



The Story of Siegfried

Adventure 8: Siegfried's Welcome Home

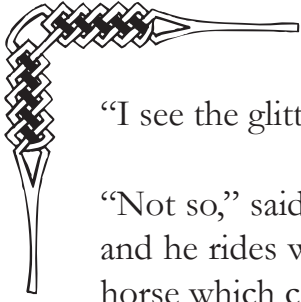
by James Baldwin

In Santen Castle, one day, there was a strange uproar and confusion. Everybody was hurrying aimlessly about, and no one seemed to know just what to do. On every side there were restless whisperings, and hasty gestures, and loud commands. The knights and warriors were busy donning their war-coats, and buckling on their swords and helmets. Wise King Siegmund sat in his council-chamber, and the knowing men of the kingdom stood around him; and the minds of all seemed troubled with doubt, if not with fear.

What could have caused so great an uproar in the once quiet old castle? What could have brought perplexity to the mind of the wisest king in all Rhineland? It was this: a herald had just come from the seashore, bringing word that a strange fleet of a hundred white-sailed vessels had cast anchor off the coast, and that an army of ten thousand fighting men had landed, and were making ready to march against Santen. Nobody had ever heard of so large a fleet before; and no one could guess who the strangers might be, nor whence they had come, nor why they should thus, without asking leave, land in the country of a peace-loving king. The news spread quickly over all the land. People from every part came hastening to the friendly shelter of the castle. The townsmen, with their goods and cattle, hurried within the walls. The sentinels on the ramparts paced uneasily to and fro, and scanned with watchful eye every stranger that came near the walls. The warders stood ready to hoist the drawbridge, and close the gate, at the first signal given by the watchman above, who was straining his eyes to their utmost in order to see the first approach of the foe. A heavy mist hung over the meadow-lands between Santen and the sea, and nothing was visible beyond the gates of the town. The ten thousand strange warriors might be within half a league of the castle, and yet the sharpest eagle-eye could not see them.

All at once a clatter of horse's hoofs was heard; the dark mist rose up from the ground, and began to roll away, like a great cloud, into the sky; and then strange sunbeam-flashes were seen where the fog had lately rested. "They come!" cried one of the sentinels.





“I see the glitter of their shields and lances.”

“Not so,” said the watchman from his place on the tower above. “I see but one man, and he rides with the speed of the wind, and lightning flashes from the mane of the horse which carries him.”

The drawbridge was hastily hoisted. The heavy gates were quickly shut, and fastened with bolts and bars. Every man in the castle was at his post, ready to defend the fortress with his life. In a short time the horse and his rider drew near. All who looked out upon them were dazzled with the golden brightness of the hero's armor, as well as with the lightning gleams that flashed from the horse's mane. And some whispered,—

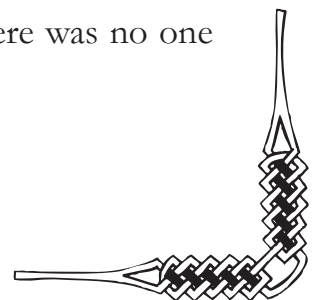
“This is no man who thus comes in such kingly splendor. More likely it is Odin on one of his journeys, or the Shining Balder come again to earth.”

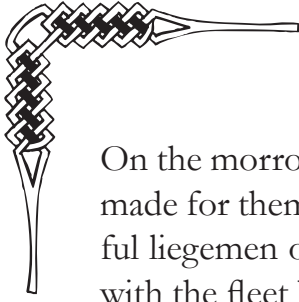
As the stranger paused on the outer edge of the moat, the sentinels challenged him,—

“Who are you who come thus, uninvited and unheralded, to Santen?”

“One who has the right to come,” answered the stranger. “I am Siegfried; and I have come to see my father, the good Siegmund, and my mother, the gentle Sigelind.” It was indeed Siegfried; and he had come from his kingdom in the Nibelungen Land, with his great fleet, and the noblest of his warriors, to see once more his boyhood's home, and to cheer for a time the hearts of his loving parents. For he had done many noble deeds, and had ruled wisely and well, and he felt that he was now not unworthy to be called the son of Siegmund, and to claim kinship with the heroes of the earlier days.

As soon as it was surely known that he who stood before the castle-walls was the young prince who had been gone so many years, and about whom they had heard so many wonderful stories, the drawbridge was hastily let down, and the great gates were thrown wide open. And Siegfried, whose return had been so long wished for, stood once again in his father's halls. And the fear and confusion which had prevailed gave place to gladness and gayety; and all the folk of Santen greeted the returned hero with cheers, and joyfully welcomed him home. And in the whole world there was no one more happy than Siegmund and Sigelind.



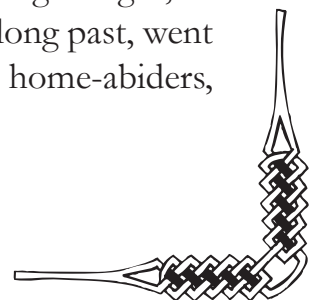


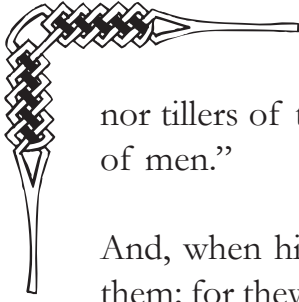
On the morrow the ten thousand Nibelungen warriors came to Santen; and Siegmund made for them a great banquet, and entertained them in a right kingly way, as the faithful liegemen of his son. And Siegfried, when he had given them rich gifts, sent them with the fleet back to Nibelungen Land; for he meant to stay for a time with his father and mother at Santen.

When the harvest had been gathered, and the fruit was turning purple and gold, and the moon rode round and full in the clear autumn sky, a gay high-tide was held for Siegfried's sake; and everybody in the Lowland country, whether high or low, rich or poor, was asked to come to the feast. For seven days, nought but unbridled gayety prevailed in Siegmund's halls. On every hand were sounds of music and laughter, and sickness and poverty and pain were for the time forgotten. A mock-battle was fought on the grassy plain not far from the town, and the young men vied with each other in feats of strength and skill. Never before had so many beautiful ladies nor so many brave men been seen in Santen. And, when the time of jollity and feasting had drawn to an end, Siegmund called together all his guests, and gave to each choice gifts,—a festal garment, and a horse with rich trappings. And Queen Sigelind scattered gold without stint among the poor, and many were the blessings she received. Then all the folk went back to their homes with light hearts and happy faces.

The autumn days passed quickly by, and Siegfried began to grow weary of the idle, inactive life in his father's halls; and Greyfell in his stall pined for the fresh, free air, and his mane lost all its brightness. When Siegmund saw how full of unrest his son had become, he said to him,— “Siegfried, I have grown old and feeble, and have no longer the strength of my younger days. My kingdom would fare better were a younger ruler placed over it. Take my crown, I pray you, and let me withdraw from kingly cares.” But Siegfried would not listen to such an offer. He had his own kingdom of the Nibelungens, he said; and, besides, he would never sit on his father's throne while yet that father lived. And although he loved the pleasant companionship of his mother, and was delighted to listen to the wise counsels of his father, the craving for action, and the unrest which would not be satisfied, grew greater day by day. At last he said,—

“I will ride out into the world again. Mayhap I may find some other wrong to right, or some other kingdom to win. It was thus that my kin, in the golden age long past, went faring over the land and sea, and met their doom at last. They were not home-abiders,





nor tillers of the soil; but the world was their abiding-place, and they filled the hearts of men.”

And, when his father and mother heard this, they tried no longer to keep him with them; for they knew that it would be more cruel than the keeping of a caged bird away from the sunlight.

“Only go not into Burgundy,” said his father. “The kings of that country are not friendly to us, and they may do you harm. Hagen, the kinsman of the kings, and the chief of their fighting-men, is old and crafty, and he cannot brook a greater hero than himself.”

Siegfried laughed.

“That is all the better reason why I should go to Burgundy-land,” he said.

“Then take ten thousand of my warriors,” said his father, “and make yourself master of the land.” “No, no!” cried Siegfried. “One kingdom is enough for me. My own Nibelungen Land is all I want. I will take my twelve Nibelungen knights that I have with me here, and we will fare forth to see the world and its beauties, and men’s work; and, when we have tired with riding, we will sail across the sea to our Nibelungen home.”

