

## FREDERIC AND GELA

OR

### The founding of Gelahausen.

The traveller, after having enjoyed the beauties of nature, that every where present themselves to his eye upon the borders of the glorious Rhine, will do well to make an excursion from Mayence through Franckfort, up the valley of the Maine, to Hanau. He will be repaid for his trouble by the delightful scenery of the valley of the Kinzig, and the heights of the Wetterau, near which he will discover the crumbling remains of the once magnificent imperial palace of Gelahausen. If he be inclined to moralize he will find here ample subject for his reflections by turning his eyes upon the dilapidated walls of the once rich



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and imperial city of Gelnhausen, round which the slothful Kinzig holds its lingering course. A sad example of the transitory nature of all earthly grandeur.

It was upon the crest of those beautiful heights, called the Rhöngebirge, where they are united to the Vogelgebirge, by a picturesque ridge of hills and where nature has been most lavish of her favours, that Frederic, "Red-beard," son of Frederic, "the One eyed," Duke of Swabia passed the fairest days of his youth. Skilled in all the arts of chivalry, the noble youth was equally redoubted in the camp and at the chase, for he exclusively devoted his time to these noble pursuits. Few opponents withstood his lance and never did the savage denizens of the forests, which covered the hills around him, escape his spear or bolt. The most perilous adventures of the chase, were those best suited to his ardent temper, for it was then that he gave the highest proofs of his courage and dexterity. It was seldom, that he assisted at tilt, tournay, foray or hunting party, without bearing off the prize of victory, so that he was esteemed not only the bravest but the most accomplished cavalier of all the neighbouring courts.

When the winter's tempests prevented him from indulging in his favourite sports he amused himself with reading the chronicles and legends of former times and with practising the minstrel's noble art.

No sooner however did spring revisit his native valleys, bringing with it its choir of winged songsters, its blossoms and its whole train of sylvan joys than he

sallied forth to revel amid the thousand merry voices and sweet perfumes of the expanding flowers. It was then that he enjoyed with the true lover of God's splendid works the forest's early cloak of green, the rippling streams and the universal joy of reanimated nature. Every reviving object filled his soul with new pleasure and delight, for the beauties of nature which he had so often admired and so often sung always appeared new to his youthful and pious spirit. Spring, as we said, had returned so Frederic rambled forth through the green valleys and smiling woods, with his bow upon his shoulder and was joyfully received at the surrounding castles and by his father's vassals, who gladly hailed the day, when his favourite sports and exercises brought him once more among them.

In one of his excursions the path happened to lead him to a noble castle, but what was his surprise on approaching the gate, which was overhung with clustering branches of full blown lilac, to see beneath the porch a gentle maiden, who was busily engaged at her spinning-wheel, whilst on one side sat the owner of the castle cleaning some pieces of armour, and on the other several faithful watch dogs, reclining in the sun beams.

"God be with you," exclaimed the youth.

"And with you!" replied the old man, laying aside his work, and saluting him cordially.

"Do not disturb yourself, Erwin," answered Frederic, "and you fair maiden will not, I am sure,

refuse a traveller a meal and shelter till the lark summons him to pursue his journey.”

“Gela, bring a draught of fresh mead for our guest,” said the old man, “my Lord will excuse the homeliness of our fare.”

The maiden was about to rise from her seat, but Frederic requested her to proceed with her work and added with a smile, that he would earn his cup of welcome like a true minstrel. Both assented to his proposal, but when he sang of the joys of spring and the delight with which it fills every breast, a delight which never ceases, never cloy, Gela's work insensibly dropped from her hands and her eyes were suffused with moisture; the old man also discontinued his employment and even the dogs raised themselves up, as if listening to the melodious accents of the youthful singer.

A thrill of pleasure vibrated through Frederic's heart when he heard the maiden's praise and far sweeter did he find the cup of welcome, which she handed to him, than the richest beverage he had ever tasted in his father's halls. Frederic's heart had remained unmoved by the smiles of the most beautiful ladies of the court, but Gela's blue eye had awakened in his breast a new feeling. A sensation to which he had hitherto been a stranger and to which he was unable to give a name, now animated his soul. He had but one thought and that was of Gela, and he felt within him an inexpressible bliss, to which even his lute was unable to respond.

Scarcely did the first rays of morning gild the foliage of the surrounding woods, when Frederic sprang from his sleepless couch, to confide to his lyre the sweet yet melancholy emotions of his heart, but for the first time his skilful fingers did not respond to the workings of his soul and he hastened out to quell the storm of his feelings in the cool morning breeze. But as he crossed the spacious hall, he was met by Gela, beautiful as the rose, when the first rays of the sun kiss the dew drops from its fragrant cup. Struck with admiration he approached and greeted the maiden, who returned his salutation with graceful courtesy. Then seizing her hand he whispered in a trembling voice: "Beautiful Gela, hear me but for one moment and let me learn my fate; I love thee, — thou art dearer to me than life itself!"

Burning blushes suffused Gela's cheeks, she stood, mute, motionless and with downcast eyes before him. — "Be not angry with me, Gela!" continued Frederic, "thy anger were worse than death."

Then pressing her unresisting hand to his fevered lips he immediately hurried from her presence nor did he again venture to revisit the castle to which he felt so irresistibly attracted. On his return to his father's palace he concealed his love in the inmost recesses of his heart, but it could not escape the observation of his companions, that an extraordinary change had taken place in him. The chase no longer delighted him, nor could the chivalrous pastimes of the age divert his melancholy; his guitar was the

only confidant of the secret sorrow, that agitated his bosom. Vainly did his father endeavour to discover the source of his melancholy and no less vain were the enquiries of his tender mother, Judith, the daughter of Henry Duke of Bavaria, surnamed "the Black."

He sometimes strolled into the woods, armed as usual with spear and bow, but the beasts of the forest passed unheeded and unscathed by his unerring shafts. On one of these occasions his steps were unconsciously attracted towards the castle where the star of his existence radiated in all its gentle splendour. But he dared not approach the idol of his affection, for first love is timid as the startled roe and often imagines that the road to success is that which menaces defeat. One morning, however, as Frederic was wandering through the forest, which surrounded the castle where Gela resided, he suddenly perceived the beautiful maiden seeking for wild herbs within bow shot of the walls.

His first impulse was to speak and throw himself at her feet, but the words died upon his lips and his limbs refused their office. The maiden seeing this blushed deeply and regarded the youth with astonishment, for he stood before her, motionless as if transfixed by enchantment. Women on these occasions often evince more courage than men, so she raised her voice and said: "You seem unwell, my Lord; will you not enter our castle and take rest and refreshment?"



“Gela!” cried Frederic throwing himself at her feet as if restored to life by her words: “Thou dost not then reject my suit, may I ever hope to see thee again and wilt thou listen to the outpourings of my heart—For I swear—.”

“Oh swear not,” said Gela, interrupting him “but rise, for it is not fit, my Lord, that I should see you thus before me.”

“Gela, my life is at thy disposal, I love thee,” replied the impassioned youth. “Say but the word: may I hope, may I live?”

Gela answered hesitatingly: “Let tomorrow’s earliest dawn find you in the chapel of the castle—” And before Frederic had time to reply she had disappeared among the trees. Rising upon his feet he stared wildly about him; for what he had seen and heard seemed to him like a dream. At length he entered the building and tried to kill the hours in conversing with old Erwin whose daughter did not appear. If ever youth passed a tedious day, it was that, which saw him again a guest at the castle of his beloved.

Scarcely had the warder announced the hour of midnight from the donjon turret ere the impatient Frederic descended with a hasty step into the vaulted chapel, where he anxiously awaited the appearance of the lovely Gela. Long had he to wait, for it was not until the morning twilight shed its first grey streaks through the painted windows, that the door, which communicated with the corridor of the castle and served as a private entrance for its inmates, creak-

ed upon its hinges. Frederic started up scarcely able to breathe with emotion and fixed his eyes upon a shadowy figure, which at first he mistook for one of old Erwin's pages but which gradually became more distinct and at length showed him the adored form of Gela. He flew towards her and in impassioned accents renewed the declaration of his affection, intreating her to listen to his love. Gela did listen for a while and then leading him to a stone bench seated herself without embarrassment by his side and exclaimed in a calm and solemn voice.

“ My Lord, my meeting you here and at this hour, is a sufficient proof that your love has struck a responding chord in my poor heart. But alas your love must be my only guardian, my inward devotion your only hope. I never can be yours. No, my Lord, you are called to higher and more glorious destinies. The noblest ladies await your selection, a Princess becoming your exalted rank must be your bride. An humble maiden such as I can never aspire to that honour. Leave me then I beseech you, I never can be yours ! ” Her lovely cheeks were now mantled with the rich dyes of virgin modesty heightened by the red glare of the never fading lamps burning upon God's altars. Fréderic cast himself at her feet—embraced her knees in excess of extacy and endeavoured to overcome her resolution by impassioned arguments and by fresh protestations of his love. But Gela replied in a tone of mild submission.

“ Here in God's presence I swear to you, that my

love shall never cease. May heaven forgive me, if my affection is deserving of punishment, but my love shall and must be pure as the place, in which I have made you this confession. The holy mother of our Saviour will arm me with the necessary fortitude."

Frederic dared not interrupt the maiden; his eye rested upon hers, but when she ceased speaking and his ear was no longer enraptured by the sweet melody of her voice, he exclaimed in despair:

"Wouldst thou kill me, Gela? must I never see thee again?"

"Yes," answered Gela. "Here, in the presence of the blessed Virgin, whose image looks down upon us from that altar and at this hour, as often as you please. But at no other place, for I will keep my love in all its purity for another and better world. Here our feelings will be under the guidance of God and his angels."

Frederic who flattered himself he should eventually overcome her scruples could not contain his excess of happiness, he clasped her to his bosom and burning kisses sealed their vow of eternal love and fidelity, Henceforth each morning dawn found the lovers seated within the holy sanctuary, where they indulged without reserve in the unspeakable felicity of their mutual passion, but that passion was pure, as heaven's ether, and their souls were free from every earthly thought. When the news of the fall of Edessa in the year 1146, became known in Germany and Bernhard de Clairvaux preached the crusade throughout Europe,

the Emperor Conrad, the Third, was amongst the first to answer the inspiring appeal and to prepare himself for the holy war. It was then that a noble thirst for glory was rekindled in Frederic's bosom. He also affixed the cross to his mantle and, having assembled his faithful Swabians, followed his uncle the Emperor to Palestine.

Though heart broken at this interruption of their innocent affection, Gela was the first to urge him to join the expedition as became the future Duke of Swabia. The parting hour at length arrived. At the same holy spot, where they had so often met, the unhappy lovers bade adieu to each other and as Frederic imprinted the last kiss on the maiden's lips he said: "Thus let our love be sealed for ever."

"For ever," answered Gela, and quickly she disengaged herself from his embrace, for the trumpets already sounded for the warriors' departure.

Throughout the various perils and vicissitudes of the crusade, Frederic was animated by the inspiration of his love, which excited him to the performance of prodigies of valour. The rose bud, a symbol of his Gela's youth and purity, was the emblem on his shield and banner. This symbol was his protection. Often when overpowering numbers oppressed the Christian hosts, Frederic's war cry, "Gela to the rescue!" struck terror into the hearts of the Saracens and turned the scale of victory.

At length when the imperial army was compelled by the reverses they sustained in the burning deserts

of Iconium, to retreat to Constantinople, Frederic received the mournful tidings of his father's death, which rendered it necessary for him, immediately to return home. No sooner had he received the allegiance of his subjects, than his love, which had augmented by long separation, called him to the castle where his Gela lived.

Impatient of delay and already enjoying in anticipation the delights of their reunion, Frederic hastened towards the Kinzig. But judge, gentle reader, of his utter disappointment and agony, when he heard by the way that Gela had already taken the veil. He still proceeded but received confirmation of this overwhelming intelligence from her father, who presented him with a letter and scarf which Gela had placed in his hands for the young Duke, on the very day that she entered the convent. Frederic seized the scarf and letter and pressing them to his quivering lips and with eyes bedimmed with tears, read the following words.

“It behoves the Duke of Swabia to select a wife amongst the Princesses of his own rank. For a whole year his love was the sole happiness of Gela's life, so it will ever be. Let that love be as eternal as it was pure and holy.” — Casting himself upon his knees the unhappy Duke swore to obey the mandate and he kept his word. The scarf, the dear pledge of his Gela's affection, accompanied him upon all his expeditions and in the hour of peril was wound around his casque. Yielding at length to the wishes of his

family and the representations of his counsellors, he married Adelheid daughter of the Margrave Theobald of Vohburg in the year 1149, yet love was a stranger to their union; and when the Imperial crown was placed upon the brow of this noble scion of the house of Hohenstaufen, he immediately separated himself from Adelheid, whom however he treated with all the respect and courtesy becoming her rank.

His love for Gela in the mean time remained unchanged. At the place where her father's castle had stood, he built a magnificent palace, which was his favourite place of residence and on the spot where he had so unexpectedly met her in the woods, he founded a town to which he gave the name of Gela-hausen. The last relic of the heroic race of Hohenstaufen has long since descended to the grave and the name of Frederic Barbarossa has been transferred to the pages of history, but his love for the beautiful Gela still lives in the traditions of the people and is commemorated by one of the most beautiful monuments of the age, the smiling town which bears her name.