures peeping out from behind every tree and shrub. But, when he looked upwards through the overhanging tree-tops, he saw the star-decked roof of heaven, the blue mantle which the All-Father has hung as a shelter over the world; and he went bravely onwards, never doubting but that Odin has many good things in store for those who are willing to trust him.

And by and by the great round moon arose in the east, and the fearful sounds that had made the forest hideous began to die away; and Siegfried saw, far down the path, a red light feebly gleaming. And he was glad, for he knew that it must come from the charcoal-burners’ pits. Soon he came out upon a broad, cleared space; and the char-





coal-burners' fires blazed bright before him; and some workmen, swarthy and soot-begrimed, came forwards to meet him. "Who are you?" they asked; "and why do you come through the forest at this late hour?"

"I am Siegfried," answered the boy; "and I come from Mimer's smithy. I seek Regin, the king of charcoal-burners; for I must have coal for my master's smithy." "Come with me," said one of the men: "I will lead you to Regin."

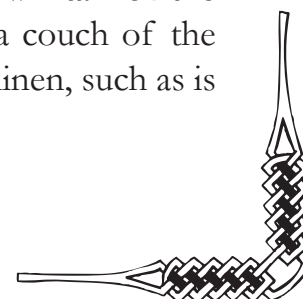
Siegfried alighted from his cart, and followed the man to a low-roofed hut not far from the burning pits. As they drew near, they heard the sound of a harp, and strange, wild music within; and Siegfried's heart was stirred with wonder as he listened. The man knocked softly at the door, and the music ceased.

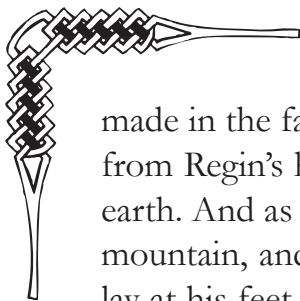
"Who comes to break into Regin's rest at such a time as this?" said a rough voice within.

"A youth who calls himself Siegfried," answered the man. "He says that he comes from Mimer's smithy, and he would see you, my master."

"Let him come in," said the voice. Siegfried passed through the low door, and into the room beyond; and so strange was the sight that met him that he stood for a while in awe, for never in so lowly a dwelling had treasures so rich been seen. Jewels sparkled from the ceiling; rare tapestry covered the walls; and on the floor were heaps of ruddy gold and silver, still unfashioned. And in the midst of all this wealth stood Regin, the king of the forest, the greatest of charcoal-men. And a strange old man he was, wrinkled and gray and beardless; but out of his eyes sharp glances gleamed of a light that was not human, and his heavy brow and broad forehead betokened wisdom and shrewd cunning. And he welcomed Siegfried kindly for Mimer's sake, and set before him a rich repast of venison, and wild honey, and fresh white bread, and luscious grapes. And, when the meal was finished, the boy would have told his errand, but Regin stopped him.

"Say nothing of your business to-night," said he; "for the hour is already late, and you are weary. Better lie down, and rest until the morrow; and then we will talk of the matter which has brought you hither." And Siegfried was shown to a couch of the fragrant leaves of the myrtle and hemlock, overspread with soft white linen, such as is





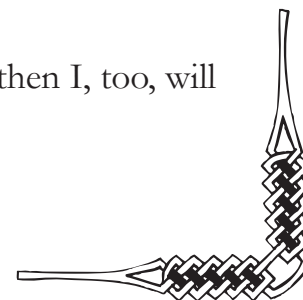
made in the far-off Emerald Isle; and he was lulled to sleep by sweet strains of music from Regin's harp,—music which told of the days when the gods were young on the earth. And as he slept he dreamed. He dreamed that he stood upon the crag of a high mountain, and that the eagles flew screaming around him, and the everlasting snows lay at his feet, and the world in all its beauty was stretched out like a map below him; and he longed to go forth to partake of its abundance, and to make for himself a name among men. Then came the Norns, who spin the thread, and weave the woof, of every man's life; and they held in their hands the web of his own destiny. And Urd, the Past, sat on the tops of the eastern mountains, where the sun begins to rise at dawn; while Verdanda, the Present, stood in the western sea, where sky and water meet. And they stretched the web between them, and its ends were hidden in the far-away mists. Then with all their might the two Norns span the purple and golden threads, and wove the fatal woof. But as it began to grow in beauty and in strength, and to shadow the earth with its gladness and its glory, Skuld, the pitiless Norn of the Future, seized it with rude fingers, and tore it into shreds, and cast it down at the feet of Hela, the white queen of the dead. And the eagles shrieked, and the mountain shook, and the crag toppled, and Siegfried awoke. The next morning, at earliest break of day, the youth sought Regin, and made known his errand.

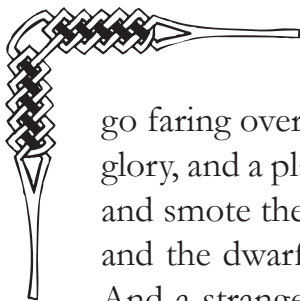
“I have come for charcoal for my master Mimer's forges. My cart stands ready outside; and I pray you to have it filled at once, for the way is long, and I must be back betimes.” Then a strange smile stole over Regin's wrinkled face, and he said,—

“Does Siegfried the prince come on such a lowly errand? Does he come to me through the forest, driving a donkey, and riding in a sooty coal-cart? I have known the day when his kin were the mightiest kings of earth, and they fared through every land the noblest men of men-folk.” The taunting word, the jeering tones, made Siegfried's anger rise. The blood boiled in his veins; but he checked his tongue, and mildly answered,—

“It is true that I am a prince, and my father is the wisest of kings; and it is for this reason that I come thus to you. Mimer is my master, and my father early taught me that even princes must obey their masters' behests.” Then Regin laughed, and asked, “How long art thou to be Mimer's thrall? Does no work wait for thee but at his smoky forge?”

“When Mimer gives me leave, and Odin calls me,” answered the lad, “then I, too, will

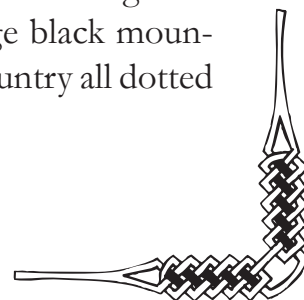


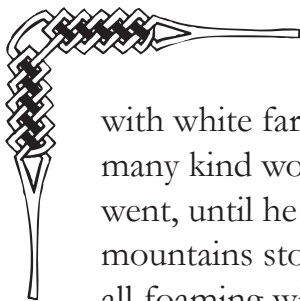


go faring over the world, like my kin of the earlier days, to carve me a name and great glory, and a place with the noble of earth.” Regin said not a word; but he took his harp, and smote the strings, and a sad, wild music filled the room. And he sang of the gods and the dwarf-folk, and of the deeds that had been in the time long past and gone. And a strange mist swam before Siegfried’s eyes; and so bewitching were the strains that fell upon his ears, and filled his soul, that he forgot about his errand, and his master Mimer, and his father Siegmund, and his lowland home, and thought only of the heart-gladdening sounds. By and by the music ended, the spell was lifted, and Siegfried turned his eyes towards the musician. A wonderful change had taken place. The little old man still stood before him with the harp in his hand; but his wrinkled face was hidden by a heavy beard, and his thin gray locks were covered with a long black wig, and he seemed taller and stouter than before. As Siegfried started with surprise, his host held out his hand, and said,— “You need not be alarmed, my boy. It is time for you to know that Regin and Mimer are the same person, or rather that Mimer is Regin disguised. The day has come for you to go your way into the world, and Mimer gives you leave.” Siegfried was so amazed he could not say a word. He took the master’s hand, and gazed long into his deep, bright eyes. Then the two sat down together, and Mimer, or Regin as we shall now call him, told the prince many tales of the days that had been, and of his bold, wise forefathers. And the lad’s heart swelled within him; and he longed to be like them,—to dare and do and suffer, and gloriously win at last. And he turned to Regin and said,— “Tell me, wisest of masters, what I shall do to win fame, and to make myself worthy to rule the fair land which my fathers held.”

“Go forth in your own strength, and with Odin’s help,” answered Regin,—”go forth to right the wrong, to help the weak, to punish evil, and come not back to your father’s kingdom until the world shall know your noble deeds.” “But whither shall I go?” asked Siegfried. “I will tell you,” answered Regin. “Put on these garments, which better befit a prince than those soot-begrimed clothes you have worn so long. Gird about you this sword, the good Balmung, and go northward. When you come to the waste lands which border upon the sea, you will find the ancient Gripir, the last of the kin of the giants. Ask of him a war-steed, and Odin will tell you the rest.”

So, when the sun had risen high above the trees, Siegfried bade Regin good-by, and went forth like a man, to take whatsoever fortune should betide. He went through the great forest, and across the bleak moorland beyond, and over the huge black mountains that stretched themselves across his way, and came to a pleasant country all dotted



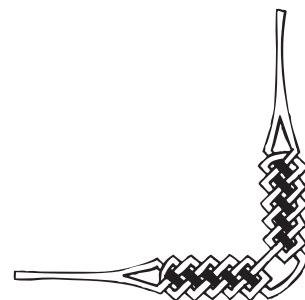


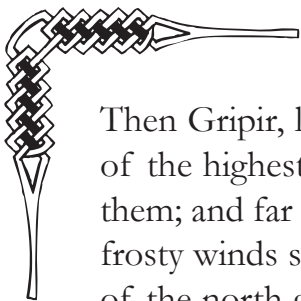
with white farmhouses, and yellow with waving, corn. But he tarried not here, though many kind words were spoken to him, and all besought him to stay. Right onwards he went, until he reached the waste land which borders the sounding sea. And there high mountains stood, with snow-crowned crags beetling over the waves; and a great river, all foaming with the summer floods, went rolling through the valley. And in the deep dales between the mountains were rich meadows, green with grass, and speckled with thousands of flowers of every hue, where herds of cattle and deer, and noble elks, and untamed horses, fed in undisturbed peace. And Siegfried, when he saw, knew that these were the pastures of Gripir the ancient.

High up among the gray mountain-peaks stood Gripir's dwelling,—a mighty house, made of huge boulders brought by giant hands from the far north-land. And the wild eagle, built their nests around it, and the mountain vultures screamed about its doors. But Siegfried was not afraid. He climbed the steep pathway which the feet of men had never touched before, and, without pausing, walked straightway into the high-built hall. The room was so dark that at first he could see nothing save the white walls, and the glass-green pillars which upheld the roof. But the light grew stronger soon; and Siegfried saw, beneath a heavy canopy of stone, the ancient Gripir, seated in a chair made from the sea-horse's teeth. And the son of the giants held in his hand an ivory staff; and a purple mantle was thrown over his shoulders, and his white beard fell in sweeping waves almost to the sea-green floor. Very wise he seemed, and he gazed at Siegfried with a kindly smile. "Hail, Siegfried!" he cried. "Hail, prince with the gleaming eye! I know thee, and I know the woof that the Norns have woven for thee. Welcome to my lonely mountain home! Come and sit by my side in the high-seat where man has never sat, and I will tell thee of things that have been, and of things that are yet to be."

Then Siegfried fearlessly went and sat by the side of the ancient wise one. And long hours they talked together,—strong youth and hoariest age; and each was glad that in the other he had found some source of hope and comfort. And they talked of the great midworld, and of the starry dome above it, and of the seas which gird it, and of the men who live upon it. All night long they talked, and in the morning Siegfried arose to go.

"Thou hast not told me of thy errand," said Gripir; "but I know what it is. Come first with me, and see this great mid-world for thyself."





Then Gripir, leaning on his staff, led the way out of the great hall, and up to the top of the highest mountain-crag. And the wild eagles circled in the clear, cold air above them; and far below them the white waves dashed against the mountain's feet; and the frosty winds swept around them unchecked, bringing to their ears the lone lamenting of the north giants, moaning for the days that had been and for the glories that were past. Then Siegfried looked to the north, and he saw the dark mountain-wall of Norway trending away in solemn grandeur towards the frozen sea, but broken here and there by sheltering fjords, and pleasant, sunny dales. He looked to the east, and saw a great forest stretching away and away until it faded to sight in the blue distance. He looked to the south, and saw a pleasant land, with farms and vineyards, and towns and strong-built castles; and through it wound the River Rhine, like a great white serpent, reaching from the snow-capped Alps to the northern sea. And he saw his father's little kingdom of the Netherlands lying like a green speck on the shore of the ocean. Then he looked to the west, and nothing met his sight but a wilderness of rolling, restless waters, save, in the far distance, a green island half hidden by sullen mists and clouds. And Siegfried sighed, and said,—

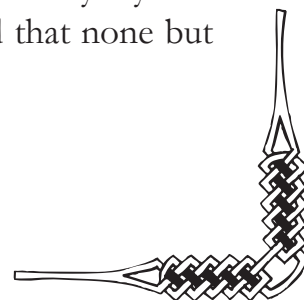
“The world is so wide, and the life of man so short!” “The world is all before thee,” answered Gripir. “Take what the Norns have allotted thee. Choose from my pastures a battle-steed, and ride forth to win for thyself a name and fame among the sons of men.”

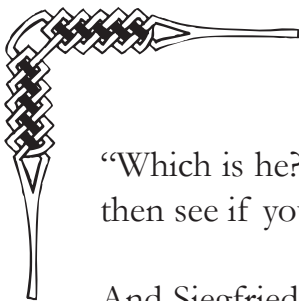
Then Siegfried ran down the steep side of the mountain to the grassy dell where the horses were feeding. But the beasts were all so fair and strong, that he knew not which to choose. While he paused, uncertain what to do, a strange man stood before him. Tall and handsome was the man, with one bright eye, and a face beaming like the dawn in summer; and upon his head he wore a sky-blue hood bespangled with golden stars, and over his shoulder was thrown a cloak of ashen gray.

“Would you choose a horse, Sir Siegfried?” asked the stranger.

“Indeed I would,” answered he. “But it is hard to make a choice among so many.”

“There is one in the meadow,” said the man, “far better than all the rest. They say that he came from Odin's pastures on the green hill-slopes of Asgard, and that none but the noblest shall ride him.”





“Which is he?” asked Siegfried. “Drive the herd into the river,” was the answer, “and then see if you can pick him out.”

And Siegfried and the stranger drove the horses down the sloping bank, and into the rolling stream; but the flood was too strong for them. Some soon turned back to the shore; while others, struggling madly, were swept away, and carried out to the sea. Only one swam safely over. He shook the dripping water from his mane, tossed his head in the air, and then plunged again into the stream. Right bravely he stemmed the torrent the second time. He clambered up the shelving bank, and stood by Siegfried’s side. “What need to tell you that this is the horse?” said the stranger. “Take him: he is yours. He is Greyfell, the shining hope that Odin sends to his chosen heroes.” And then Siegfried noticed that the horse’s mane glimmered and flashed like a thousand rays from the sun, and that his coat was as white and clear as the fresh-fallen snow on the mountains. He turned to speak to the stranger, but he was nowhere to be seen and Siegfried bethought him how he had talked with Odin unawares. Then he mounted the noble Greyfell and rode with a light heart across the flowery meadows.

“Whither ridest thou?” cried Gripir the ancient, from his doorway among the crags.

“I ride into the wide world,” said Siegfried; “but I know not whither. I would right the wrong, and help the weak, and make myself a name on the earth, as did my kinsmen of yore. Tell me, I pray you, where I shall go; for you are wise, and you know the things which have been, and those which shall befall.”

“Ride back to Regin, the master of masters,” answered Gripir. “He will tell thee of a wrong to be righted.” And the ancient son of the giants withdrew into his lonely abode; and Siegfried, on the shining Greyfell, rode swiftly away towards the south.

