
THE SWAN-TOWER.

At the period of our story the town of Nym-
engen, in the Netherlands, presented a scene of
unusual bustle and activity. Knights and squires
rode to and fro. Horsemen and yeomen paraded
the streets in their armour and rich costumes.
The windows of the lofty, pointed-roofed houses
were filled all day long with gentle dames and
gallant cavaliers, so that the numerous strangers,
who arrived from all sides, could with difficulty
find lodging for themselves and their followers,
or stabling for their horses.

The cause of this unwonted gathering was this.

King Charles had come to Nymengen to hear the complaint of the Duchess of Brabant against her brother-in-law, and, if possible, to bring their dispute to an amicable termination. The matter between the litigants stood thus. Godfrey, Duke of Bouillon and Brabant, on account of his approved wisdom and valour, had been chosen by the crusaders for their leader in the expedition to the Holy land. By the conquest of Jerusalem and the deliverance of the holy sepulchre from the hands of the Infidels, he had rendered himself the most renowned of all the Christian heroes in Palestine, where he died without male issue. He directed however in his will, which was acknowledged by his vassals, that his states should remain under the government of the Duchess and her daughter. This disposition was however not respected by Godfrey's brother, the powerful duke of Saxony, who founded his claims upon the Salic law, which excludes women from succession. He therefore made himself master of the country, over which his brother had ruled, paying no attention to the representations or remonstrances of the widow and orphan, who determined at length to apply to the king himself for redress.

The duke of Saxony had also come to Nymengen to answer the charges adduced against him. Most of the persons present secretly favoured the widowed Duchess and her beautiful daughter, Beatrice, out of a natural sympathy for the afflicted

princesses ; but they despaired of the good success of their cause.

The trial was about to commence, when it was suddenly interrupted by a loud and continued shout, which seemed to proceed from the banks of the Rhine. The King went to the window to ascertain the cause of the tumult and perceived a snowwhite swan swimming up the stream, and drawing after him, by a silver chain, a small boat in which lay a knight asleep, with his head resting upon his shield, and his helmet, gorget and hauberk of mail by his side. The swan piloted this heavy burthen skilfully through the flood and against the stream — for the boat had neither sail or mast. Charles and the whole court were amazed beyond measure at the strange sight, and as the little vessel approached the strand, the complaint of the Princesses was forgotten, and all hastened down to the bank of the river, where the people stood in dense crowds, beholding the miracle, with many an exclamation of astonishment. In the mean time the knight awoke, girded on his armour and stepped upon the shore. The king received him courteously and taking him by the hand, led him to the castle. The knight then turned to the bird, which accompanied him, and dismissed him with these words : “ Fly home again, my dear swan ; if I ever require your service in future, I will call you, and you will return to me faithfully. ” No sooner did the swan hear this, than he flapped

his dazzling white wings, and in a few moments disappeared with the boat from before the eyes of the astonished spectators. All looked with curiosity upon the strange knight, and whispered to one another as they went; for the adventure seemed so very mysterious, that it afforded them ample scope for speculation.

Charles returned to the lofty hall, and having taken his seat as before, commanded the disputants to adduce the arguments, upon which they founded their claims. In the mean time he directed that the stranger, whose arrival had interrupted the trial, should be conducted to a place of honor amongst the other princes and nobles.

On the one hand the Duchess of Brabant, with her daughter Beatrice at her side, stated her case and appealed to the decree of the late Duke, which had been approved by all his vassals. On the other the Duke of Saxony referred to the universally observed custom and the existing laws, for a confirmation of his title and to justify his occupation of his brother's territory. Seeing, however, that the king delayed to pronounce sentence, uncertain which way to decide, he offered to maintain his right with the sword, and demanded that the Duchess should find a champion to defend her cause.

Charles willingly gave his consent to this proposal, for in fact he found himself thereby extricated from an awkward dilemma, as the decision was thus made dependent upon the fate of arms. The Duchess on

the contrary was greatly alarmed : for the Duke of Saxony was a valiant warrior, and a very giant in stature, so that no one dared to oppose him. In vain her eyes wandered through the circle of knights : they met indeed with compassionate looks, but they found no one who would venture to enter the lists in her behalf. Beatrice seeing this shed tears and thus addressed the bystanders :

“ Alas! must our opponent triumph, because not a single knight will raise his arm in our cause ! ” Upon this the youth who had been drawn to land by the swan, presented himself before the king, and declared himself to be the princesses' champion.

Many who heard this assertion felt relieved as it were of a heavy burden, although they feared that the stranger, would be no match for the Duke either in strength or address. The princesses who despaired of the successful issue of the affair, shewed their gratitude nevertheless by their looks. The spot fixed upon for the combat, was the open space before the royal palace ; thither the Duke and the knight of the Swan returned with their visors down, after having retired to equip themselves. An innumerable concourse of people surrounded the nobles and yeomen of the guard, who could with difficulty keep them back. The contest was long and obstinate ; for both combatants wielded their weapons with admirable force and dexterity. At length the Duke received a terrific blow upon his helmet, staggered, and after a few instants sunk to

the ground. On raising his visor, they found that life had fled.

The victor was greeted with the loudest acclamations of joy. Even the king left his elevated seat, to lead him into the presence of the Princesses, who had awaited the issue with intense anxiety, and now received their deliverer with the most heartfelt expressions of gratitude. Charles instantly awarded to the Duchess the sovereignty of her husbands states, there being no other competitor to contest her right. When all the assembly had dispersed, after having congratulated the illustrious ladies on the fortunate issue of the combat, the stranger gladly accepted the Duchesses invitation to accompany her on her return to Cleves, where she usually resided.

The knight of the Swan, who was known by no other name, passed his days happily at the castle of Cleves. The people received him with cheers, wherever he appeared, for they loved the Duchess, and looked upon him as her deliverer. The beautiful Beatrice soon confessed by her looks, that she entertained stronger sentiments towards him, than those of gratitude. Her mother saw with joy their mutual attachment, for she knew now that she could present her people with a brave and noble minded sovereign, as a compensation for the loss of her valiant and beloved consort. After a short time, Beatrice became the happy bride of the knight, but he did not place the ring on her finger, until she had given him a solemn assurance, that she would

upon no account make any inquiries respecting his country or family : “ If thou dost, said he, I shall be irretrievably lost to thee, for my fate depends upon that question. ”

Year after year passed away. The country was tranquil and happy, for the knight ruled it with firmness and moderation, and the fame of his valour and wisdom preserved his dominions from all hostile aggressions. Beatrice was the mother of two boys, who bade fair to resemble their noble father. Often however in her hours of solitude, had she wondered in her mind what motives could possibly induce him to conceal his descent. More than once was the question on the point of escaping from her lips, but she was restrained by fear, as well as by her promise. But when a long time had elapsed, and she could no longer bear to remain in ignorance as to the origin of her children's father, she one night asked the forbidden question. The knight full of sorrow and dismay thus mournfully replied : “ O Beatrice, thou hast, thyself, given the death-blow to our happiness. I must depart hence ; as I stated upon our wedding day ; nothing can longer detain me here. ”

The next morning found the whole ducal castle in commotion. The Princess was overwhelmed with grief, whilst her husband wandered silent and melancholy through the spacious apartments, to bid a last farewell to the spot which had so long witnessed his happiness. When the sun was already

high in the heaven, a swan was seen sailing majestically up the river, drawing after him a little bark. The knight having put on the same suit of armour in which he had entered the town of Nymengen on the eventful day of trial, he ordered his two children to be brought to him and kissed them. Then clasping the afflicted mother once more in his arms, he hastened to the square contiguous to the Rhine. The swan had swum to the bank and seemed to await his arrival there. All the inhabitants of the town had collected together, and fell at the feet of their Lord, earnestly entreating him not to forsake them: but, alas! the accomplishment of their wishes was not dependent upon his will. The knight addressed a few parting words to the assembled people, thanking them for their affection and loyalty, and gave them his blessing. He then stepped into the boat, cast a last fond glance at the castle and the multitude who were witnessing his departure with heavy hearts, and floated down the Rhine, never to return.

At first the whole occurrence seemed to Beatrice like a dream. Alas! she soon became conscious of its melancholy reality and rejected all consolation, whilst her mother, the old Duchess found the evening of her days embittered by seeing her beloved daughter fade away in the spring of life and the zenith of her beauty. She was often observed to sit all day long upon the lofty terrace of the castle, overwhelmed with grief and remorse, her head resting upon her

hand, looking wistfully in the direction in which her noble consort had disappeared from her sight. At times when a white sail appeared in the distance, her heart would beat high, with the hope that he might return; but her sighs and hopes were vain. Many months had not thus passed away, ere her aged mother and loving subjects had to bewail a double loss. The lovely and inconsolable Beatrice soon fell a prey to grief and despair.

The good old Duchess though alone in her desolate castle, brought up her grand children in piety and noble sentiments. From them descended many illustrious families. Those of Geldern and Cleves, with the counts of Rheineck and other Renish nobles still bear the swan in their escutcheon, in remembrance of their origin. Although the castle of Cleves has long lost its last Lord of that lineage, its lofty battlements are still adorned with the figure of the swan, which seems to overlook the stream and country far and wide. To this day the memory of Beatrice and the unknown knight is coupled urth the Swan-tower.