

ALTENBERG CLOISTER.

Upon the summit of a lofty eminence near the river Dhün, where formerly stood the feudal fortress of Berg, whose lordly towers overlooked the neighbouring castle of Brauweiler, now stand the decayed ruins of a cloister surrounded by a group of venerable oaks and beech trees.

It was in the autumn of the year 1100, that the old walls of this castle resounded with accents of general rejoicing. Its noble and kind-hearted Proprietor, Count Albert, designated by his vassals "the Mountain-Lord" had hitherto been a prey to disappointment and violent grief; but he now sat with a smi-

ling countenance beside the couch of his consort, the beautiful Margaret, Countess of Kefernberg, who having accompanied him from Thuringen to the banks of the Dhün, had this day presented him with two lovely boys, after eight years childless marriage. The happy father alternately rocked the infants upon his knee and pressed them to his heart, and it seemed as though, the remembrance of past sorrows would henceforth be effaced by the delights of paternal enjoyment and domestic happiness. Tradition states that the Count's grief arose from the following circumstance. His father, a noble knight, had in early youth wooed and won a beautiful maiden, Adela of Lorraine, and after several years of connubial felicity, had likewise rejoiced in the birth of twins. But scarcely had the young Countess recovered from her confinement, ere a treacherous friend raised suspicions of her fidelity in the mind of her husband. Impelled by groundless jealousy, the deceived, though noble minded man, caused the unfortunate Adela to be beheaded, whilst her infants were abandoned beneath the walls of the castle, to the fury of the elements and to the savage beasts of the forest.

The unfortunate Adela who had resigned her modest neck without a murmur, to the headsman, had nevertheless lifted up her voice to heaven, and in her last moments earnestly supplicated that the Almighty would vindicate her innocence, for the sake of her boys.

As soon as the dreadful and unjust sentence had

been carried into execution, her husband caused the corpse to be unceremoniously buried, in the most solitary part of the neighbouring forest, and upon his hunting excursions, carefully avoided passing the place of death. Returning late, however, one evening to the castle, the Count entered a path, with which he was unacquainted, and ere long found himself upon the border of a desolate and unknown tract of country. Surprised at this, for he knew of no such wilderness, he reined up his horse, and with astonished eyes, gazed upon the marvel, that presented itself to his sight.

In the midst of a barren inclosure, formed by rugged rocks and precipitous cliffs, there appeared a couch of the richest verdure representing the perfect form of his once lovely wife, and upon the spot, for such it was, where the gentle heart of the beautiful martyr had ceased to throb, bloomed a lily, from amidst whose golden petals there issued a concert of harmonious sounds, soft and enchanting as the voices of a thousand nightingales. For a while the Count stood motionless, alternately gazing upon the wondrous sight and listening to the entrancing sounds, which thrilled with awful emotion through his veins. Suddenly however, he turned pale, his lips quivered and he smote his anguished breast. A ray from heaven penetrated his heart. The conviction of the martyred Adela's innocence and of her cruel, and unjust death flashed across his mind. With a contrite heart and tearful eye he sprung from his saddle

and prostrating himself beside the flowery tomb, kissed the ground. Having given way for a few moments to the pangs of sorrow and repentance, he again raised his head and sought once more to catch the heavenly sounds — but the flower and tomb had disappeared. Overwhelmed with mingled grief and awe, he tore himself from the melancholy spot and soon reached the castle, where he gave orders for the instant removal of the unfortunate Countess's remains to the vault of her ancestors, where she was interred with the greatest pomp.

His next care was to adopt every possible means for the discovery of the children, though his repentant soul trembled lest the poor victims should have fallen a prey to wild beasts, or have perished from the severity of the weather and the effects of hunger. All his efforts however were fruitless.

Four years employed by him in the severest mortifications of the body and in the strictest piety and repentance had rolled heavily and sorrowfully away, when, as he sat one day near the tomb of his wife, lamenting his cruelty and rashness, and bewailing his childless and unhappy fate, a favoured vassal demanded an audience. This request was instantly granted and no sooner did the latter enter, than the Count started with joyful surprise and gratitude to heaven, for the man bore upon each arm a lovely boy; one of whom looked up to the knight with the soft dark orbs of his sainted Adela, the other with his own bright blue eye. When he had somewhat recovered from

his emotion, the serf stated that being on his return from a journey into Swabia, he had discovered the two children, amidst a band of wild Bohemians. Being attracted by their beauty, he had made inquiry as to their origin and quickly ascertained that they had been found, five years before, in a basket near the walls of Berg. To rescue them from the clutches of the freebooters was his first care — to hasten with them to the feet of his Lord his next.

The Count listened to this recital, with feelings of mingled joy and astonishment. Being satisfied from particular marks, which distinguished the children, that they were those he sought, he richly rewarded his vassal, and received this token of divine forgiveness, with the utmost gratitude and contrition. Henceforth his whole time was devoted to the education of his two sons, who were reared with the most careful solicitude. He moreover taught their infant lips to lisp the following pathetic prayer, which proved his deep repentance and humility. — “Listen to us, o Lord, and pardon our cruel father, who caused our innocent mother to be barbarously and unjustly executed!” At first the children mechanically repeated these words, unconscious of their import, but at a more advanced age, when their mother’s miserable fate was disclosed to them, and they were able to comprehend the enormity of her cruel murder, their young hearts recoiled in horror from their father, to unite more tenderly one with the other.

To the painful circumstances attending their birth, doubtless was to be attributed the deep melancholy, which constantly pervaded their youthful minds. In fact so profound was this impression that Bruno, the younger, early embraced a religious life, while Adolph, the elder, though highly accomplished, and excelling in every knightly exercise, evinced no relish for the pleasures or gallantries of his age.

Their father having died however, shortly after they attained their majority, Adolph soon engaged in the war then raging in Thuringen, where he saw and won the heart of the beautiful Margaret of Kefernberg.

The love which united this young and noble pair, though deep and devoted, was of a more melancholy character, than the gay and buoyant passion, that usually inflames the bosom of youth. For it was not until the end of eight years, that the birth of the beautiful twins appeared to crown, though in reality it destroyed the happiness of their parents.

The Countess after giving birth to her infants declined rapidly in health and in a few days closed her eyes for ever upon the joys and sorrows of this world.

The Count, disconsolate and overwhelmed with grief, confided his children to the care of their uncle Bruno, and having soon fallen a victim to the melancholy that preyed upon his heart, for the loss of his wife, ere twelve months had elapsed he was laid by her side, in the grave. The mutual affection of the young

Adolph and Everard rivalled that which their father and uncle had entertained for each other. Neither knew a joy, or sorrow, that was not participated in by the other. Their gentle and amiable dispositions were linked in a bond of holy fellowship, which seemed to be the result of heavenly inspiration. In the mean time, their chivalrous valour, their skill in the use of arms, their courtly gallantry, liberality, and piety, proved them to be worthy sons of that glorious Rhine-land, which is so highly favoured by the Almighty, that it seldom produces other than valiant and illustrious children. From early infancy the brothers had resolved never to separate, but this resolution was soon fated to be broken. Soon after they had celebrated the anniversary of their twentieth year, they received an invitation from the Count of Cleves to assist at the approaching nuptials of his eldest daughter, Gisela, with their cousin Count Sieghardt of Kefernberg.

Rejoicing at the prospect of amusement thus offered to them, Adolph and Everard set forth, attended by a gallant train of knights and men at arms, and on arriving at the Castle of Cleves were warmly welcomed by their illustrious host, who forthwith conducted them to the apartments of his countess. Upon entering they started with admiration, and well they might, for, by the aged Matrons side stood her two young and lovely daughters — twin stars glowing with equal, though different lustre.

“Heaven grant,” whispered Adolph to his brother,

“ that the beauteous maiden on the left, be not the bride. ”

“ And heaven grant, ” rejoined Everard, “ that it be not the one on the right. ” But, alas! it was the betrothed Gisela, who stood upon the right of the Countess. Thus the first step of the youthful Everard amidst the flowery bowers of love, caused the destruction of all his hopes: whilst the wonted smiles and joyful expression that had hitherto beamed on the lovely features of the maiden, also disappeared in a few days. The truth is, both hearts had been pierced by the same shaft; both were doomed to the same torture.

Whether Everard and Gisela had an opportunity of explaining their mutual passion remains a mystery. A lapse of seven hundred years has left us no record of such a circumstance. Suffice it to say that in less than three weeks after the arrival of the brothers at Cleves, the nuptials of Count Sieghardt and Gisela were duly solemnized, and a few months later, Ada, the young sister, was led a smiling bride to the castle of Neuenburg, by the happy and enamoured Adolph. Everard's blighted affection now centered entirely in his brother; but fearful of intruding upon the felicity he witnessed, he retired to the neighbouring fortress of Berg, presented to him, by the generous Adolph who took up his own residence at the castle of Neuenburg upon the banks of the Wupper. Nevertheless, the brothers met daily and separated only at night, when they retired to

rest, either to dwell with grateful remembrance upon the hours thus passed, or to anticipate with joyful presentiment the coming sunrise, which would again unite them. The vicinity of their castles presented every facility to their constant intercourse. Indeed the echo of their horns, as they saluted each other, across the dew clad hills, was wont to be heard at early dawn, resounding from the lofty turrets of their respective abodes. These signals, indicated the hour of their meeting at home, or their place of rendezvous, when they joined in the noble pleasures of the chase. In short their unprecedented fraternal affection became, and has since continued proverbial throughout the land. Unequaled for valour, they were no less renowned for wit and learning, their education having been carefully superintended by their Uncle the Archbishop of Cologne, who spared no pains to cultivate their minds. Of the two, Adolph was perhaps the most bold and chivalrous, whilst Everard was the most pious and learned. Indeed the latter rarely quitted his retirement in the lovely valley of the Duhn, where he lived far from the world's tumults and vanities, devoting himself with constant ardour to the pursuit of knowledge.

This life of solitude and study had continued for some years, uninterrupted by any other distractions than the visits of his brother, or the occasional diversions of the chase, when a feud unfortunately broke out between Walram Count of Limbourg, and Godfrey Duke of Brabant. Adolph and Everard, being

united by early ties of regard to the latter, hastened to join the standard of their friend, who after a long and sanguinary contest near Thaldorf, obtained a decisive victory, over his antagonist. Infinite, however, was the grief of Adolph. — For, when the knights assembled round their respective banners after the battle, Everard was no where to be found. A blow from a battle-axe had felled him senseless to the earth, where he remained unnoticed amidst the heaps of dead and dying warriors. Animation having at last returned the fallen knight became conscious of his situation. Raising himself upon his knees, he found that he was the only person who had escaped with life amongst those who surrounded him. Bodies mutilated and stripped of their garments, fields trodden down, villages burnt, and castles sacked, such was the dreadful sight that met his eye. He turned his head and thought with anguished heart, that he himself was an agent in this fearful work of destruction. Upon a mind so deeply imbued with piety and disposed to meditation, the scene was calculated to produce the most serious and profound impression. Its effects were decisive upon that of Everard; his determination to abandon the career of arms, and all its fearful attendants was instant and irrevocable. Seizing a horse whose master had fallen beside him, he hastily quitted the field of carnage, and galloped onwards until he reached Altena, on the Lenna, where he resolved to remain concealed until his health and strength were restored. Thanks

to a robust constitution and the intercession of the holy Virgin, his wounds quickly healed. Being resolved to devote himself henceforth to prayer and penance, in order to atone for his passed sins, he took the road to Italy and reached Rome, where he solicited the Popes benediction and thus obtained absolution and remission for all his faults. It was not in the power of the Holy Father however to destroy the gnawing worm of conscience, or to pacify his troubled soul. He therefore continued his pilgrimage and directed his steps over the Pyrenees to St. Iago de Compostella. Here he performed his devotions before the altar containing the bones of the holy Apostle, which had been enshrined there by the great and pious Charlemagne. From thence he returned to France, where he visited the most celebrated and sacred resorts of native and foreign pilgrims. But all his efforts were vain. Neither prayer, penance or pious works could restore his peace of mind. Thinking that all his prayers and mortifications were unacceptable to the Almighty, he sought to obtain repose for his troubled spirit by still greater devotion, and still more incessant exertions for the benefit of his fellow creatures. "Often said he to himself, has the impious ardour of battle inundated my burning brow, with unholy perspiration, henceforth the dew of useful labour shall cool its fevered heat. By cultivating the fields that, I have hitherto only helped to destroy, I will endeavour to offer some trifling atonement to heaven for my past crimes.

Having disguised his noble and manly figure beneath the dress of a serf, he entered the service of a farmer, in the neighbourhood of Thaldorf, near the bloody spot, where he was first awakened to a sense of his errors. Here he continued during five years, serving his master with indefatigable zeal, and worshipping his God with equal humility and ardour. It chanced however upon a burning summer's day, while occupied in the labours of the field, near the high road, that he was accosted by a nobleman, a vassal of his brother, who, accompanied by another warrior, was upon his road to the shrine of St. Egide in Champaign. Scarcely had the old knight remarked his noble bearing or heard him employ expressions so different from the ordinary language of a peasant than he examined him attentively, and lifting up his eyes with emotion exclaimed: "Surely, if I err not, thou art no other than our long sought for Lord, Count Everard." A momentary confusion had well nigh betrayed Everard's secret, but immediately recovering his self possession, he assumed an appearance of such entire unconsciousness, that the bewildered soldier regarded him with mingled confusion and astonishment. The farmer chancing also to approach, laughed at their mistake and assured the stranger that he questioned whether his herdsman had ever heard of so exalted a personage as the Count.

The Nobleman replied not, but continued gazing upon Everard, who on account of the excessive

heat, had opened the collar of his doublet. Scarcely had the Count done this, ere the old knight fell upon his knee, and clasped his hands: for he instantly perceived a red cross, surmounted with the letters, J N R J, engraved upon Everard's bosom. This evidence was incontrovertible, for he knew that Archbishop Bruno, had caused the cross and letters to be traced upon the breast of his nephew, during his infancy. Overcome by his feelings and this testimony of his identity, Everard found further dissimulation fruitless, he yielded himself therefore to the respectful embrace of his brother's vassal, whilst he kindly pressed the hand of the friendly farmer, whose astonishment at the rank of his guest had deprived him of the power of speech. Adolph having been informed of this extraordinary discovery, hastened to assure his brother of his unaltered affection, and to restore to him his estates, which he had faithfully administered.

Everard gratefully accepted the assurance of his brother's undiminished love, but no persuasion could induce him to again take up his abode in the castle of his ancestors.

The neighbourhood resounded, in the mean time, with rumours of this strange event which ere long reached the ears of the Abbot of Morimont, through the medium of Everard's master. The Abbot, a learned and pious member of the family of the Margrave of Austria, upon hearing the circumstance, repaired immediately to the young Count, and by the

advice of this holy man, Everard was induced to retire with him to his monastery. Where being profoundly versed in all the mysteries of our blessed faith, he was without difficulty received as a brother of the community, and continued to reside with them during many years.

At length Adolph could no longer endure this continued separation from his beloved brother, or support the thoughts of his being thus exiled for ever from his native land. So deep indeed was his affliction, that Everard was persuaded to return to the castle of Berg, the favourite residence of his youth, where he forthwith determined to found the Abbey of Altenberg, which in the year 1133 was duly consecrated by Archbishop Bruno, whose virtues and piety were celebrated throughout all Christendom. Having been joined by the Abbot of Morimont and twelve of the brothers, whom he had induced to accompany him, Everard now took up his abode, within the walls of the sacred edifice. Several years thus rolled on in tranquillity. At length as he was seated one morning in his cell, absorbed in holy meditations, he was roused by the approach of a train of dames and horsemen. At their head rode a Lady attired in deep mourning, and mounted upon a white palfrey, who bade the porter bear her greeting to the reverend Abbot and at the same time demanded hospitality for herself, and her retinue.

Her request was forthwith accorded, and while her attendants were being entertained in the refectory,

the Lady solicited permission to speak awhile with Count Everard. The worthy Abbot obeyed the summons and his agitation may be well imagined when he found himself ushered into the presence of Gisela, the object of his first, his only youthful love. Albeit the time for worldly emotions had long since fled for him, yet for a moment, his heart beat wildly, his pulses throbbled, and his pale and noble countenance was flushed with blushes. But the calm dignity of the still lovely woman, the holy expression of her pure lofty forehead, quickly soothed the passing agitation, and silenced every earthly thought.

“What seekest thou, my Sister?” inquired Everard.

“To see thee once more, in all thy sanctity, beloved cousin, and crave thy blessing,” replied the beautiful Gisela.

“Where is Sieghardt of Kefernberg, thy husband?” again interrogated the monk after a short pause.

“Asleep with God,” was the answer.

After a few hours sojourn in the cloister, most of which were passed in conversation, the noble widow knelt to receive the Abbots blessing, which Everard bestowed upon her, with faltering voice, and overflowing eye. Then requesting his prayers for her sons, she bade him farewell, and rode slowly from the Abbey walls. The monk watched her receding form until the darkness hid her from his view, then uttering a deep sigh and dashing a tear from his eye, he betook himself to his cell, where he passed the whole night in fervent

prayers and supplications to the throne of heaven. Two years had scarcely elapsed, when Everard, who had partly recovered his peace of mind, was induced to abandon the cloister of Altenberg, in order to establish a monastery at the Castle of Jorisburg, presented to him by Gisela for that purpose. Here he presided for several years as Abbot, but upon the death of the Countess he again returned to Altenberg and resumed his former monastic habits.

Many years after Everard was joined by Adolph, who upon the death of his consort resigned the regency to his sons, and sought a solace for his loss in the affection of his brother and the tranquillity of the cloister. Thus had their fraternal love remained unabated during their whole lives. It continued as undiminished, when they were stretched upon the bed of withering age, as it had when the roses of youth bloomed around them. At length Everard's weary spirit took its flight, foretelling to his brother a speedy re-union.

Adolph heard this intelligence with joy. Having bidden an affectionate farewell to his children he was once more united to his beloved Everard, under the same gravestone, in October 1152.