



A. Kethel inv.

L. Heijens and v. Ddo f. sc.

— 521 —

LORE-LEY.

Between Wesel and St.-Goar, the Rhine dashes impetuously forward and urges its course with redoubled violence over the rocks and sandbanks, as if enraged at the precipitous crags, which, approaching nearer and nearer towards each other at this spot, seem disposed to oppose its progress. It is not without precaution and sentiments of awe that even the most experienced pilot ventures through this narrow chasm, where destruction menaces him on every side. When he approaches this spot, no matter what his creed, he raises a fervent but silent prayer, that it may please the ruler of the flood, to protect and

preserve him. Nay, even the traveller, when wafted by the steamboat through this wild labyrinth of impending cliffs, gives an involuntary shudder on beholding the lowering and precipitous masses which rise towering one above another, as if prepared to hurl themselves upon his devoted vessel.

From one of the most terrific of these precipitous crags, called the Ley, passing sounds are repeated by a thousand echoes as if in mockery of human nature. For, high upon its summit sits enthroned the beautiful watersprite Lore—who, although she no longer exhibits herself to mortal eye in her all-bewitching beauty, or upraises her voice to ensnare the passing mariner, nevertheless sings now and then to entice victims into the rapid whirlpools beneath her feet.

The owners of the few light craft, which cluster beneath the shelter of the stupendous Ley and who carry on the salmon fishery by night, still declare, that they have seen, or fancy they have seen, the beautiful enchantress standing in the moons' beams on the top of the Ley, and that more than one of those who have listened to the deceitful melody of her strains have perished. We are, however, disinclined to believe that she has reappeared, as many centuries have passed since she vanished beneath the waters of the Rhine, maddened at the loss of a mortal whom she adored, but who fell a victim to her charms.

This young man was the son of the last Palatine of the Rhine, whose heart rejoiced at seeing the bright days of his youth revived in this his only child, who

was one of the handsomest youths in the whole Rhineland. Unfortunately Lore had once seen him, as he bathed at the foot of the crags. Enchanted with the noble symmetry of his person, she took him for a river God and eagerly watched him, as he clove the foaming waves which glittered like showers of diamonds in the bright moon light. She was just on the point of commencing her bewitching song and of showing herself to him in all the splendour of her beauty as he disported in the refreshing stream, when she suddenly felt herself overcome by new sensations; her heart was moved with love and pity and although her whole soul panted to possess the lovely youth, she remained in silent admiration without discovering herself.

For a long time nothing more was heard of her and it was thought that she had removed to the distant banks of the Danube. The fishermen, no longer alarmed by her voice, plied their trade safely beneath the rock where they always caught the most fish. In short the sprite and every thing relating to her was almost forgotten.

In the mean while fortune seemed to favour the son of the Palatine in every thing he undertook. If he followed the chase, the most intractable horses, which nobody else could manage, obeyed his hand like lambs and carried him over stony fissures and rugged precipices, where the boldest horseman would not venture. His arrows overtook the eagle in his airy flight, whilst his hawks were as keen, swift,

and faithful, as if they had been trained by the wild huntsman himself. His dogs never lost the track of the deer, and, whenever he hunted in the vicinity of the rocks where the watersprite had formerly resided, he always returned home laden with the richest spoil. Oftentimes when he had wandered about for hours together without success in the rocky ravines near the Lore-Ley, he was suddenly attracted by the melodious sounds of a lute and following their echoes usually fell in with some kind of game, which never escaped his javelin or cross-bow.

When quite exhausted by the chase, cool springs, where least expected, would bubble up at his feet, or rich fruits would exhale their delicious fragrance in spots where nothing but heather and wild thistles had thrived before.

Frequently, when heated and weary, pleasant grottoes would appear to his view, where hitherto he had found no shelter. There, to his surprise he not only found a cool retreat, but downy couches invited him to repose and the rich tones of swelling music lulled him to the sweetest sleep.

One day when the young Count had been actively engaged in hunting, until late in the evening, and had prepared to return home, he lost his way in the well-known path, which he was wont to tread with the same security as the corridors of his father's castle. As he clambered about the rocks, in vain attempts to reach the bank of the Rhine, he seemed to wander farther and farther from it. At one moment he

thought he heard the roaring of the waves below ; at another it sounded like distant music in his ears. The notes of his hunting horn, with which he endeavoured to summon his companions were repeated, as if in mockery, from the rocks. Having with difficulty clambered to the summit of a rugged cliff, in order to obtain a view of the stream, he was suddenly dazzled by a bright red light and when his eyes were in a degree accustomed to the glare, they showed to him a maiden more beautiful and lovely, than earthly imagination could depict or fancy. Her face was half enveloped in a transparent azure veil, resembling the sky as it appears on a serene moonlight night, bespangled with ten thousand twinkling stars, through which she smiled upon him a paradise of love.

He was just about to approach the beautiful vision, when the thought of the watersprite rushed upon his mind and devoutly crossing himself, he suddenly drew back. At this the supernatural brightness vanished, and feeling as if he had awaked from a confused dream, he as suddenly found himself on the right path which led to the Castle.

Henceforth however the young Count could not banish the lovely form from his thoughts. Both in his dreams and waking hours the enchanting image was incessantly present to his imagination and he constantly visited the spot, to obtain if possible another sight of the beautiful maid. But in vain ! the blissful-vision, the object of his ardent desires, was not again accorded to him. Still however the magic

tones at times sounded in his ears and when he followed them, they invariably led him upon the trace of deer or boars. But the chase afforded him no pleasure, for his whole soul was absorbed by the heavenly creature, whose beloved image reigned with absolute sway over his captive heart.

Our young Count had confided his sorrows to his Preceptor the venerable Walter, who shook his head and reminded his pupil of the danger to which he would expose himself if he trusted to the deceitful vision. Numberless were the stories which the old man told of youths, whom Lore, the watersprite, had lured to their destruction by the charms of her beauty and the bewitching melody of her voice. Nothing however could banish the enchanting picture from the Count's mind, his only thought, his only hope was, that he might once more behold her in all her beauty.

The period now drew nigh when it was necessary for him to repair to the Emperor's court, there to earn the golden spurs, the prize of chivalry. Old Walter rejoiced at an event that would wean his pupil from his perilous attachment. But times were changed and with them the young Count's feelings, he now looked forward with loathing to that moment which he had formerly sighed for, as the utmost extent of his youthful hopes. But nevertheless the day of departure was fixed and Walter joyfully communicated the intelligence, which was the more grateful to himself, since it was his duty to accompany his pupil to the Court. The old man's heart expanded with

pride when he thought of the praise and honors, which his young master would acquire and how far he would surpass all the other young courtiers in manly beauty and chivalrous prowess. But the nearer the hour of his departure approached, the more unhappy was the youth. His heart throbbed with unspeakable anguish when he thought he was about to be separated from his beloved without having again beheld her.

In the mean while, he pursued his favorite amusement of the chase more frequently than ever. But it was in vain that he lingered in hopes of meeting with the object of his wishes and affection. The worthy Walter watched the sorrow of his dear pupil with the greatest regret. — He, and he alone knew the cause of his affliction, but alas in spite of all his endeavours he was unable to devise a remedy. The hour of departure having arrived, the young Count insisted upon his preceptor accompanying him to the bank of the Rhine under the pretext of fishing, and although the thought of the watersprite filled the old man's mind with apprehensions, he deemed it prudent to comply.

It was a mild May evening. The earth was like a blooming bride, decked out in all her marriage ornaments, impatiently awaiting the bridegroom. The soft zephyrs played like lover's sighs upon the surface of the Rhine. All around breathed sweetness and repose. The rich tints of the golden sky danced upon the waters and tinged the fresh verdure, with which the spring had carpetted both hill and dale. Even



the fish in the universal harmony, forgot the dangers of the nets, spread to ensnare them, and thus our fishermen were unusually successful. The young Count whose whole thoughts were bent on Lore, steered the boat towards the shore, and thus approached nearer and still nearer to the dangerous Ley, without its being perceived by Walter, whose attention was occupied with their good fortune.

At length however the moon arose in all her splendour from behind the lofty crags and her gentle light silvered the heights and danced upon the tremulous surface of the stream. Walter now lifted up his head and for the first time observed their perilous situation.

“My Lord, my Lord, are you blind, do you not see the Lore-Ley straight before us?” exclaimed he letting fall the net, which he held ready for casting. “In the Lord’s name — In the name of our Saviour and the blessed Virgin, let us make for the shore!” continued Walter, but his young master seemed to have lost all sense of hearing: his eyes were steadfastly fixed on the summit of the rock, over which the moon poured the full stream of her silvery light. The waves murmured sweetly, as if in salutation, and high upon the rock appeared the river-maid, adorned in all the radiance of those charms, in which the Count had once before beheld her.

All nature seemed enthralled by the celestial harmony, when the maid commenced her song, and extended her arms as if to embrace the object of her affection. The youth let go the helm, his eyes saw

her alone and Walter, breathless with fear, was unable to utter a syllable. In the mean time they glided nearer and nearer to the Ley, where the foaming waters dashed impetuously against the rock. Suddenly the waves rose to a fearful height and overwhelmed the boat together with its heedless pilot, who, entranced by the bewitching strains and transfixed by the extraordinary appearance of the vision, was hurried unconsciously to destruction.

A mighty wave bore Walter safely to the opposite bank, who thought as his senses returned, that he was awaking from a dream. He called aloud his pupil's name, but no other sound was heard than the deceitful echo of the mountain. In vain he repeated his exclamations. The fatal truth now burst upon the old man's mind and brought tears into his aged eyes,

“ Oh! that I had also been swallowed up by the angry flood rather than become the messenger of such tidings to the unhappy father!” His only wish was to die and for a while he meditated whether he should not throw himself into the river, but summoning up resolution he retraced his steps to the castle and communicated the frightful truth to the old Palatine.

For a while the venerable father was overcome by excessive grief, but after a few minutes he exclaimed: “ Whoever will bring me the cursed sorceress, dead or alive, shall receive a princely reward.”

“ Allow me, my Lord,” said Walter, “ to undertake that enterprise; for rather would I meet my

death in the waves, than survive the loss of my dear young master."

To this the Palatine consented and then desired to be left to the solitary indulgence of his grief.

On the following evening the Palatine's guards with Walter at their head, marched out to seek the watersprite. The whole Ley was surrounded, and Walter with a few of the most courageous stationed themselves on the very summit of the rock. And when the moon rose high above the mountain, Lore herself appeared, in all the transcendent beauty of her loveliness.

"Follow me," cried Walter to his attendants; "follow me, in the name of God! The sorceress has no power to harm you." But the young soldiers moved not; they seemed spell bound at the sight.

Lore gazed at them for a moment and then exclaimed in a voice whose melody thrilled through their veins. "Whom seek you, my friends?"

"Thee, vile witch," cried Walter. Then signing himself with the holy cross, he advanced towards her, saying: "Where is our young master, where is our beloved Edgar?"

The watersprite raised her white transparent arm and pointed silently to the stream, whose waters as if agitated by a storm, dashed furiously against the rock. Dense clouds suddenly obscured the moon and stars, but Lore still stood there radiant and bright like a brilliant constellation amidst the darkness. The wind now roared boisterously among the mountain caverns,

the trees rocked to and fro, the thunder roared and all nature seemed on the eve of a convulsion.

Even Walter recoiled with awe as he saw the nymph cast a glittering necklace into the troubled flood, which instantly became calm. The storm was lulled, light reappeared, so that he and his followers saw the separate beads floating in a wide circle, like a wreath on the smooth surface of the river. Lore then spread out her veil, which glittered like the brightest star light and sang in a pleasing voice the melody, with which she invoked the waves. No sooner had the last echoes of her song died away than from the middle of the wreath of pearls rose two mountainous waves, into which she threw her silver veil, and then singing sprung amidst the foam which bore her gently down the Rhine. The veil descended slowly after her, like the star-bespangled canopy of heaven and continued to shed a soft light over the stream, until at length all disappeared.

Though half bewildered at this extraordinary scene, Walter thought he perceived the countenance of the young Count amidst the waves, and fancied that he had seen him embrace the nymph, as she sunk beneath the flood. Since this no mortal has ever seen or heard the watersprite. Nevertheless no boatman approaches the rock which she once inhabited without the utmost fear and apprehension.