



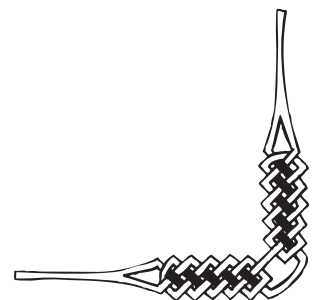
The Story of Siegfried

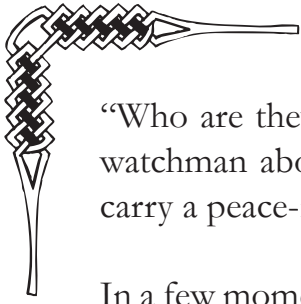
adventure 19: How they Hunted in the Odenwald

by James Baldwin

Next morning, at earliest daybreak, while yet the stars were bright, and the trees hung heavy with dew-drops, and the clouds were light and high, King Siegfried stood with his warriors before the castle-gate. They waited but for the sunrise, and a word from Gunther the king, to ride forth over dale and woodland, and through forest and brake and field, to meet, as they believed, the hosts of the North-land kings. And Siegfried moved among them, calm-faced and bright as a war-god, upon the radiant Greyfell. And men said, long years afterward, that never had the shining hero seemed so glorious to their sight. Within the spacious courtyard a thousand Burgundian braves stood waiting, too, for the signal, and the king's word of command. And at their head stood Hagen, dark as a cloud in summer, guilefully hiding his vile plots, and giving out orders for the marching. There, too, were honest Gernot, fearless and upright, and Giselher, true as gold; and neither of them dreamed of evil, or of the dark deed that day was doomed to see. Close by the gate was Ortwin, bearing aloft the blood-red dragon-banner, which the Burgundians were wont to carry in honor of Siegfried's famous fight with Fafnir. And there was Dankwart, also, ever ready to boast when no danger threatened, and ever willing to do chief Hagen's bidding. And next came Volker the Fiddler good, with the famed sword Fiddle-bow by him, on which, it is said, he could make the sweetest music while fighting his foes in battle. At length the sun began to peep over the eastern hills, and his beams fell upon the castle-walls, and shot away through the trees, and over the meadows, and made the dewdrops glisten like myriads of diamonds among the dripping leaves and blossoms. And a glad shout went up from the throats of the waiting heroes; for they thought that the looked-for moment had come, and the march would soon begin. And the shout was echoed from walls to turrets, and from turrets to trees, and from trees to hills, and from the hills to the vaulted sky above. And nothing was wanting now but King Gunther's word of command.

Suddenly, far down the street, the sound of a bugle was heard, and then of the swift clattering of horses' hoofs coming up the hill towards the castle.





“Who are they who come thus to join us at the last moment?” asked Hagen of the watchman above the gate. “They are strangers,” answered the watchman; “and they carry a peace-flag.”

In a few moments the strange horsemen dashed up, and halted some distance from the castle-gate, where Siegfried and his heroes stood.

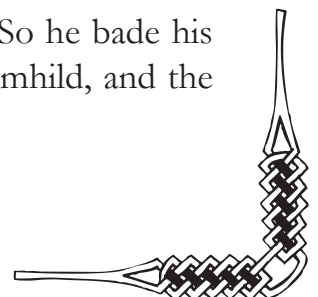
“Who are you? and what is your errand?” cried Hagen, in the king’s name.

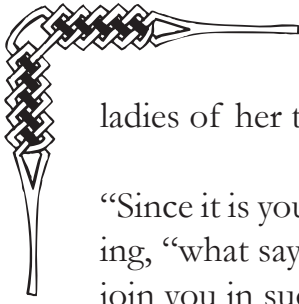
They answered that they were heralds from the North-land kings, sent quickly to correct the message of the day before; for their liege lords, Leudiger and Leudigast, they said, had given up warring against Burgundy, and had gone back to their homes. And they had sent humbly to ask the Rhineland kings to forget the rash threats which they had made, and to allow them to swear fealty to Gunther, and henceforth to be his humble vassals, if only they might be forgiven.

“Right cheerfully do we forgive them!” cried Gunther, not waiting to consult with his wise men. “And our forgiveness shall be so full, that we shall ask neither fealty nor tribute from them.”

Then he turned to Siegfried, and said, “You hear, friend Siegfried, how this troublesome matter has been happily ended. Accept our thanks, we pray you, for your proffered help; for, without it, it might have gone but roughly with us in a second war with the Northland kings. But now you are free to do what pleases you. If, as you said yesterday, you would fain return to Nibelungen Land, you may send your warriors on the way to-day, for they are already equipped for the journey. But abide you with us another day, and to-morrow we will bid you God-speed, and you may easily overtake your Nibelungen friends ere they have reached our own boundaries.”

Siegfried was not well pleased to give up an undertaking scarce begun, and still less could he understand why the king should be so ready to forgive the affront which the North-land kings had offered him. And he was not slow in reading the look of shame and guilt that lurked in Gunther’s face, or the smile of jealous hate that Hagen could no longer hide. Yet no word of displeasure spoke he, nor seemed he to understand that any mischief was brewing; for he feared neither force nor guile. So he bade his Nibelungens to begin their homeward march, saying that he and Kriemhild, and the





ladies of her train, would follow swiftly on the morrow.

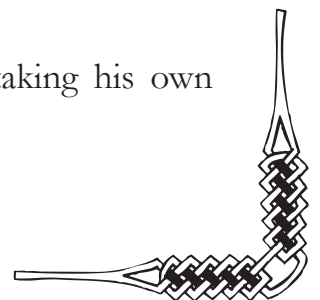
“Since it is your last day with us,” said Gunther, grown cunning through Hagen’s teaching, “what say you, dear Siegfried, to a hunt in Odin’s Wood?” “Right glad will I be to join you in such sport,” answered Siegfried. “I will change my war-coat for a hunting-suit, and be ready within an hour.”

Then Siegfried went to his apartments, and doffed his steel-clad armor, and searched in vain through his wardrobe for his favorite hunting-suit. But it was nowhere to be found; and he was fain to put on the rich embroidered coat which he sometimes wore in battle, instead of a coat-of-mail. And he did not see the white lime-leaf that Kriemhild with anxious care had worked in silk upon it. Then he sought the queen, and told her of the unlooked-for change of plans, and how, on the morrow, they would ride towards Nibelungen Land; but to-day he said he had promised Gunther to hunt with him in the Odenwald.

But Kriemhild, to his great surprise, begged him not to leave her, even to hunt in the Odenwald. For she had begun to fear that she had made a great mistake in telling Hagen the story of the lime-leaf; and yet she could not explain to Siegfried the true cause of her uneasiness. “Oh, do not join in the hunt!” she cried. “Something tells me that danger lurks hidden in the wood. Stay in the castle with me, and help me put things in readiness for our journey homewards to-morrow. Last night I had another dream. I thought that Odin’s birds, Hugin and Munin, sat on a tree before me. And Hugin flapped his wings, and said, ‘What more vile than a false friend? What more to be feared than a secret foe? Harder than stone is his unfeeling heart; sharper than the adder’s poison-fangs are his words; a snake in the grass is he!’ Then Munin flapped his wings too, but said nothing. And I awoke, and thought at once of the sunbright Balder, slain through Loki’s vile deceit. And, as I thought upon his sad death, a withered leaf came fluttering through the casement, and fell upon my couch. Sad signs and tokens are these, my husband; and much grief, I fear, they foretell.”

But Siegfried was deaf to her words of warning, and he laughed at the foolish dream. Then he bade her farewell till even-tide, and hastened to join the party of huntsmen who waited for him impatiently at the gate.

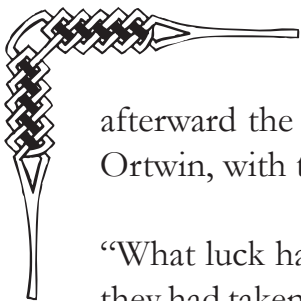
When the party reached the Odenwald, they separated; each man taking his own



course, and following his own game. Siegfried, with but one trusty huntsman and his own fleet-footed hound, sought at once the wildest and thickest part of the wood. And great was the slaughter he made among the fierce beasts of the forest; for nothing that was worthy of notice could hide from his sight, or escape him. From his lair in a thorny thicket, a huge wild boar sprang up; and with glaring red eyes, and mouth foaming, and tusks gnashing with rage, he charged fiercely upon the hero. But, with one skilful stroke from his great spear, Siegfried laid the beast dead on the heather. Next he met a tawny lion, couched ready to spring upon him; but, drawing quickly his heavy bow, he sent a quivering arrow through the animal's heart. Then, one after another, he slew a buffalo, four bisons, a mighty elk with branching horns, and many deers and stags and savage beasts.



At one time the hound drove from its hiding-place another wild boar, much greater than the first, and far more fierce. Quickly Siegfried dismounted from his horse, and met the grizzly creature as it rushed with raving fury towards him. The sword of the hero cleft the beast in twain, and its bloody parts lay lifeless on the ground. Then Siegfried's huntsman, in gay mood, said, "My lord, would it not be better to rest a while! If you keep on slaughtering at this rate, there will soon be no game left in Odenwald." Siegfried laughed heartily at the merry words, and at once called in his hound, saying, "You are right! We will hunt no more until our good friends have joined us." Soon



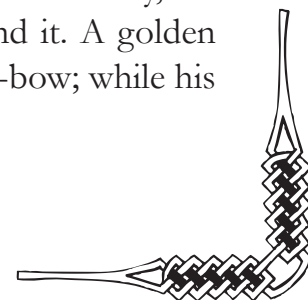
afterward the call of a bugle was heard; and Gunther and Hagen and Dankwart and Ortwin, with their huntsmen and hounds, came riding up.

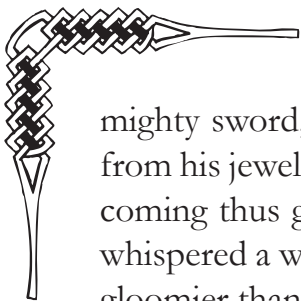
“What luck have you had, my friends?” asked Siegfried. Then Hagen told what game they had taken,—a deer, a young bear, and two small wild boars. But, when they learned what Siegfried had done, the old chief’s face grew dark, and he knit his eyebrows, and bit his lips in jealous hate: for four knights, ten huntsmen, and four and twenty hounds, had beaten every bush, and followed every trail; and yet the Nibelungen king, with but one follower and one hound, had slain ten times as much game as they.

While they stood talking over the successes of the day, the sound of a horn was heard, calling the sportsmen together for the mid-day meal; and knights and huntsmen turned their steeds, and rode slowly towards the trysting-place. Suddenly a huge bear, roused by the noise of baying hounds and tramping feet, crossed their pathway.

“Ah!” cried Siegfried, “there goes our friend Bruin, just in time to give us a bit of fun, and some needed sport at dinner. He shall go with us, and be our guest!” With these words he loosed his hound, and dashed swiftly forwards after the beast. Through thick underbrush and tangled briers, and over fallen trees, the frightened creature ran, until at last it reached a steep hillside. There, in a rocky cleft, it stood at bay, and fought fiercely for its life. When Siegfried came up, and saw that his hound dared not take hold of the furious beast, he sprang from his horse, and seized the bear in his own strong arms, and bound him safely with a stout cord. Then he fastened an end of the cord to his saddle-bows, and remounted his steed. And thus he rode through the forest to the place where the dinner waited, dragging the unwilling bear behind him, while the dog bounded gayly along by his side.

No nobler sight had ever been seen in that forest than that which Gunther’s people saw that day. The Nibelungen king was dressed as well became so great a hero. His suit was of the speckled lynx’s hide and rich black silk, upon which were embroidered many strange devices, with threads of gold. (But, alas! between the shoulders was the silken lime-leaf that Queen Kriemhild’s busy fingers had wrought.) His cap was of the blackest fur, brought from the frozen Siberian land. Over his shoulder was thrown his well-filled quiver, made of lion’s skin; and in his hands he carried his bow of mulberry,—a very beam in size, and so strong that no man save himself could bend it. A golden hunting-horn was at his side, and his sunbright shield lay on his saddle-bow; while his



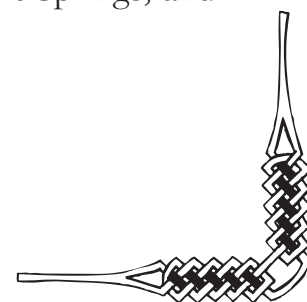


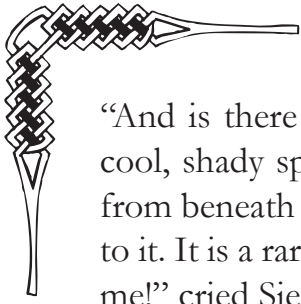
mighty sword, the fire-edged Balmung, in its sheath glittering with gemstones, hung from his jewelled belt. The men who stood around chief Hagen, and who saw the hero coming thus god-like through the greenwood, admired and trembled; and Dankwart whispered a word of caution to his dark-browed brother. But the old chief's face grew gloomier than before; and he scowled fiercely upon the faint-hearted Dankwart, as he hoarsely whispered in return,— “What though he be Odin himself, still will I dare! It is not I: it is the Norns, who shape every man's fate.” When Siegfried reached the camp with his prize, the huntsmen shouted with delight; and the hounds howled loudly, and shook their chains, and tried hard to get at the shaggy beast. The king leaped to the ground, and unloosed the cords which bound him; and at the same time the hounds were unleashed, and set upon the angry, frightened creature. Hemmed in on every side, the bear rushed blindly forwards, and leaped over the fires, where the cooks were busy with the dinner. Pots and kettles were knocked about in great confusion, and the scared cooks thrown sprawling upon the ground; and many a dainty dish and savory mess was spoiled. The bear fled fast down the forest road, followed by the baying hounds and the fleet-footed warriors. But none dared shoot an arrow at him for fear of killing the dogs; and it seemed as if he would surely escape, so fast he ran away. Then Siegfried bounded forwards, swifter than a deer, overtook the bear, and with one stroke of the sword gave him his death-blow. And all who saw this feat of strength and quickness wondered greatly, and felt that such a hero must indeed be without a peer.

When Gunther's cooks had made the dinner ready, the company sat down on the grass, and all partook of a merry meal; for the bracing air and the morning's sport had made sharp appetites. But, when they had eaten, they were surprised to find that there was nothing to drink. Indeed, there was neither wine nor water in the camp.

“How glad I am,” said Siegfried gayly, “that I am not a huntsman by trade, if it is a huntsman's way to go thus dry! Oh for a glass of wine, or even a cup of cold spring-water, to quench my thirst!”

“We will make up for this oversight when we go back home,” said Gunther; and his heart was black with falsehood. “The blame in this matter should rest on Hagen, for it was he who was to look after the drinkables.” “My lord,” said Hagen, “I fell into a mistake by thinking that we would dine, not here, but at the Spessart Springs; and thither I sent the wine.”



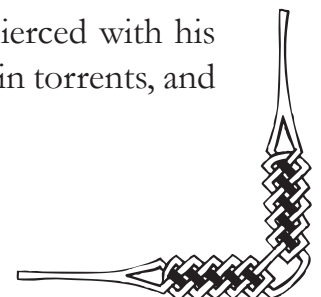


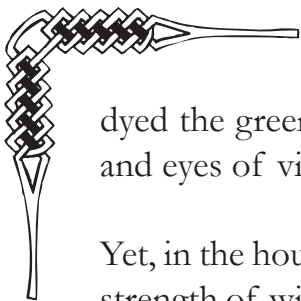
“And is there no water near?” asked Siegfried. “Yes,” answered Hagen. “There is a cool, shady spring not far from here, where the water gushes in a clear, cold stream from beneath a linden-tree. Do but forgive me for the lack of wine, and I will lead you to it. It is a rare spring, and the water is almost as good as wine.” “Better than wine for me!” cried Siegfried. And he asked to be shown to the spring at once.

Hagen arose, and pointed to a tree not far away, beneath whose spreading branches Siegfried could see the water sparkling in the sunlight.

“Men have told me,” said the chief, “that the Nibelungen king is very fleet of foot, and that no one has ever outstripped him in the race. Time was, when King Gunther and myself were spoken of as very swift runners; and, though we are now growing old, I fancy that many young men would, even now, fail to keep pace with us. Suppose we try a race to the spring, and see which of the three can win.” “Agreed!” cried Siegfried. “We will run; and, if I am beaten, I will kneel down in the grass to him who wins. I will give the odds in your favor too; for I will carry with me my spear, and my shield, and my helmet and sword, and all the trappings of the chase, while you may doff from your shoulders whatever might hinder your speed.” So Gunther and Hagen laid aside all their arms, and put off their heavy clothing; but Siegfried took up his bow and quiver, and his heavy shield, and his beamlike spear. Then the word was given, and all three ran with wondrous speed. Gunther and his chief flew over the grass as light-footed as two wild panthers: but Siegfried sped swift as an arrow shot from the hand of a skilful bowman. He reached the spring when yet the others were not half way to it. He laid his spear and sword, and bow and quiver of arrows, upon the ground, and leaned his heavy shield against the linden-tree; and then he waited courteously for King Gunther to come up, for his knightly honor would not allow him to drink until his host had quenched his thirst.

Gunther, when he reached the spring, stooped over, and drank heartily of the cool, refreshing water; and, after he had risen, Siegfried knelt upon the grass at the edge of the pool to quaff from the same gushing fountain. Stealthily then, and with quickness, did chief Hagen hide his huge bow and his quiver, and his good sword Balmung, and, seizing the hero's spear, he lifted it in air, and with too steady aim struck the silken lime-leaf that the loving Kriemhild had embroidered. Never in all the wide mid-world was known a deed more cowardly, never a baser act. The hero was pierced with his own weapon by one he had deemed his friend. His blood gushed forth in torrents, and





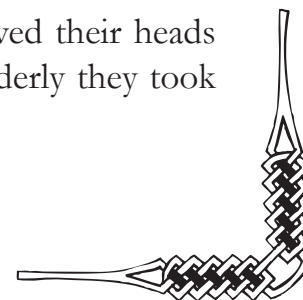
dyed the green grass red, and discolored the sparkling water, and even filled the face and eyes of vile Hagen.

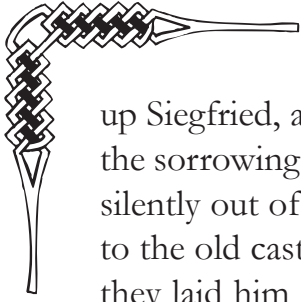
Yet, in the hour of death, King Siegfried showed how noble was his soul, how great his strength of will. Up he rose from his bended knees, and fiercely glanced around. Then, had not the evil-eyed chief, who never before had shunned a foe, fled with fleet-footed fear, quick vengeance would have overtaken him. In vain did the dying king look for his bow and his trusty sword: too safely had they been hidden. Then, though death was fast dimming his eyes, he seized his heavy shield, and sprang after the flying Hagen. Swift as the wind he followed him, quickly he overtook him. With his last strength he felled the vile wretch to the ground, and beat him with the shield, until the heavy plates of brass and steel were broken, and the jewels which adorned it were scattered among the grass. The sound of the heavy blows was heard far through the forest; and, had the hero's strength held out, Hagen would have had his reward.[EN#32] But Siegfried, weak and pale from the loss of blood, now staggered, and fell among the trampled flowers of the wood. Then with his last breath he thus upbraided his false friends:—

“Cowards and traitors, ye! A curse shall fall upon you. My every care has been to serve and please you, and thus I am requited. Bitterly shall you rue this deed. The brand of traitor is set upon your foreheads, and it shall be a mark of loathing and shame to you forever.” Then the weak old Gunther began to wring his hands, and to bewail the death of Siegfried. But the hero bade him hush, and asked him of what use it was to regret an act which could have been done only by his leave and sanction. “Better to have thought of tears and groans before,” said he. “I have always known that you were a man of weak mind, but never did I dream that you could lend yourself to so base a deed. And now, if there is left aught of manliness in your bosom, I charge you to have a care for Kriemhild your sister. Long shall my loved Nibelungen-folk await my coming home.”

The glorious hero struggled in the last agony. The grass and flowers were covered with his blood; the trees shivered, as if in sympathy with him, and dropped their leaves upon the ground; the birds stopped singing, and sorrowfully flew away; and a solemn silence fell upon the earth, as if the very heart of Nature had been crushed.

And the men who stood around—all save the four guilty ones—bowed their heads upon their hands, and gave way to one wild burst of grief. Then tenderly they took





up Siegfried, and laid him upon a shield, with his mighty weapons by him. And, when the sorrowing Night had spread her black mantle over the mid-world, they carried him silently out of the forest, and across the river, and brought him, by Gunther's orders, to the old castle, which now nevermore would resound with mirth and gladness. And they laid him at Kriemhild's door, and stole sadly away to their own places, and each one thought bitterly of the morrow.

