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| **NIBELUNGENLIED****by Janet Parga** |

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We are all aware of the wonderful treasures in the Sagamore Hill NHS collection. One such treasure is the over-sized book on the round table facing the entrance to the North Room, the *Nibelungenlied*, a collection of German folk tales. Drawn to its size, visitors almost always ask questions about it: What is it? What is its importance? How did TR acquire it? Did TR speak German? First of all, this leather-bound copy of the *Nibelungenlied*, or *The Song of the Nibelungs*, is an epic poem recounting the heroic legends of German history. Written in Middle High German between 1190 and 1230, its author was anonymous. Prior to its written version the tales found in the *Nibelungenlied* were part of an oral tradition recounted by storytellers and sung by minstrels. This collection of tales, loosely based on historical fact intertwined with stories of romance, chivalry, tragedy, and retribution, have been called the German *Iliad* because of its references to the Franks defeating the Burgundians. It has also been compared to the *Odyssey* and *Beowulf* with its legends about giants and dwarfs (the Nibelungs), hidden treasure, dragon slayers, romance, betrayal, and the deaths of heroes. Its main characters are King Gunther, Kriemhild, his daughter, Siegfried (Sigurd), and Brunhild, Queen of Iceland. Its cultural influences have been enormous.  |

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| The story of Siegfried and Kriemhild originated in Germany and spread to Norway and eventually to Iceland. The Scandinavian *Etta* contains elements of the *Nibelungenlied,* including its heroic figures. Most famously in the modern era, the *Nibelungenlied* was the primary inspiration for Richard Wagner’s four-cycle opera, *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and William Morris’s poem “Sigurd the Volsung and the Fall of the Niblungs.” J.R.R. Tolkien’s mythical giants and dwarfs in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy might well have been influenced by the *Nibelungenlied.*  |

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| **Siegfried and Kriemhild** |

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| As a child of privilege, TR traveled to Europe twice with his parents. In 1872, TR, Eliot, and Corrine lived with a family in Dresden for five months (Mental Floss) before returning to the United States in November 1873. During this time, he learned German and became enamored with German culture and with the tales in the *Nibelungenlied.* Among his belongings still in the museum collection today are a set of German decorative silver plates in the library, an 1867 copy of the *Nibelungenlied,* and ivory figurines of the lovers Siegfried and Kriemhild. These figures can be seen in a 1904 photo of the drawing room mantle.  |

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The large bound copy of the *Nibelungenlied* in the North Room was a gift from Kaiser Wilhelm II and was presented to TR by the German Ambassador, Speck von Sternberg, in 1905. Many of the book’s illustrations, as well as some of the printed text, appear to be hand-colored.Other notable gifts in the collection from Wilhelm include photos of TR and Kaiser Wilhelm II reviewing the German troops during TR's visit to Potsdam, Germany. The back of these photos have captions written by Kaiser Wilhelm and were given to TR during his visit to Washington D.C. in November 1910 . Another gift is the book *Der Kaiser und die Kunst* by Paul Seidel and inscribed by the Kaiser himself; it is also found in the North Room. One of the most interesting gifts is the schematic drawing of 67 American Naval vessels hand-drawn by Kaiser Wilhelm II. It hangs in the third floor hall opposite Ted, Jr’s room. Lastly is the print in the Dining Room, “Die Fahnen Von Hohen Friedberg Vor De Berliner Garnisonkirche'' which depicts Frederick the Great and his Generals. Once when showing this piece of art to a French visitor, TR said, “This is a gift from the Kaiser at a time when [we] were exchanging gifts instead of blows'' (*L’Illustration Magazine* Oct. 12, 1918).The scope and quality of the gifts indicates a friendly relationship between these two men, but we don’t know if TR gave any gifts to the Kaiser. TR had a fascination with Germany and an admiration for the militant Kaiser. In *Theodore Roosevelt* by Louis Auchincloss, the author states that “TR had even gone so far as to express his understanding of Germany’s ambition to become an international power.”(77) At this time, many countries were seeking to expand their empires, including Japan and Russia. However, this relationship changed drastically in 1914 when Germany invaded Belgium and WWI erupted. |

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