

family and the representations of his counsellors, he married Adelheid daughter of the King of Thuringia at Yorbung in the year 1143, yet love was a stranger to their union; and when the imperial crown was put on upon the brow of the noble son of the house of Hohenstaufen, he immediately separated himself from Adelheid whom however he treated with all the love for Gela in the mean time remained unchanged. At the place where her father's castle had stood, he built a town 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

THE MINNEBURG OR THE THREE SISTERS,

a Legend of the Neckar.

The Neckar which rapidly winds its serpentine course through one of the most picturesque countries in all Germany, as if impatient to unite its waters with those of the majestic Rhine, flows through a romantic valley where the ruins of the Minneburg may still be seen upon a beautifully wooded eminence, opposite to the hamlet of Neckargerach. If the traveller ascend the mountain on the eastern side he will be repaid for his fatigue by the most enchanting prospect. Before him stretches the smiling valley, intersected by the woody ravines and uplands of the Odenwald, while the romantic ruins on which he

stands and the grey towers and moss-clad walls which surround him, enhance the loveliness of the view.

The following tale respecting the origin of this castle is related by the inhabitants of the valley of the Neckar. — The story takes its date from that part of the fourteenth century, when Germany began in some measure to breathe from the succession of horrors caused by those civil wars between the rival houses, whose opposing claims had so long torn and desolated that wretched country.

The castle of Zwingenburg, situated near the village of Lindach, was at that time inhabited by two brothers and three sisters, the only remaining descendants of an ancient and noble house. Dark and ferocious were the lineaments that marked the characters of the two young Barons, Frederic and Conrad of Zwingenburg. — Brave but lawless they lived at perpetual feud with the neighbouring Barons, whose revenge they feared as little as they did that of the wretched Serfs whom they trampled underfoot.

They went still farther, they contemned and defied the authority of their liege lord the Emperor, Charles IV, son of that John of Bohemia whose plume and motto had not long before adorned the spoils of Crescy*. — The rebellious spirit of the brothers, which had broken out in sundry excesses, had already entailed upon themselves and their family divers chastisements and was destined to draw down still grea-

* *Ich dien* the motto of the prince of Wales.

ter misfortunes. Reckless of consequences and heedless of the prayers of their wretched sisters they rushed headlong on their wild career.—The unfortunate maidens who were thus made the victims of their brothers selfish and cruel conduct were often left, within the narrow limits of their feudal domain, to weep over the obstinate fury that seemed to dictate their course.

During the long and frequent absences of Frederic and Conrad the maidens had constant opportunities of meeting three youths, sons of the Baron Hugo von Zabern, to whom they had long been attached and with whom they had exchanged vows of fidelity and love. Many were the hours they passed in the woods that skirt the banks of the Neckar, less mindful of the present than dreaming of bright days to come, chequered and clouded though they were by the fears with which the headstrong wildness of Frederic and Conrad inspired their timid breasts, nor were their forebodings of evil without foundation.

The crimes of the brothers could no longer be supported with impunity. Charles, whose patience was exhausted and who was irritated beyond measure at some new act of violence committed by these young men, gave orders that the castle of Zwingenburg should be immediately invested and that it should be attacked and razed to the ground. — It was in vain that these insolent knights prepared for an obstinate defence — it was in vain that they summoned around them their numerous vassals and that they fought

with the fury of despair to save the inheritance of their ancestors.—All proved fruitless, unavailing as the feeble effort of mortals to arrest the fiat of a higher power, for the sword of justice was uplifted and the hand of God was against them.

Overpowered by the Emperor's troops they were at last obliged to surrender and their lives atoned for the atrocities they had committed. Ere, however, the castle was delivered up to pillage and the flames, diligent search was made for the three luckless maidens, who had remained there during the siege, but no traces of them could be discovered. — It was supposed therefore that they had either been killed, or that they were secreted in some part of the building unknown to the besiegers. — The young Barons of Zabern, who only arrived at the spot after all had been given up to sword and flame, wildly rushed from spot to spot amidst the smoking ruins searching for the remains of those beloved beings, who they had no doubt were buried beneath the crumbling fragments of the stately towers, which so short a time before had adorned their native valley. Frederic and Conrad had fallen but not a tear of sorrow was shed over their fate. The black catalogue of their crimes had been filled up, they had met with a just reward. — But strong was the feeling excited by the horrible fate of the lovely and innocent Sisters.

The three lovers were frantic. — For a single moment they did not entertain a suspicion of the possibility of their having escaped. Hugo, the youngest

who was of a more ardent disposition than his brothers and more deeply attached to his lovely Elisabeth, felt the loss more poignantly than the others. He was inconsolable. Their utmost efforts were therefore employed to prevent him from pining in hopeless despair. — They sought to buoy up his spirits with hopes of a recovery that had so long faded in their own minds. — No means were left untried to discover even the black remains of all that had been once so beautiful and was still so cherished. But even hope at length abandoned them.

One day, however, as they wandered by the banks of the river pondering over the happy hours they had so often passed on those banks — their melancholy abstraction carried them further than they were wont to go. — As if in mockery of their feelings the sun shone forth in all its splendour, gilding with its beams the lovely valley which stretched before them. — The stream, which reflected on its crystal bosom the cloudless azure that arched above them, smiled as if in derision at the contrast between the beauty and the repose of nature and the passions which too often agitate and torture the mind of man.

The brothers felt this, but they nevertheless pursued their way urged on by that strange contradiction in human nature which makes it love to brood over the recollection of past joys and to contrast them with present terrors. — Their path lay through a kind of thicket hitherto apparently untrodden by the foot of man. Heedless of all around, they continued

their course, stopping now and then to clear a passage through the opposing shrubs and briars, in order to follow a faithful blood hound which usually accompanied them. At first they were regardless of the noble animal's movements, but their attention was at last arrested by seeing him suddenly stoop his nose to the ground and follow an almost imperceptible track, which seemed to have been frayed thro' the underwood into a more dense part of the thicket.

There was no apparent cause for this, but partly by a kind of instinct unaccountable to themselves, partly thro' mingled fear and curiosity they followed the hound into the darker recesses of the wood. The eagerness of the sagacious beast appeared to increase as he approached a group of rocks covered with briars and climbing shrubs.— Until at last he stopped before what appeared to be nothing but a mass of brushwood with here and there a mossy fragment of rock peering above the thorns and foliage.

The brothers seeing nothing there to arrest their attention were about to proceed onwards, when the blood hound suddenly bayed long and deeply. This made them not only turn to ascertain the cause but they commenced hacking and hewing with their swords at the plants around, thinking that some wild animal must be concealed close by. It was with some difficulty that, by dint of tearing and cutting the thick mass of foliage, they made some little progress. But, seeing nothing, they were on the point of desisting when Hugo, having torn aside a huge over-

hanging bough, discovered the mouth of a cavern nearly choked up by leaves and brambles. — On seeing this the hound sprung forward with a long and plaintive yell. Hugo followed him brandishing his sword and calling to his brothers, who imagined that a wolf or bear had made his lair therein.

A slight tremor thrilled through their frames at thus encountering such savage animals within their own den. They paused therefore for a moment, questioning the prudence of risking their lives in such an encounter. But Hugo had already entered and their fears for his safety prevailed over all selfish considerations. They blushed, therefore, at their hesitation and dashed headlong after him.

At first all was darkness; save the gleam of their steel nothing was to be seen, but a rustling was soon heard among the dried leaves that formed a carpet beneath their feet. They thought for a moment that it was their own movements which had caused the noise but as it was repeated they turned to search for the glance of the savage eye that would indicate the spot where their expected enemy lay crouching for the attack. Every hand was upraised, every sword was ready to defend the life of its owner and another moment of breathless suspense succeeded, which was broken by a spring made by the hound towards the remotest corner of the cavern followed by a woman's shriek.

The brothers instantly rushed forward to the place whence the noise proceeded, but instead of wolves or bears, ready to devour them, they saw their faithful

dog crouching at the feet of four forms, which were huddled together in the farthest corner of the cave. Their eyes no sooner became accustomed to the darkness than they discovered that they were women. Hugo instinctively rushed up to one of them and, bearing her away fainting in his arms to the mouth of the cavern, discovered what his heart had before told him, that it was indeed his own, his long lost Elizabeth. Though every trace of colour had left her cheek, though suffering had marked its funereal characters on her lovely brow he at once recognised her. It was indeed she who with her sisters and one faithful old man had sought refuge here during the siege, not knowing what had since taken place at Zwingenburg, their fears had kept them shut up watching for an opportunity of deliverance ; though when it came the joyful transition almost overpowered them.

The brothers lost no time, however, in removing them from the spot and when the roses of happiness had replaced the lillies of despair on their cheeks, they were each united to the object of their love, so that the sufferings all had undergone were quickly forgotten, or looked upon merely as a gone by dream, the memory of which they resolved to record by building near the spot a castle, which received the name of the Minneburg.

There Hugo long resided with his beautiful Elizabeth, and in commemoration of the fortunate recovery of his adored wife he ordered a statue of the faithful hound, through whose agency her retreat had

been discovered, to be hewed in stone and placed over the gate. Although the Minneburg has long since fallen into ruins this stone still remains and is shown in the neighbouring village of Gutenbach, where the peasants never omit to relate the legend of "the three sisters."