

... were assailed by the hoarse sounds of "Hark! hark! hark!" which issued from the trees. Indeed, they labored they saw the head of an old stag spring at them from every tree top. Where the valley opened into the plain, and the three birds of an old era, and the raven sang his song, the starting and his rattle, and the nightingale related the history of her grand-mother. One of the youths, who had now recovered his courage as he saw the open country and human beings before him, asked a peasant, who was just passing, if

**THE BRIDE OF RHEINSTEIN.**

"Will you explain to you the joke? The starlings' flight means that many a man cannot see right from wrong, though it be as plain as the nose on his face. The raven's song signifies that men should curb rooked birds with their laws and not with their medicine and the nightingale's story informs you, that your youth's ambition will not bring you any good, but by some noble

Knights with a long retinue of their squires,  
In gaudy liveries march and quaint attires;  
One laced the helm, another held the lance,  
A third the shining buckler did advance.  
The coursér paw'd the ground with restless feet  
And snorting foamed and champed the golden bit.  
PALAMON AND ARCITE.

It is neither a desolate pile of ruins, a half-demolished solitary tower, or the blackened remains of a crumbling edifice, which attracts ones attention as we slowly ascend the Rhine. Now we gaze with astonishment towards the lofty rocks, crowned by a graceful and noble castle, the admirable proportions



*Sonderland del*

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of which carry us back to those days when it was the abode of chivalry and the witness of knightly deeds. We fancy that the days are returned, when each rocky eminence bore a baronial castle, when a convent, inhabited by pious monks or chaste nuns, was found in every shady valley, when every cave and grotto harboured a venerable hermit and when the moonlight-loving elves and goblins danced their airy rounds upon the green sward.

It is the ancient castle of Rheinstein, that stands before you. Responding to the cultivated taste of its royal owner, it has risen in all its majesty and strength like a Phoenix, from the ruins to which it had been reduced by the all powerful hand of time and the destructive fury of man.

On the lofty turret now flutters the proud banner of the royal house, from which its noble restorer and princely possessor is descended. Neither destructive missile, drawn swords nor threatening lances, oppose the stranger's entrance, if he wishes to visit the halls and chambers of the castle. Now the draw-bridge falls at his approach, the oaken gates open joyfully to receive him and the grey-haired porter, himself a noble veteran, lays aside his helmet and coat of mail and leads him willingly through the antique chambers to the lofty battlements, whence he looks down with admiration, upon the beautiful valley of the Rhine, where the rich verdure of the present contrasts with the grey ruins of the past. Tradition tells us, that this castle was inhabited, towards the commen-

cement of the XIV Century, by a certain Baron Sifrid von Rheinstein. In his youth Sifrid had led a wild and dissipated life, and in one of his frequent predatory excursions into France had carried off a young and beautiful maiden from her parents and detained her together with other rich booty in this his impregnable and well guarded stronghold. But from this time the wild uproar of arms and revelry, which had hitherto incessantly resounded in the castle, suddenly ceased and were replaced by the soft tones of the lute. Indeed so peaceful was the Baron's life that many of his followers quitted his service, because he had discontinued his lawless practices and remained tranquilly at home, determined to spend the rest of his days in peace and repose. Sifrid von Rheinstein's love for the beautiful maiden had produced this change. He had married her soon after her arrival at Rheinstein and they led a contented and happy life.

It was not long, however, ere the heavy hand of mourning descended upon the castle, for, although the lovely Yutta had presented her husband with a daughter, she did not survive many hours. The Baron Sifrid was overwhelmed with grief and affliction and from that time became so melancholy and retired, that the castle, was soon shunned by stranger guests and the warder's horn was seldom sounded. This caused little pain to Sifrid who had determined to dedicate the rest of his life to the happiness of his only daughter, whom he loved as the apple of his eye

and reared not only in the practise of piety and virtue, but in the study of all female accomplishments.

In this manner years rolled on and Gerda grew up to the delight of her father's declining years, resembling a tender flower in loveliness and innocence. Although no knightly visitor appeared before the Baron's gates, the pilgrims who sought shelter and hospitality in the Castle during tempestuous nights, soon spread the fame of the charms and beauty of the Baron of Rheinstein's lovely daughter throughout all the surrounding countries, asserting that so fair and accomplished a maiden was not to be found in any other castle of the whole Rhinegau. These reports at length inspired many a young knight and noble squire with a desire to behold and to win the far-famed beauty; so that horsemen were seen flocking towards the Rheinstein and so numerous were the knights, that bent their steps to the castle, with their waving plumes and glittering armour, that it seemed as if a feud had been declared against old Sifrid. The sight of such a throng of suitors displeased and even alarmed the old knight, who knitting his brow, sent word to his distinguished visitors, that they might return to their homes and that, if they would repair to the grand tournament, announced by the Bishop of Mayence he and his daughter would be present, and she would then choose that knight, who should prove the most valiant.

Not long after this, the expected tournament took place: many knights and fair dames had come to

Mayence from far and near, and Baron Sifrid, true to his promise, appeared with his daughter Gerda.

The report of the pilgrims was fully confirmed, for she bore the palm of beauty from all the other dames and maidens. All eyes were directed towards her and all tongues praised her grace and charms. But there were two knights, who, above all others, were so ravished with Gerda's beauty, that they secretly resolved to obtain her hand in the approaching contest and swore to hazard their lives in the attempt. The first of them was young Kuno von Reichenstein, who was renowned amongst the young Princes and knights of the Rhineland for his valour and noble manners. The second was Conrad von Ehrenfels, who was older than Kuno. Although the latter was also famous for his bravery, he was rather feared than beloved, on account of his savage and gloomy character, which had gained for him the surname of "*The Fierce.*" Both were related to the knight of Rheinstein, and had greeted their beautiful cousin on her arrival in Mayence and shown the most anxious desire to win her favour. Gerda's eyes however rested with greater pleasure on Kuno's open and serene countenance, than upon his rival's gloomy sunburnt and already somewhat furrowed brow. Her father seemed to have guessed the inclination of her heart, for he kindly told her, that he would permit the most valiant of the two suitors to continue his addresses to her.

But great was the lamentation and disappointment

that ensued, for Gerda's fervent prayers that Kuno might come off victorious, were unheard. After having displayed consummate skill and bravery in the lists and stretched many an opponent in the dust, the young knight was compelled to succumb to the superior bodily strength of Conrad the Fierce. The victor no sooner withdrew from the combat, than he presented himself to the old knight who immediately led him to his daughter, declaring that he welcomed and henceforth esteemed him as his son in law.

Gerda, however, was of quite a different opinion and although she dared not oppose her father's will, yet in her solitary chamber she prayed to her patron saint with burning tears, to deliver her from her detested bridegroom, at the same time imploring that her beloved Kuno might be substituted in his place.

This time the prayers of the pious maiden seemed to be received with a more propitious ear, for the wishes of the fond Gerda were fulfilled in a most unexpected manner by the following miraculous occurrence.

Sir Conrad of Ehrenfels, after a short courtship, had gained the free consent of Baron Sifrid and the forced compliance of his daughter, whilst poor Kuno, despairing of his happiness resolved to join an expedition to the Holy Land, hoping to drown the painful recollection of his lost mistress in the blood of the Saracens. The day at length arrived on which the lovely Gerda was to be united to the knight of Ehrenfels. The gentle maiden stood in the banqueting hall



of Rheinstein, resembling a bride only in the ornaments of her person, for her cheeks were pale and her downcast eyes red with weeping. The blooming wreath of myrtle in her auburn tresses seemed to mock the grief of its wearer, whilst the costly embroidered silken garment and glittering jewels on her neck and arms, looked like the ornaments of a lamb, about to be led to sacrifice. Already the approaching footsteps of the bridegroom, who had arrived with a brilliant suite of knights and squires at the foot of the rock, could be plainly heard, when Gerda, unable to withstand the impulse of her feelings, rushed from the circle of her waiting women into the balcony from which she had so often cast her longing eyes towards Reichenstein.

Here she sank, half senseless, upon her knees. Scalding tears chased each other down her cheeks and bosom, she stretched forth her supplicating arms, now towards heaven, the tranquil serenity of which seemed to mock her excessive misery, and then towards the Reichenstein, upon whose battlements, stood a despairing youth, not knowing how to assist either her or himself.

Suddenly the door of the balcony was thrown open, and out stepped the fierce Conrad, whose lowering brow became still more terrible, when he saw the eyes of his bride turned towards the opposite castle, on which he beheld the form of his hated rival. In a threatening manner he shook his clenched fist at the Reichensteiner, whilst with the other he seized the

terrified maiden, and muttering a curse between his teeth, dragged her hastily from the spot.

In a few minutes the enraged and miserable Kuno saw the unhappy Gerda lifted upon her horse, and then ride off, accompanied by her father, bridegroom and a troop of horsemen, towards the chapel of St. Clement, which was situated between the two castles, and where the priest was already waiting to bless and unite the betrothed.

Kuno, no longer able to restrain himself, rushed down to his castle gate, determined to gain possession of his beloved with the sword, or to die in the contest. He had already opened the portal and with his eyes turned towards the object of his affection, was about to mount his steed—when he was suddenly arrested by a sight, that transfixed him motionless to the ground, where he stood awaiting with inexpressible astonishment the issue of the extraordinary scene, that was passing before him.

The sight was indeed strange and miraculous. The palfrey on which the bride was mounted suddenly became wild and unmanageable. Fire issued from its distended nostrils, it plunged with its fore feet and lashed out furiously with its hinder hoofs, striking down knights, squires and, in short, all who stood within its reach. At length it dashed off with the rapidity of lightning and passed the chapel leaving the frightened attendants far behind, but bearing the trembling Gerda, agitated between hope and fear and

clinging to the neck of her deliverer, towards her lover's castle, so that before Kuno could take his foot out of the stirrup of his saddle — Gerda was at his side. With indescribable ecstasy he hastened to lift her from the foaming steed and bore her in his arms into the castle, of which he instantly closed the Portcullis and bade his vassals stand to their arms.

Sifrid, astonished at the extraordinary occurrence, raised himself with difficulty from the ground, on which he had been so roughly thrown, but the knight of Ehrenfels, being severely wounded by his fall, was carried off by his squires and a boat was seen floating over the Rhine, bearing on its deck the dying knight. Old Sifrid attributed to the will of Heaven this miraculous event and being no ways displeased to take one son in law for the other, especially as young Kuno was as rich as he was valiant, dispatched a herald to Reichenstein to inform the latter that he would accept of him for a son in law, since divine Providence so ordained it.

Not long after this event, two festive processions were again seen moving slowly towards the Chapel of St. Clement. The same spirited palfrey, which a short time before had borne a disconsolate and sorrowful bride, now gently ambled and curvetted beneath its lovely burden, who arrived a happy maiden at the gate of the holy edifice and departed from it still more joyfully. With a countenance beaming with heavenly love, she now gaily rode at the side of the

enraptured Kuno von Reichenstein, who with a beating heart led his young spouse into the castle of his ancestors, the ruins of which may be still seen from Prince Frederic's romantic dwelling of the Rheinstein.