

THE  
GIANT OF EPPSTEIN.

The green valleys of the Taunus abound in healthful springs and its woody uplands are crowned with decayed castles, the recollection of whose chivalrous owners has outlived the perishable monuments of their power. Like a chain of antique coins these ancient relics embrace the fertile and picturesque country, which extends for many leagues along the right bank of the Maine. Powerful and illustrious families formerly resided where the ruins of Falkenstein, Königstein, Eppstein, Sonnenberg and Hohenstein now rear their proud turrets, and where the Altking and the Feldberg raise their lofty heads above the neigh-

bouring hills, some of the mightiest deeds that immortalize the history of romance were performed.

In the richest part of the country called "the Nassau Switzerland" embosomed amidst hills and dales, still lies the village of Eppstein. The lofty tower and strong walls of its castle, still point out the spot that was the hereditary seat of a rich family, who furnished many Counts to the Empire and not a few shepherds to the Archbishoprick of Mayence. The origin of this noble monument of feudal splendour is to be traced to its having formerly been the abode of a huge and savage giant, who insolently relying on his immense strength would not suffer any one to settle in the valley; especially if the owner were of gentle blood, for the humble cot of the peasant was infinitely less hateful to his eye than the lordly castle of the noble. Had it depended upon him not a single castellated habitation would have embellished the mountains of the Taunus.

Now it once happened that the giant was obliged to leave the neighbourhood, in order to go to the assistance of one of his monstrous brethren in Alsace, who it appears found it no easy matter to defend himself against the harassing attacks of the ordinary sized mortals by whom he was beleaguered and who though comparatively weak and diminutive acted upon the principle of "*l'union fait la force*," and kept the monster penned up in his fortress. The terrific ranger of the woods and fields had scarcely departed when all the neighbourhood having assured themselves that

he really was far out of reach, became all at once mighty courageous, so, after summoning a meeting beneath the shade of a gigantic oak, they resolved to avail themselves of his absence to divide his property among themselves. While they were thus occupied in vainly endeavouring to arrange the disputes and altercations, which are sure to arise among those who have to settle the partition of other men's property and while none of the disputants would yield to the claims of their equals, a young knight made his appearance in the valley. He appearing to be quite impartial and demanding no share in the spoil was unanimously chosen umpire by the contending parties, and in spite of his extreme youth acquitted himself so skilfully of the duties of his office that in two days not only all disputes were settled, but he found himself some how or another in possession of a fruitful and verdant hill which rose with a gentle slope from the bosom of the lowlands.

Eppo, for that was the stranger's name, was well aware of the nature and duties of his situation. His purse which had never been overstocked was now nearly empty, but he found means by his eloquence and powers of persuasion to supply that deficiency from the pockets of others; for although all the peasantry loudly clamoured against paying fee or tithe to their rightful Lord the Archbishop of Mayence, they willingly gave their mite to him. The good country people were soon convinced that they could do nothing better than assist the knight in building a

castle, which would not only vie with those of the neighbouring barons, but secure them against all future inroads from the giant or his formidable family. Eppo represented to them how ornamental it would be with its crenalated battlements towering above the trees, and what protection it would afford to the whole country, if the giant should ever think of returning to his deserted possessions. But the truth was, that although the knight affected to attach great importance to this latter argument yet his grand object was to fill his own coffers and to build his castle at the expense of the ignorant inhabitants, then after having well feathered his rocky nest to leave them to shift for themselves. Be that as it may, the good country people set about the work with such hearty good will that even if Eppo had been a powerful prince, surrounded by numerous vassals and skilful artificers, the building could hardly have advanced more rapidly. Indeed the walls seemed to rise by magic from the soil and so eager were the workmen to complete the castle, that they forgot their own wants and poverty, and whenever a passing traveller enquired into and marvelled at the cause of this extraordinary activity, he was informed that the fortress was constructing for the defense and freedom of the country.

In the mean time the wily Eppo secretly exulted over his own good fortune, for he soon had the satisfaction of seeing the basement completely finished and so far rendered habitable that he determined one fine summer night to pass the few hours of darkness

within its walls. As yet indeed there was no chamber furnished, but the thought that possession was nine points of the law and that he was reposing within his own dwelling, made even the couch of moss appear like a bed of down to him. Day had not yet dawned however ere he was suddenly awakened from his profound slumber by a tremendous clattering over his head and on all sides of him. He listened for a while intending to curse the workmen for troubling his repose. His choler, however, soon gave way to alarm and he could scarcely credit his senses, when he saw the beams and rafters of the upper story tumbling and rattling about him, as if shaken by an earthquake. And well might he have mistaken it for one, for the earth trembled with the violence of a general convulsion and fearful noises, like the roaring of raging bulls, struck upon his astonished ear. Now, although Sir Eppo noways lacked courage, yet he thought it most prudent, in the first instance, to provide for his safety and to enquire into the cause of the uproar afterwards. In this he showed his judgment, for the vaulted ceiling above his head began to crack and the stones already threatened to fall in and bury him in the ruins. Indeed he had no time to spare, for he had scarcely leaped out of one of the windows, when a part of the edifice fell in with a thundering crash and the old giant, who it appears had returned during the night from Alsace, was seen above the ruins battering the walls with his iron mace and laughing in bitter derision at the terrified peasants, who fled

in the utmost consternation, without power to look behind and much less to endeavour to oppose the work of destruction.

When the sun rose above the mountains nothing was to be seen on the spot, where the beautiful structure had begun to rise, save a desolate heap of stones and rubbish. Here, however, the giant again fixed his head quarters and continued as before to harass and oppress the neighbourhood in every possible way, so that the whole surrounding country was filled with alarm and despair and sorely deplored the few months of repose they had enjoyed during the residence of the knight, who had quitted the valley, but not without pledging his word to return in due time. The country people, who saw him depart with much of the money they had subscribed for building the castle, placed little confidence in his promise and even regretted their own credulity and the more so as several weeks elapsed, without their receiving any tidings of him. They consequently gave up all hopes of ever seeing him again and began to reconcile themselves to their fate, resolving to make the best of a bad job and to forget that Eppo had ever been their guest.

One day as they were lamenting their unhappy lot and complaining of Eppo's infidelity who should appear among them but the knight himself, accompanied by half a dozen servants, driving before them several mules laden with heavy sacks. The knight would by no means tell them, what was contained in these sacks and strictly enjoined his servants, who had all

the air of blacksmiths to observe the most profound secrecy concerning his intentions. In the mean time he inquired when the giant was wont to take his afternoon's nap and how long it usually lasted. On being informed that it was then precisely the monster's hour of rest and that in that hot season of the year it was not likely to be of very short duration, Eppo ordered his companions to proceed with the utmost speed, but in perfect silence to his demolished castle.

The knight scarcely knew whether to weep or smile on reaching the well known spot, and his heart throbbed when he heard the awful snore of the usurper, for such he denominated the giant. Indeed it was not without considerable difficulty that he succeeded in preventing his companions from taking to their heels at the sound of this unusual music, which resembled the low bellowing of a distant herd of wild bulls, mingled with the droning tones of enormous bagpipes.

The sleeper was lying upon his back in an open space inclosed by the remains of the walls, with no other shelter than a few ells of coarse sail cloth which served to protect his face from the burning rays of the mid-day sun. Having reconnoitred the enemy's position, Eppo communicated his orders to his followers and in one instant the sacks were opened and a multitude of strong iron rings taken out and linked together with the greatest caution and dispatch. As good luck would have it the giant had drunk nearly half an anker of Johannisberg for his breakfast, and

was comfortably sleeping after the meal; thus every thing succeeded to perfection, so when at length he opened his eyes, he found himself caged in a heavy net work of iron, which was so firmly rivetted in on all sides that he vainly strove to extricate himself and no less vainly filled the air with his horrid blasphemies. Eppo now rose upon the wall and in his turn laughed heartily. Seeing the monster nearly exhausted with his efforts, he blew a loud blast upon his horn and soon summoned all the neighbouring peasants to the spot, who were no less astonished than rejoiced to see their dreaded foe impotently cursing and raving beneath the heavy iron web. Nobody however ventured to approach, until having taken all necessary precautions the whole body mounted upon the walls and commenced hurling down fragments of rock and stone upon their prisoner. They then returned every one to his own home, until the men, who had been left to watch, brought intelligence that he had breathed his last, overwhelmed and crushed by the weight of stones.

In gratitude to Eppo for their delivery the honest people forthwith recommenced building the castle which, when completed, yielded to none of the fortresses of the neighbouring barons either in beauty or strength and was called Eppstein in honour of their liberator. In order to remind future generations of the wonderful circumstance that had led to its erection, the bones of the giant were fixed up over the grand portal and when they mouldered away their effigy was carved in



stone, as an undeniable testimony to the truth of the story. Whether the expectations of the country people were fulfilled or whether Eppo was a grateful and kind Lord and protector, history does not say. The chronicles, however, inform us that the family of Eppstein became exceeding rich and powerful and played an important part in the events of the German Empire, until it became extinct sometime during the sixteenth century. The castle is now in ruins, but in the village church are still to be seen several of the tombs of its ancient Lords.