



The Story of Siegfried

adventure 9: The Journey to Burgundy-Land

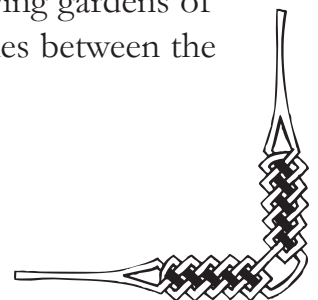
by James Baldwin

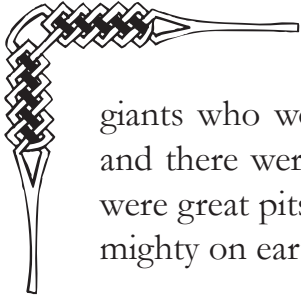
For many days before Siegfried's departure, the queen, and all the women of the household, busily plied their needles; and many suits of rich raiment made they for the prince and his worthy comrades. At length the time for leave-taking came, and all the inmates of the castle went out to the gate to bid the heroes God-speed. Siegfried sat upon his noble horse Greyfell, and his trusty sword Balmung hung at his side. And his Nibelungen knights were mounted on lordly steeds, with gold-red saddles and silver trappings chased with gold; and their glittering helmets, and burnished shields, and war-coats of polished steel, when added to their noble bearing and manlike forms, made up a picture of beauty and strength such as no one in Santen had ever seen before, or would ever see again.

"Only go not into Burgundy-land," were the parting words of Siegmund.

And all who had come to bid them farewell wept bitterly as the young men rode out of the city, and were lost to sight in the distance.

"Only go not into Burgundy-land!" These words of his father sounded still in Siegfried's ears; and he turned his horse's head towards the west and south; and they rode through the level country, and among the fields, from which the corn had already been gathered; and at night they slept in the open air, upon the still warm ground. Thus for many days they travelled. And they left the Lowlands far behind them, and Burgundy far to the left of them; and by and by they came to a country covered with high hills, and mountains that seemed to touch the sky. The crags and peaks were covered with snow, and ice lay all summer in the dales and in the deep gorges cleft long time ago by giant hands. Here it is that the rivers take their beginning. And here it is that the purple grapes and the rare fruits of milder climes are found; for the sun shines warm in the valleys and upon the plains, and the soil is exceeding rich. It is said that these mountains are midway between the cold regions of Jotunheim and the glowing gardens of Muspelheim, and that, in ages past, they were the scene of many battles between the

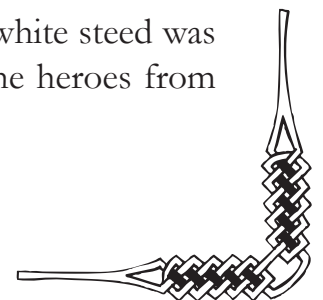


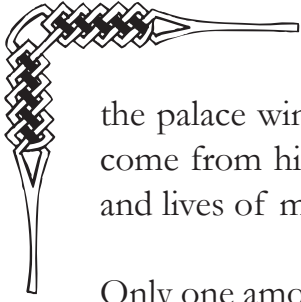


giants who would overwhelm the earth,—these with ice, and those with fire. Here and there were frowning caves dug out of the solid mountain-side; while higher up were great pits, half-filled with ashes, where, it is said, the dwarf-folk, when they were mighty on earth, had their forges.

Siegfried stopped not long in this land. Thoughts of the Nibelungen Land, and of his faithful liegemen who waited for his return, began to fill his mind. Then the heroes turned their horses' heads, and rode back towards the north, following the course of the River Rhine, as it wound, here and there, between hills and mountains, and through meadows where the grass was springing up anew, and by the side of woodlands, now beginning to be clothed in green again; for the winter was well over, and spring was hastening on apace. And as they rode down the valley of the Rhine they came, ere they were aware, into the Burgundian Land, and the high towers of King Gunther's castle rose up before them. Then Siegfried remembered again his father's words,— “Only go not into Burgundy-land.” But it was now too late to go back, and they determined to stop for a few days with the Burgundian kings. They rode onwards through the meadows and the pleasant farming-lands which lay around the city; and they passed a wonderful garden of roses, said to belong to Kriemhild, the peerless princess of the Rhine country; and at last they halted before the castle-gate. So lordly was their bearing, that a company of knights came out to meet them, and offered, as the custom was, to take charge of their horses and their shields. But Siegfried asked that they be led at once to King Gunther and his brothers; and, as their stay would not be long, they said they would have no need to part with horses or with shields. Then they followed their guides, and rode through the great gateway, and into the open court, and halted beneath the palace windows.

And the three kings—Gunther, Gernot, and Giselher—and their young sister, the matchless Kriemhild, looked down upon them from above, and hazarded many guesses as to who the lordly strangers might be. And all the inmates of the castle stood at the doors and windows, or gathered in curious groups in the courtyard, and gazed with open-mouthed wonder upon the rich armor and noble bearing of the thirteen heroes. But all eyes were turned most towards Siegfried and the wondrous steed Greyfell. Some of the knights whispered that this was Odin, and some that it was Thor, the thunderer, making a tour through Rhineland. But others said that Thor was never known to ride on horseback, and that the youth who sat on the milk-white steed was little like the ancient Odin. And the ladies who looked down upon the heroes from





the palace windows said that this man could be no other than the Sunbright Balder, come from his home in Breidablik, to breathe gladness and sunshine into the hearts and lives of men.

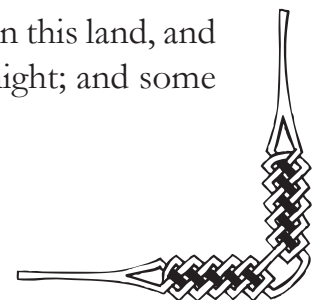
Only one among all the folk in the castle knew who the hero was who had ridden thus boldly into the heart of Burgundy-land. That one was Hagen, the uncle of the three kings, and the doughtiest warrior in all Rhineland. With a dark frown and a sullen scowl he looked out upon the little party, and already plotted in his mind how he might outwit, and bring to grief, the youth whose name and fame were known the whole world over. For his evil mind loved deeds of darkness, and hated the pure and good. By his side, at an upper window, stood Kriemhild, the peerless maiden of the Rhine; but her thoughts were as far from his thoughts as the heaven-smile on her face was unlike the sullen scowl on his grim visage. As the moon in her calm beauty is sometimes seen in the sky, riding gloriously by the side of a dark thunder-cloud,—the one more lovely, the other more dreadful, by their very nearness,—so seemed Kriemhild standing there by the side of Hagen.

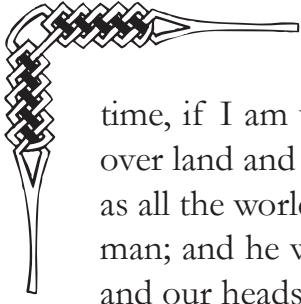
“Think you not, dear uncle,” she said, “that this is the Shining Balder come to earth again?” “The gods have forgotten the earth,” answered Hagen in surly tones. “But if, indeed, this should be Balder, we shall, without doubt, find another blind archer, who, with another sprig of mistletoe, will send him back again to Hela.” “What do you mean?” asked Kriemhild earnestly. But old Hagen said not a word in answer. He quietly withdrew from the room, and left the maiden and her mother, the good dame Ute, alone.

“What does uncle Hagen mean by his strange words? and why does he look so sullen and angry?” asked Kriemhild. “Indeed, I know not,” answered the queen-mother. “His ways are dark, and he is cunning. I fear that evil will yet come to our house through him.”

Meanwhile the three kings and their chiefs had gone into the courtyard to greet their unknown guests. Very kindly did Gunther welcome the strangers to his home; and then he courteously asked them whence they came, and what the favors they wished.

“I have heard,” answered Siegfried, “that many knights and heroes live in this land, and that they are the bravest and the proudest in the world. I, too, am a knight; and some





time, if I am worthy, I shall be a king. But first I would make good my right to rule over land and folk; and for this reason I have come hither. If, indeed, you are as brave as all the world says you are, ride now to the meadows with us, and let us fight man to man; and he who wins shall rule over the lands of both. We will wager our kingdom and our heads against yours.”

King Gunther and his brothers were amazed at this unlooked-for speech.

“Such is not the way to try where true worth lies!” they cried. “We have no cause of quarrel with you, neither have you any cause of quarrel with us. Why, then, should we spill each other’s blood?”

Again Siegfried urged them to fight with him; but they flatly refused. And Gernot said,—

“The Burgundian kings have never wished to rule over folk that are not their own. Much less would they gain new lands at the cost of their best heroes’ blood. And they have never taken part in needless quarrels. Good men in Burgundy are worth more than the broadest lands, and we will not hazard the one for the sake of gaining the other. No, we will not fight. But we greet you most heartily as our friends and guests.”

All the others joined in urging Siegfried and his comrades to dismount from their steeds, and partake of the cheer with which it was their use to entertain strangers. And at last he yielded to their kind wishes, and alighted from Greyfell, and, grasping King Gunther’s hand, he made himself known. And there was great rejoicing in the castle and throughout all the land; and the most sumptuous rooms were set apart for the use of Siegfried and his Nibelungen knights; and a banquet was at once made ready; and no pains were spared in giving the strangers a right hearty welcome to the kingly halls of Burgundy. But Hagen, dark-browed and evil-eyed, stood silent and alone in his chamber and waited his time.

