

## THE PALATINE'S STONE.

Before the Rhenish provinces were totally devastated during the Orleans war of succession, which made the inhabitants feel with double weight the miseries occasioned by the thirty years' war, Stahleck was a considerable castle and Bacharach a well fortified town. The sixteen lofty towers which then defended the walls, that extended from the castle to the town and surrounded it on the river side, have now for the greater part fallen to ruins. On the declivity of the hill may still, however, be seen the church of Werner. Its noble gothic windows still exist but its roof has perished and its moss-clad walls

are rapidly falling to decay. This venerable edifice was erected to the memory of a boy called Werner, who was born in the hamlet of Warmsrode, towards the end of the eighth century, but was soon kidnapped and murdered by the Jews of the neighbouring town of Oberwesel and then buried in this spot.

The Rhenish Palatines used often to beguile their time in the castle of Stahleck, whence there is a fine view not only of the Rhine, but of the town of Bacharach and the vineyards that have rendered it celebrated throughout the world. Conrad of Hohenstaufen, step brother to the Emperor Frederick, the Redbeard; who became Palatine by Hermann of Stahleck dying without issue, likewise inhabited it and laid the foundation of its subsequent importance.

Belonging to the most powerful and flourishing of all the princely houses of Germany; rich, valiant and respected, it seemed almost impossible that Conrad could cherish a wish, that might not be realized. One thing, however, was wanting to his happiness: he had no son to inherit his titles and possessions; the two boys, whom his consort Irmengard von Henneberg had borne him, died in their infancy and only one daughter, whose name was Agnes, remained. The maiden was therefore destined to succeed to the greater part of his noble estates.

As Agnes grew up, it was natural for many noblemen and princes to become her suitors. Among the number of these was Henry of Brunswick, son of Henry the Lion and as the enmity long existing between

the Hohenstaufens and Guelphs was apparently appeased, an alliance between the young couple was resolved upon by their parents. But before the day fixed upon had arrived, circumstances occurred and difficulties arose, which caused this plan to be abandoned by Conrad and this the more readily, since other prospects presented themselves that were more pleasing and flattering to the Palatine's ambition.

Philip Augustus, king of France, who had just returned from a crusade to the Holy Land, demanded the hand of Agnes in marriage. His request was not more agreeable to the father, than it was disagreeable to the daughter. She had loved the Brunswick prince, and warmly expressed her wish not to marry any other man than the noble Youth who had been first chosen by her parents. The feelings of Henry, who was in the emperor's camp, ardently sympathized with those of the lovely Agnes and he therefore employed all the means in his power to obtain intelligence of what was passing at Stahleck. The lovers had a confidant in the Countess Palatine, who was averse to her daughter's union with the French king; she therefore favoured the wishes of the Guelphic Duke, hoping thereby to ensure the happiness of her only child.

At this period, it happened, that the Count Palatine was obliged to quit the castle for a few days. He had no sooner departed ere Irmengard, who had previously ascertained that her daughter was firm and resolute in her determination, profited by the

opportunity and dispatched a messenger to invite the fortunate Henry to Stahleck. It is needless to add that the happy lover lost no time in flying to the feet of his adored mistress. Consequently many hours had not elapsed before the Countess Palatine sent for the chaplain of the castle, who, that very day, joined the hands of the young couple. No public festival succeeded the nuptials and nothing for some time occurred to disturb the blissful days and hours which the Prince and Princess passed together.

It was not long, however, before the Count Palatine returned and Irmengard who was prepared for a direful explosion of his anger went forth to meet him, "My lord," said she, "a falcon has flown here, with a brown head and a white throat. Its beak and claws show it to be a powerful bird of prey; the feathers of its wings reach down so low, that one can well see it was bred by its father on a lofty aerie. This bird, than which you never saw a finer, I have caught and caged." And at these words, she conducted him to the apartment of Henry and Agnes, who both cast themselves at his feet.

Conrad's anger at first knew no bounds, yet in his outward demeanour to the Guelph he preserved apparent composure. He commanded him nevertheless to quit the castle immediately; the marriage he said had taken place without his consent and he swore, in despite of the prayers and tears of his wife and daughter, that it never should obtain his sanction. The young Duke was inconsolable at being obliged

to part from Agnes, under such circumstances! But he comforted himself by the reflection that the father's wrath would abate and that in time he must acknowledge him as his son in law. Even Irmengard reproached herself for having carried matters so far, for she feared lest the Count Palatine, should seek to obtain a dissolution of the marriage. Gloomy and sad was the tranquillity that prevailed at Stahleck when Henry departed. The women gave way to their grief and shed abundant tears, but Conrad preserved an impenetrable silence and only showed himself to his wife and daughter at the hour of refection, passing the rest of his time in business and the chase.

A little way below Bacharach, immediately opposite the town of Caub, there rises from the river a flat rock, on which is erected a strange edifice, that seems to float on the bosom of the foaming waters. Broad is the base, large the circumference, massive the masonry, small and low the doors which can only be approached by a flight of narrow steps. Several square, pointed turrets, some of them resting upon projecting parts of the building and furnished with small windows surround the centre tower, on whose dome formed roof a beacon was formerly alighted at night fall. A bell was also rung in this tower to announce the approach of ships, which here had to pay the Rhine toll. A deep well with several small chambers and vaults exist in the interior of this strange castle, which is still in a state of good preservation. It is called the Count Pala-

tine's stone, and by abbreviation the Pfalz (Palatinate).

It was at the side of this edifice, that the banner of Conrad of Hohenstaufen's vessel, was seen one morning gaily flaunting in the wind. He had brought thither his daughter Agnes and briefly informed her, that the Pfalz should henceforth be her abode until he had resolved on further measures respecting her. Calmly resigning herself to her fate, Agnes seated herself at the window of the little room that had been allotted to her and occupied herself in gazing upon the foaming surface of the waters and upon the chain of hills that rose above their banks; whilst her thoughts were with her distant husband.

Rarely was Irmengard permitted to visit her solitary daughter. One day however she came, but not alone — Duke Henry in the garb of a pilgrim followed her and in an instant clasped his Agnes to his heart. The grief and sufferings of former days were forgotten for a moment. But they could not long enjoy the happiness of being together. — Prudence commanded them to separate after a brief interview.

In the mean while the Count Palatine's sentiments commenced to change. Being pressed by the Emperor himself to get Henry's marriage annulled, his paternal affection was roused and he could not make up his mind, to render his only daughter unhappy. The consideration of the evils that might ensue from another violent rupture with the house of Guelph, had likewise some weight with him. He had not

yet spoken to Irmengard on the subject, when she informed him that Agnes was in a fair way to become a mother. This sealed the reconciliation. But it was only upon his daughter presenting her husband with an heir that the father would permit her to enter the castle of Stahleck. — She remained in the mean time upon her rocky island, but no longer sad and solitary, for now the Guelphic Duke needed not to visit her in disguise. Henry of Brunswick, surnamed the Tall, succeeded Conrad of Hohenstaufen to the Palatinate and was followed by his son in the same name. Since the time of the beautiful Agnes it is said to have been the custom for the wives of the Palatines of the Rhine, to be brought to bed in the little castle. Many people doubt the truth of this latter statement, which is only founded on tradition.