

STEINFELD ABBEY.

During the reign of the Emperor Henry the Fowler, there lived in the Archbishopric of Cologne, a renowned and wealthy knight named *Sibodo of Hochsteden*, Lord of Altenahr. Sprung from a race not to be surpassed in nobility of descent by any of the illustrious German houses, he had early required great and deserved celebrity, not only for his christian and chivalrous virtues, but for the diversity of his accomplishments, and his profound learning. It happened that, when a youth, Sibodo chanced to be present at the baptism of an infant. Having observed that the priest impressed its little forehead with the holy sym-

bol of our blessed faith, his curiosity was excited and he therefore drew nigh to his own Preceptor and said :

“ Was I also marked with the sign of the cross at my baptism ? ” “ Certainly, ” replied the good man, “ the blessed emblem of our redemption was ineffaceably impressed upon thy front, in the name of the Father, Son and holy Ghost. ”

“ If that be the case, ” rejoined the youth, “ I see no reason why I should give myself the trouble of repeating the ceremony in future. ” And from that hour he determined to discontinue this essential christian practise. This unhappy resolution of the young knight was quickly perceived by the abhorred enemy of mankind, who exultingly exclaimed : “ Ah ! ah ! This is exactly the kind of boy for me. To such a knight will I cheerfully act as squire. Let us see if we cannot manage it. ”

There upon he assumed the attire of a menial and took the first opportunity to throw himself in the way of the young nobleman, to whom he meekly offered his services. “ Whence art thou, and what is thy name ? ” inquired the knight, as soon as the Devil had terminated the long string of compliments, with which he regaled him. — “ My name is Bonschariant, ” replied the fiend, “ I come from a hot climate, a far distant foreign land. I have seen many wonders and required much knowledge. The fame of your generosity and valour reached me far away from this and my sole desire is to be permitted to enter the service

of so valiant a lord." The young Count being pleased with the fiend's flattery, readily agreed to receive him, especially as he was at that moment in want of a squire and the stranger from his apparent activity and ready wit, seemed well suited for the purpose.

Bonschariant inwardly chuckling at the success of his scheme, accompanied the Count to his castle of Ahr. And truly never did knight possess a more indefatigable squire. His unwearied attentions were only to be equalled by his indefatigable activity. Every wish, every thought was anticipated and gratified. No sacrifice of labour or exertion, which could contribute to the Count's happiness or comfort, was looked upon as too great. Besides this the devil was not sparing of tricks and profane jests, which caused him to be considered as a right merry fellow by the knight. In fact he succeeded ere long in obtaining such complete possession of his Lord's confidence, that he became almost essential to his very existence.

In the mean while the knight's fame increased with his years. In battle as well as at feasts and tournaments his valour and noble deeds were the theme of universal admiration, so that when he announced his intention of setting out to join the banners of the cross in Palestina, numerous bodies of noble knights and pious pilgrims flocked to his standard. And they did well, for wherever Sibodo led them, victory attended their arms, and his triumphant banner was seen floating over the infidel crescent of the false Prophet. Shortly after his return to his native land a deadly

feud broke out between the people of Cologne and the adjacent country. The enemy having invaded the Eifel-land, the knight instantly flew to arms, assembled his retainers and marched against the foe. Victory again crowned his efforts and the aggressors were driven back with great slaughter. The conqueror who had remained with his vassals upon the opposite shore of the river, quitted his troops towards evening, and withdrew to a retired spot, where he might enjoy a few hours of repose and meditation. Exhausted by the days exertions and his rapid ride, he dismounted and reclined under the ombrageous shadows of a stately oak where, ere long, he fell into a deep slumber. Here he was soon discovered by a party of the enemy, who instantly recognized his armour and rejoiced at the prospect of so rich a prize. Carefully they approached the unconscious sleeper. Already the clang of their approaching arms resounded through the forest, when the watchful Bonschariant rushed forward and raising the knight upon his shoulders, ascended with him into the air. Alarmed and half awakened, the Count murmured forth an exclamation of surprise, when the clash of sounds reached his ear and he discovered the danger from which he had escaped. He was no sooner thoroughly awakened, however, ere he perceived that he was rapidly mounting in the air, while beneath him lay the beautiful Rhine shining in the pale light of the rising moon and appearing scarcely broader, than a silver band. "The Lord have mercy on my soul!" exclaimed the horror-

stricken knight with trembling lips, as he looked down upon his hellish squire, "the Lord take pity on me?" But his prayer was interrupted by his squire, who roared out in a rough voice, "Cease thy brawling, Sir Knight, or by the Devil's word, will I bestow upon thee a baptism, thou wilt not easily forget." Sibodo now understood perfectly with whom he travelled and held his peace, seizing however a firmer grasp of the brawny neck of his infernal charger, who ere long safely landed him upon the opposite shore whence he quickly reached his castle and retired to rest.

Notwithstanding this miraculous proof of Bonschariant's hellish character, Sibodo permitted the fiend to reside at the castle of Ahr, but he ceased to place confidence in him and indeed regarded him with secret fear and aversion. Long intercourse with evil had, however, increased the knight's natural scepticism and tendency to infidelity, and he sought to suppress the reproaches of his conscience by the reflection, that he had not entered into any compact with the fiend and consequently that the latter could possess no power over his soul. With this sophistry he remained satisfied and the squire continued his attendance, studying to retain his favour by every means in his power. Indeed his vigilance and care were so great that upon one occasion, when travelling to a distant part of the country, the Count fatigued by the length of the journey, alighted at an Inn, and retired to rest. Scarcely had he given himself up to slumber, when Bonschariant rushing into the apart-

ment, exclaimed: "Rise, my Lord, rise or you perish." The knight did not hesitate a moment, but sprang from his couch and hastily wrapping his mantle around him, ran into the court, where he had no sooner arrived, than the building fell with a tremendous crash, burying all the sleeping inhabitants in its ruins. Those and many other services raised him to the highest place in his Master's favour. Years rolled thus on and Sibodo continued to be successful in all temporal things. Suddenly however his consort, to whom he was tenderly attached, fell dangerously ill and the learned physicians, who were summoned from all parts, declared with solemn faces that there was no hope of her recovery. At length came one, who having visited the patient, said: "I know of a certain remedy, for the noble Dame's disease, but, alas! it is beyond the power of any one to obtain it in these parts." "What is it?" demanded the Count. "If half my treasure can purchase it, it must be got." "It is the milk of a Lioness, mixed with Dragons blood," replied the other.

When the Count heard this he hung his head and was sorely troubled, for he was well aware of the impossibility of procuring such an extraordinary specific. The squire, who was standing amongst the crowd, approached him at this moment and said: "If that remedy can save my Lady, trust to me — she shall ere long be restored to health," and so saying he suddenly disappeared and was seen by the domestics, riding rapidly across the distant plain.

Scarcely an hour had elapsed, however, when he again returned, and having entered the Countess's apartment, produced the marvellous potion. The bystanders all stared and crossed themselves, but the Count seized the flask and giving its contents to his wife, the effect was so rapid, that the Countess instantly arose from her couch, in all the bloom of health. Where Bonschariant had been, none but the Count knew. The fact was that he had flown to the torrid Zone, where he had milked a sleeping Lioness and slaughtered a male dragon, then having mingled the blood of the one with the milk of the other, he hastened back with his wondrous remedy.

The circumstance appeared somewhat suspicious to the noble Lady and she spared no pains to extract the truth from her husband, who at first resisted all her entreaties, but being at length wearied by her importunity, Sibodo reluctantly disclosed the secret, and communicated to her the real character of his unknown squire. The pious Lady, stricken with horror, earnestly besought him to dismiss the dangerous attendant, but to this the knight would not consent, reminding her how useful and faithful he had ever been and how much he ought to love him, since he had saved her life. All therefore, that the pious Lady could obtain from her husband, was a promise, that he forthwith would build and consecrate to the Lord a church and cloister.

A great portion of the surrounding country was then covered by dense forests, uniting with the cele-

brated Ardennes. In the midst of this wood arose a hill, which from the barren and rocky nature of the soil, was called the Steinfeld (Stone-field). This was the site chosen by the Countess for the execution of the plan, whereby she hoped to save the soul of her husband.

In those times the Ardennes abounded with deer and other wild animals, and Sibodo was wont to pass whole days in the enjoyment of hunting.

It happened one morning that, as he sallied forth to the chase accompanied by Bonschariant, he found himself in the immediate neighbourhood of Steinfeld. His promise to the countess, now occurred to him, and he therefore turned towards his squire, saying. "The distance from the castle to this forest, renders the chase so fatiguing, that I purpose erecting here a dwelling, in which we may enjoy many joyous banquets upon our hunting excursions. Show therefore thy good will, and lend me a hand to accomplish my object."

Bonschariant no sooner heard the purpose for which the building was required, than he readily agreed and immediately set to work. Labourers and materials were soon procured and, in a short time, the foundation was laid. The walls rose rapidly and ere long upon the barren hill, there stood a high and stately castle, whose lofty halls, and spacious corridors called forth the knight's admiration, as well as that of all the surrounding country. When the building was near its completion, Sibodo bethought him of

fulfilling his promise. Summoning all his resolution, he mounted the highest tower and planted thereon a cross, which he had made and concealed for the purpose. Scarcely had he achieved his object, when Satan appeared in the air, bearing an immense mass of stone, with which he intended to wall up the tower. But on perceiving the symbol of our redemption, he uttered a loud curse and hurling the mighty fragment upon the building, disappeared. His fatal purpose was frustrated, for an invisible hand, turned the stone in another direction and rolled it to a distant spot, near which the little town of Dieffenbach now stands. Here it is still pointed out to visitors as the Devil's stone!

The Monastery of Steinfeld was soon completed and richly endowed by Sibodo and presented, together with a large portion of his wealth, to the Archbishop of Cologne. This prelate converted it into a convent of Benedictine Nuns and ere long it was esteemed as one of the most sacred and wealthy religious houses in the Rhineland. This magnificent building, which was long distinguished for the piety and virtues of its inmates, is now converted into a private dwelling. Situated upon a hill in the district of the Eifel, it still excites astonishment at its vast extent and admiration at the original and beautiful plan, not unmingled with dread of its devilish architect, who however never again made his appearance in those parts.