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THE DEVIL'S LADDER.

... him had now awaited the impatient lover on his return. She for whose sake he had asked his good renown, she whom he expected joyfully to clasps in his arms had disappeared. Breathless and agitated by the most heart-rending agony he enquired in every direction for his lost bride but the reply he received in one

Among the noble families, whose names are recorded in the history of the Rheingau, that of Gilgen von Lorch was one of the most distinguished. A member of this family had proceeded to the Holy land; at the period when the whole German chivalry was summoned to the crusades; but he only did so after considerable hesitation and reluctance, and more because he feared the dishonour, which a refusal would attach to his noble name, than from piety and inclination. The fact was that his heart rebelled against his spirit. For having, but a short time been affianced to a beautiful and noble Lady he could not

make up his mind to tear himself from her. Indeed when he did follow the standard of the cross, there were many who doubted the sincerity of his resolve.

What people foresaw eventually happened. The army of the crusaders had not yet quitted the German territory, ere Gilgen under the pretext of sickness remained behind. If his conscience reproached him, it was silenced by love. The desire of again seeing his mistress, appears to have grown so strong during his short absence, that neither his sense of duty or fear of shame could overcome it.

But bad news awaited the impatient lover on his return. She for whose sake he had staked his good renown, she whom he expected joyfully to clasp in his arms had disappeared. Breathless and agitated by the most heart-rending agony he enquired in every direction for his lost bride but the reply he received drove him to despair, for his vassals pointed to the steep mountain of Hedrich, which rises above Lorch and upon whose summit there stood an inaccessible castle. A knight who dwelt in this strong hold and whose addresses had been rejected by Gertrude had waited for the moment when she should be deprived of her husband's protection. Then by a rapid and well combined sally, he made her his prisoner and when the alarm was given, the inhabitants of the village saw with consternation her gown already floating upon the rock, whilst her ravisher and a couple of his assistants were carrying off their struggling booty to their inaccessible den.

During the following days Gilgen roamed about the neighbourhood like a maniac vainly demanding the assistance of his friends against the ravishers — but they declared to him, that human valour or power could not avail in this case and that nothing else remained for him but to wait patiently and to see, if the firmness of the prisoner, would eventually induce the robbers to abandon their prey. But, where could Gilgen find patience or resignation? It was observed to him that however lamentable Gertrude's fate might be, the whole affair ought to be considered as a punishment from heaven for having broken his vows. But this instead of disposing him to repentance, only increased his grief and anger.

He was in this state of mind when, one evening, on his return from a ride through the intricate and winding valleys in the neighbourhood of Lorch, he halted before the Kedrich cliff. As he stood contemplating the steep acclivity and reflecting upon the impossibility of liberating his mistress, such terrible thoughts flashed across his mind as rendered him unworthy of being called a christian. Muttering horrid curses between his teeth, he was about to turn his horse's head homewards, when an unknown person stepped before him in the narrow path. Gilgen shuddered, for he had a presentiment to whom this emaciated visage belonged. Seized with sudden fear, he was going to ride past, but the stranger would not allow him to move without exchanging a few words, indeed the knight's horse stood still as if arrested by

some secret spell. "Sir knight," said an unearthly voice, "can I assist you?"

No answer was given. "I know what you demand and what you wish for," continued the interlocutor; "look up at yon cliff. Spur your charger bravely forwards: to so valiant a knight nothing ought to be impracticable."

"Return to hell again, you dog," cried Gilgen, irritated at this mockery. At the same time he dealt him a blow with his sword that would have sufficed to cleave in twain the head of the strongest mortal. — But a hoarse laugh was heard and the thin figure was seen standing unhurt upon a rocky eminence.

"Be reasonable, my friend," now exclaimed the figure, in a coaxing voice, "I alone can enable you to obtain what you desire, confide in me and this very day the beautiful captive shall be yours."

The knight trembled like an aspen leaf, at the thought that he was on the threshold of eternal damnation; he was irresolute and was about to put spurs to his steed to fly from the tempter, when the voice croaked out: "To-morrow your bride will be lost to you for ever — It is yet time—Comply and you may still regain her!"

Ungovernable passion instantly filled Gilgen's soul and he therefore concluded the usual pact with the stranger. At this moment the moon rose and shed her mild light upon the rugged cliff. "Courage, bold horseman!" cried the voice.

Gilgen saw himself alone; the wind howled and

chased the scattered clouds along the dark-blue starry sky. His steed neighed loud on feeling the spur and with one bound it reached the giddy path. With one hand the knight held the bridle tightly and grasped his drawn sword in the other. The animal seemed to be borne upwards by the demons of the wind for his hoofs firmly rested on places, that would not have afforded footing for the light heeled chamois. Gilgen, though in constant danger of falling backwards, sat undaunted in his saddle. Hearing the noise the ruffians that guarded the castle, ran to the walls. Mute with terror and astonishment they looked down and could scarcely believe their eyes, when they saw the intrepid rider, encouraging his horse by words and blows and ascending as rapidly as a spectre.

The moment of rescue was at hand.—Gilgen perceived Gertrude's white figure on the tower.—One more spring upon the dangerous cliff, and he attained the summit — stormed the gate and the ravisher lay a bleeding corpse, before the avenger's feet. A minute afterwards, Gilgen held Gertrude in his arms.

But happiness, purchased by so terrible a crime, could only be of short duration. Scarce was he reunited to her, for whom he had sacrificed worldly fame and eternal salvation, when she withered away like a flower exposed to the blast of the easterly wind and died in his arms. Gilgen did not long survive her;—consumed by grief and remorse he soon put an

end to his own existence. — The inhabitants of Lorch still point out with horror the steep path, which, from that event, bears the name of the Devil's ladder and they preserve at this moment in their townhouse the bridle of Lord Gilgen's steed.