SIEGFRIED’S SECOND RHINE JOURNEY: BY KATHARINE METCALF ROOF

Scene—The Lorelei’s rock toward sunset. The gold light in the sky is reflected in the still waters of the Rhine. A youth clad in skins, with a hunter’s horn hanging from his belt, appears on the summit of the rock. He pauses, glances about, then throws himself down to rest.

ES, ’tis the very spot where they made sport of me,—the naughty water witches! So changed that scarce I knew it for the same, yet the waters shine to-night as if they held again the gold. But all else is changed. Many men have I seen where once the woods were still, and strange huts and houses. They are of a green that is not like the grass, and of a yellow that is not like the gold. Men’s garments, too, are hideous and strange. Yet the faces are not changed. On them I see that old desire and greed. So looked Alberich and Mime; so looked also the great god Wotan and Fricka his spouse. Still it lives, then, after all the years, that greed of gold.

Just now I came upon a maiden resting by the way. She was reading from a book bound all in red, and she spoke a strange tongue. She laughed and tried to play with me as did the water witches. But though her face was beautiful and her light garments fair, her laugh was loud and I liked her not, so went my way. (He discovers the form of a small man in black coming up over the rocks.) Someone comes to break my solitude.

(As the man approaches, the youth rises upon his elbow and blows a salute upon his horn. The man is dressed in short black knickerbockers with large silver knee buckles, and wears a cocked hat. He returns the greeting gravely.

The Youth:—Thrice welcome, friend. I see by thy garments that thou art also a stranger to these parts; and I, who knew it once so well, am, for that reason, all the more a stranger now. What is thy name and whence comest thou?

The Stranger:—They call me Hendrik Hudson. I have been a sailor of the deep seas, an adventurer if you will.

The Youth (thoughtfully):—I know not thy name; and yet, although thy speech is strange, I understand thee. Let us talk, for I am lonely in this place.

Hendrik Hudson:—Thy name I know not yet.

The Youth:—My mother called me Siegfried. She who died
ere my eyes knew what they looked upon. And she, that other, called me Siegfried,—Brünhilde, fairest of women.

_Hendrik Hudson:_—I do not know the lady.

_Siegfried:_—All men know her by whatever name. Some call her Woman and some call her Love and others call her Life.

_Hendrik Hudson:_—Hast thou journeyed far?

_Siegfried:_—I know not what thou callest far. The Rhine I know or used to know . . . and a deep wood and a high mountain ringed about with fire.

_Hendrik Hudson (shaking his head):_—The mountain I know not. Of deep woods the world holds many, and for thy Rhine it is not so great a river, although fair. Methinks thou hast seen little of the world.

_Siegfried (astonished):_—The Rhine . . . not a great river!

_Hendrik Hudson:_—In the vast country to which I traveled in my youth are many rivers, wider, deeper and longer.

_Siegfried:_—But not so beautiful.

_Hendrik Hudson:_—One I saw fresh from the hand of God. There the foot of man had not trod, nor the hand of man destroyed. That surely was more beautiful.

_Siegfried:_—But this seems not the Rhine I knew. On the banks are strange huts, and upon the water, strange craft, constantly passing.

_Hendrik Hudson (laughing grimly):_—An you think its beauty despoiled, you should see my river . . . my beautiful river! its banks broken and scarred, everywhere blank walls, black smoke, discordant sounds. Its banks are covered with the homes of men and scarcely one is beautiful. To see it you would reckon beauty dead forever in the world.

_Siegfried (astonished):_—Homes of men more unlovely than these we see about us?

_Hendrik Hudson:_—Far more unlovely. For here there are some gray old castle walls that might have grown upon the summit of the hills. But there, beside that river which I found, all is sharp, new, bright and ugly.

_Siegfried:_—And the men . . . are they the same? Bear they also in their faces that greed of gold—like Alberich and Mime?

_Hendrik Hudson:_—Thy friends I know not, but of that greed of gold of which thou speakest, much have I seen. This great river of which I speak is but one in a great country, but everywhere in that land may one perceive that greed of gold.
From a Drawing by Frances Lea.

SIEGFRIED STARTING UPON HIS SECOND RHINE JOURNEY.
SIEGFRIED BESET BY RHINE GUIDES, OFFERING TO CONDUCT HIM TO THE DRAGON'S CAVE.
SIEGFRIED FINDS HIMSELF SURROUNDED BY RHINE TOURISTS.
SIEGFRIED AND HENDRIK HUDSON COMPARE NOTES UPON THE RHINE AND THE HUDSON.
Siegfried:—I have seen men kill one another the gold to possess.
Hendrik Hudson:—For that, men kill each other still without
blood. In that far country men starve other men to death, the gold
to possess. For many men have crossed the water to that land,
the gold to possess. Yet after they are there, hate those that have
already gained it. For there dwell men who have gathered great
wealth of gold—
Siegfried:—And beat and starve those that helped them to amass
it—so did black Alberich.
Hendrik Hudson:—No, not so in this great country. For there
the man working with his hands need never starve, neither those
who work with their brains for gold. For there is gold enough for
all . . . yet there are those who starve.
Siegfried:—Then who may those be?
Hendrik Hudson:—They are those who will not sell their dream
for gold . . . For in this country gold comes to those who
make light music, and write simple words that the vulgar under-
stand; for the love of gold makes all vulgar, be they high or low.
Siegfried:—And here in my country is that also true?
Hendrik Hudson:—Not yet. Here in this land men may have
still their dream. For yet a little while . . . But the change
comes here also. I see it gather like a small cloud upon the horizon.
Siegfried:—Yes, I know now of what thou speakest. For only
this morning I went to the Drachenhals, that cave where dwelt Fafner,
the dragon, he whom I slew with this sword. And there many men
beset me, offering to show the way. They demanded of me my
gold, and when I refused, laughed with one another about me, and
said scornful words. And to large houses have I gone for meat
and drink and bed to sleep upon; there, too, they laughed at me
because of my strange dress, and whispered of me before my face,
yet grasped my gold. Then when I gave it to them, they frowned,
and muttered, and turned it over in their hands.
Hendrik Hudson:—That is true here on thy Rhine. Elsewhere
in thy country have I not found it so. They are a kind people and
would be honest. And yet, here too, I see it come, this curse of gold.
Siegfried:—Alas, the curse of Alberich!
Hendrik Hudson:—I know not this Alberich of whom thou
speak’st, but of the curse I know somewhat, and its cause, methinks,
is love of self and discontent.
Siegfried:—The discontent comes with the sight of the gold.
So I have ever seen.
Hendrik Hudson:—It comes both first and after. In that land where gold is loved above all else the discontent must come. In that new land of which I speak, men went first for freedom and recked not of gold. But it was a great country and many went from over seas and still they go. The change came when those that landed were no longer men of gentle blood, nor strong and sturdy peasants of the soil, but criminals, law breakers, and malcontents, the rough, the rude, the ignorant. Still they are flocking there in hordes and call the country theirs; and some grow rich and others paupers, and some are thieves that break, and steal, and kill. So now it is a country filled with folk that speak strange tongues, all seeking to tear from the land its gold, yet loving not the land. They break down its forests and deface its fair green fields. For they care for one thing only,—to grasp in their own hands the gold.

Siegfried:—What an unhappy country! And are all its people so?

Hendrik Hudson:—Not all are so. But those who have come last are so. Yet the land itself is beautiful and rich. Beautiful, God hath made it, and men have made it rich; yet few are well content. Each hewer of stone and cutter of wood who in some lands has not gold enough, has in this country more than he needs or knows well how to use, and yet he strives for more and kills other men, more to possess. And when he knows well how to cut the wood or hew the stone, then he would no longer hew the stone or cut the wood, but would become a ruler of the nation. For that reason are all men discontent, for no workman is content to do that thing which he can do well, but rather wishes to attempt that which he is not fit to do. And the class below hates always the class above. For it is the cry of this great land that all men are free and equal, yet they are not and seem never like to be.

Siegfried:—And thinkest thou that such things will come to pass here in this land?

Hendrik Hudson:—Not quite the same. For here each man is content to do that which he can do well, and what his father and grandfather did before him. Here the danger comes also, through the gold, but more slowly.

Siegfried:—And are none in that great country happy?

Hendrik Hudson:—Yes, truly; the worker who loves his work and the man and woman who love each other, their children and their home; the artist who loves his dream and cares not to possess the lands because he owns the beauty of them; and cares not to possess the picture in its frame, because the picture that he loves hangs
ever upon the walls of his own mind. This great gold-loving country may keep such workers poor and so hold from them the sights and sounds they love, or it may drive them to other lands, but although it starve them it cannot deprive them of their happiness. And yet, since life itself must be bought with gold, some gold all must have, and so the curse of gold may reach even those who have no greed.

Siegfried:—I had thought all this over when the gold was buried in the waters of the Rhine. Surely someone has stolen it again!

Hendrik Hudson:—There is other gold than the Rhine gold. The world is large. And man can see so far and no farther.

Siegfried:—It was ever so with the gods. Thinkest thou that again the end will come with fire?

Hendrik Hudson:—Fire purifies they say, and fire comes in many forms; and men devise many ways to purify the world, but what is best one cannot know until the time is past, and not always then, for whither we travel we know not, and we are but weavers who work in the dark and cannot see the pattern that we weave until it is complete. But this thing I see clearly; that man must love to do that which he can do well, and that if he love gold better than all else he will surely lose his soul.

Siegfried: (rising) I see a maiden coming o’er the rocks. She is beautiful but she is not alone, a youth is with her.

Hendrik Hudson:—They are happy by their faces. The greed of gold has not touched them yet. Come let us go through the vineyards to the forester’s lodge behind the hill and drink to a new world free from the curse of gold.

Siegfried (as they walk):—Love it was that once redeemed the world. I called her name Brünhilde!