

THE HAUNTED CASTLE.

A LEGEND OF THE RHINE.

On the brow of a lofty and rugged hill, which overlooks the Rhine, stand the ruins of the ancient Castle of Ehlendorf. The ivy has clambered over its crumbling towers, as if to shield them from the destructive hand of time, and bind with its creeping tendrils the wounds which he has made. Once its halls resounded with the mirth of the young and gay, of brave knights and ladies fair, while the songs of minstrels, and tales of heroic enterprize, whiled away the hours of night, until the purple light of dawn appeared. Now it has fallen to decay: the race of its noble possessors has become extinct; and the ivy grows, and the owl hoots amid its deserted courts.

At the time when our tale commences, it was in the possession of Conrad, Baron of Ehlendorf, the remaining scion of that noble family. His brother had died in Palestine, leaving to him the title and all the vast estates of his ancestors. In early life he had wedded the beautiful Elfrida, of Aldenburg, and never was a purer gem more dearly valued than the young bride of Ehlendorf by her doting lord. Years of bright, unclouded happiness rolled over their heads; and if unalloyed pleasure has ever dwelt on earth, it was the portion of Conrad, of Ehlendorf, when he looked upon his angel bride and their little Katrine, scarcely knowing which was the loveliest, the mother or the child. Often as he saw their fair offspring, with bounding footsteps, dimpled cheeks, and laughing eye, throwing back her golden curls, and rushing with playfulness and love into her mother's arms, he felt that without her his treasures were but glittering dust.

Like the other barons of ancient times, his retinue was composed of a vast number of armed retainers, and his power and wealth were unequalled by any other of equal rank in the country. His kindness and hospitality were every where proverbial, and the noblest of the land delighted to gather round his festive board. Thus, love, wealth and beauty conspired to fill the heart of Ehlendorf with joy, and nought could dim his happiness till his loved Elfrida was called from earth to blossom in a fairer clime. Sad and afflictive was this bereavement to the young baron, overthrowing as it did the dreams that he had been weaving through eight bright years of wedded happiness. Still, as he turned in anguish from the lifeless form of the object of his heart's best affections, one ray of hope enlivened the surrounding gloom. His lovely Katrine grew more and more beautiful day by day, and in her he felt

that he possessed a purer treasure than wealth could afford. In his constant watchful care over her helplessness, and the fond confiding affection with which she repaid his tenderness, he found forgetfulness of every sorrow.

As successive years rolled on she grew more and more lovely, and new charms in her unfolded daily. No opportunity had been neglected which would tend to her intellectual advancement; and at the age of sixteen she possessed the charms of beauty, and an intellect of the highest degree. Their castle was thronged with young cavaliers, eager to win so lovely a prize,—and though her smiles were bestowed on all, yet no one of the noble train had received any evidence of her preference. Happy in the fondness, nay, almost idolatry of her father, she remained insensible to any other than paternal affection. The baron, though still in the pride of manhood, had never indulged serious thoughts of a second union, and when bright eyes beamed on him, and silvery voices fell in tones of melody upon his ear, he had only to look upon the face of Katrine, where every feature of her sainted mother was reflected as in a faithful mirror, and his heart was steeled against every attraction.

It was a beautiful morning in the month of June, when the baron and his daughter went forth for their accustomed ride. The air was balmy; the fragrance of the flowers was borne upon the breeze, and the groves were vocal with the melody of the feathered songsters. Suddenly dark clouds obscured the sky, and foretold a coming tempest. They hurried on, but when they arrived at the castle, the storm-clouds hung darkly and fearfully over its rugged towers. Then loud thunders rent the sky; gleams of lightning darted from pole to pole. The rain fell in torrents from the darkened sky, hour after hour, incessantly; the swollen waves of the Rhine beat in fury upon their rugged banks. Katrine was seated at her chamber window, watching the raging billows as they rushed in wild commotion against the rocks. Suddenly her attention was attracted by the sight of a cavalier upon the opposite shore. The vision was transient, for scarcely had he appeared ere his fiery charger leaped from the towering height of the rock into the boiling waves below. The baron's sturdy vassals had witnessed his disaster, and rushed forth to rescue him if possible. Urged on by impassioned signs from Katrine, they put forth every effort. For awhile he struggled successfully against the foaming billows,

but was at length thrown with violence against the rocks, and when the vassals of the castle had succeeded in bearing him to the shore, he was insensible. Hour after hour the baron and Katrine hung anxiously over his couch, watching for signs of returning consciousness, but he remained pale and motionless as the work of a statuary; his faint breathing and a slight pulsation alone giving evidence that life was not extinct. At length a delicate flush overspread his marble countenance; his eyelids gently raised, and he gazed in bewildered astonishment on all around him.

"Fear not," said the baron, "you are with friends; who will watch over you carefully, until you have recovered from your late disaster."

The following morning he was able to relate the circumstances which had led him there. He gave his name as Hildebrand, a young knight of Hanover. He had been engaged in the chase, the day before, and had followed the deer so far that he lost sight of his companions, and wandered through the intricate mazes of the forest, not knowing whether his way might lead. Soon the tempest arose, and as he reached the opening of the forest, he spurred on his charger, ignorant of his proximity to the Rhine, until he was precipitated down the frightful chasm. He expressed his gratitude in the highest terms to his noble host for his kindness, and a wish to leave the castle as soon as possible. The extreme debility resulting from his late accident, however, precluded the possibility of his immediate departure. Besides, the ravages of the storm had rendered the highways impassable.

During this time the fair Katrine left no means untried to cheer the lingering hours. Her harp beguiled those moments which would otherwise have been tedious, and her voice, whose melody was unrivalled, seemed even more sweet than it was wont to be, as she sung the wild and beautiful legends of their country. Charmed by her beauty, her accomplishments, and filial affection, young Hildebrand became daily more and more attached to Katrine, while she returned his affection with fond idolatry. Thus passed day after day in peace and happiness, and the only sorrow which dimmed Katrine's pleasures was the thought of parting, and his wish that their engagement should be concealed from her father, until he should return to claim his affianced bride. Sincere and trusting, she yielded to the conviction that he was urged to this wish by powerful motives, then unknown to her, nor allowed the slightest suspicion of his constancy to enter her mind.

One bright morning three weeks after his arrival at the castle, a courier alighted with despatches for Hildebrand. As he perused them, a cloud rested upon his brow, and he hastened to find Katrine. He told her that his presence was demanded at court, but with many promises of a speedy return, he bade her a fond farewell. Weeks, nay, even months passed away, and still Katrine received no tidings from her stranger lover. She had withdrawn herself from gay society, and her gladsome laugh no longer resounded through the silent halls. Her anxious parent saw with anguish the sorrow of his child, and finally won from her the tale of her

love. In vain he used every endeavor to find the retreat of their guest. The name of Hildebrand was unknown to any of the barons of the vicinity, and he was forced to relinquish his fruitless inquiry. At length it was announced that a tournament was to be held at the capital, in honor of the nuptials of the Elector of Hanover, and the baron hoping that this scene of gaiety would dissipate her melancholy, won the consent of Katrine to accompany him. The morning of the day appointed dawned with unusual splendor, and the eye of Katrine beamed with the light of hope, as she took her place in a gallery commanding a full view of the field of action. "Surely," she thought to herself, "when the bravest of the land are about to signalise themselves, Hildebrand will not desert the noble band."

The field was elegantly prepared; and the tents, glittering with all the splendor of martial panoply, added double richness to the scene. On either side of the lists were galleries of blue and red and purple silk, crowded with the beauty of the land. All was anxious expectation. Soon a shout of joy from the assembled multitude announced that the elector and his young bride were approaching. Mounted on a fiery charger, which he managed with perfect skill, his noble form appeared to the best advantage. His bride rode a beautiful white palfrey, and though there was something noble in her flashing eye and masculine firmness, still her beauty could not be compared, without disparagement, to the angelic loveliness of Katrine. As they advanced near the place where Katrine was seated, an undefined horror thrilled through her frame, yet her eyes remained fixed upon the prince. Surely it was the same noble form. Could it be Hildebrand? He turned his dark eye upon her and met her anxious glance; the color receded from his cheek. She uttered a faint cry of agony, pronounced the name of Hildebrand, and fell senseless into the arms of her attendants.

The tale can be told in a few words. Her faithless lover had been summoned from his delightful retreat at Ehlendorf by the duties of state; and ambition had led him to form an alliance from which his heart revolted. In the cares of state and the hilarity of his nuptials he had in a measure drowned the memory of Katrine, but now she seemed to rise like a gentle spirit to reprove his falsehood. The arrows of remorse had entered his soul and poisoned his enjoyment. Though surrounded by all the honors and dignities of this world he found no peace. Katrine was borne by her afflicted parent to their once happy home, but the light of existence had fled forever, and the house of Ehlendorf was soon to be remembered as among the dead. A few sad years rolled on. The baron was borne to his last resting place. Katrine with her attendants alone remained within the castle walls. At length she yielded up her vast domains in favor of a distant relative, with this restriction, that the old castle should remain undisturbed, and as it was reported, retired to a convent in Switzerland. From this period the old fortress was left to the ravages of time, uninhabited by any mortal, though the superstitious inhabitants of the vicinity declared it to be the abode of supernatural beings.

A tall form according to the neighboring villagers, robed in white, had been seen upon the battlements at midnight, while strains of wild unearthly melody were heard floating on the breeze; and when the storm was raging, the same spirit form was seen hovering over the yawning chasm and keeping its fearful vigils where no mortal foot durst approach. The benighted traveller turned away, choosing to wander through the mazes of the forest, rather than pass the fearful place, and even the adventurous mountain boy fled in terror from its lonely walls.

Years had rolled on, when the Elector of Hanover chanced in hunting to pass through the domains of Ehlendorf. One of his followers related to him the superstitions concerning the castle, and despite their entreaties he insisted upon exploring its recesses. He reached it just as its towers were gleaming in the pure moonlight; and the waters of the Rhine flowed gently on, while each tiny ripple wore its glittering coronet of moonbeams. How vividly bright the visions of the past rose in his memory, as he entered once more through the castle's lonely gates. Just as he passed the threshold the notes of an Æolian harp sent a thrill of superstitious terror through every vein. He opened the door which led to Katrine's boudoir, when a sight met his eye which caused him to recoil with terror. Extended on a couch, and guarded by an old attendant, was the form of the once beautiful heiress of Ehlendorf. The deep flush of agitation overspread her cheek as she recognised him and said,

"Why intrude upon the sanctity of one devoted to Heaven, or strive to bind a heart to this earth which its sorrows have broken?"

These words assured him that the true Katrine

and not the spirit was before him, and he slowly approached her saying,

"I come, to crave the boon of pardon from one so deeply injured as you have been."

A sweet smile beamed on her placid countenance as she said,

"It is granted, and may kind Heaven forgive all your wanderings, as freely as I now forgive your falsehood. I have found the bitterness of earthly sorrow, and for awhile brooded sadly over disappointed love, but the deep dream now is past. For years my hopes have been fixed upon a brighter world, and not one lingering trace of earthly idolatry has mingled in my devotions. I would have secluded myself in the sacred walls of a monastery, but my heart clung with fondness to my father's halls. I have traced the Creator's power in the starry heavens and stolen abroad to view the glories of nature in the pure moonlight. This has given rise to the superstitions of the peasantry, and I have carefully avoided undeceiving them lest they should intrude upon my retirement. And now, farewell. My sands of life are well nigh spent, and I shall soon join my sainted parents in Heaven. Leave me in solitude, I entreat you, lest the lingering spell be thrown again upon me. Once more farewell."

Thus saying she motioned to the door where he had entered, and he retired in sadness of spirit. A few weeks after, the form of Katrine was deposited in the family vault, and the castle remained untenanted. The peasantry still call it the Haunted Castle, asserting that the fair lady of Ehlendorf is seen to wander by moonlight over its crumbling towers.

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Female Seminary, Yonkers, N. Y. 1841.

