

THE WOLF'S WELL.

Many years before Conrad of Hohenstaufen removed his residence to the banks of the Neckar, and erected a castle upon the hill, (which not only overlooks the city of Heidelberg but all the distant plains and heights as far as the chain of the Vosges), there stood on that part of the mountain, which is still called the Jettenbuhl (Jetta's hill) an isolated hermitage tenanted by a virgin whose parentage and mode of life were wrapped in unfathomable mystery.

Jetta's lonely dwelling was surrounded by those impervious woods which to this day clothe the Geissberg and the lofty Konigstuhl. From between the

openings, amid the trunks and foliage of the venerable oaks, the view extends far along the valley through which the noble river winds its silvery course. Here from its silent flood being enclosed by mountains it almost assumes the appearance of a lake, while there it dashes impetuously over the huge fragments of granite which impede its course and with which its tortuous bed is often nearly choked up. At the time we refer to no habitations existed there, saving a few thinly scattered cottages, which then scarcely arrested the eye as it wandered along the tranquil banks, but on whose site now stands an animated city intersected by populous streets and surrounded by lofty battlements.

The neighbouring peasantry looked upon Jetta as a superior being — and it was not without a thrilling sensation of awe that any of them dared approach her dwelling. Her figure was noble, yet she possessed all the grace which more immediately belongs to woman. Her countenance was beautiful, though of a grave and thoughtful cast — her blue eye rested with a penetrating gaze upon every object which attracted her notice and her flaxen hair hung in long and luxuriant tresses over her snowy neck and partially covered her flowing garments. She appeared to have dived deep into the secret springs of nature to be well acquainted with the changes and courses of the planets and other celestial bodies, and to have studied the properties of plants and herbs. She was even gifted with an insight into futurity and when some peasants, bolder than the rest, ventured to

approach the window of her quiet dwelling, to crave advice or information, the soft tones of her voice seldom failed to give a short but satisfactory reply. The oracle which proceeded from her lips was never known to prove fallacious. But she delighted most in discanting upon the future destiny of the beautiful country which extended before her in fertile magnificence and then, like a Sybil of old, her eye beamed with inspiration and she prophesied of brightness and glory to come — of palaces and towers that should arise upon each mountain summit, of an active and laborious race destined to occupy those valleys, then uninhabited save by a few poor fishermen.

It happened that, being lured by the splendour of a glorious summer day, the prophetess left her retreat and wandered along the mountain-path which follows the Neckar in its eastern course. Descending gradually into the valley she arrived at a bubbling spring which gushed from beneath a group of lofty limes, filling a natural basin with its sparkling water. All nature around was hushed in calm repose; the woods the very air were still. All was intensely silent. The sultry heat of a mid-day sun, the coolness of the stream, the soothing stillness of this lovely spot all combined to induce the maiden to rest and bathe her fevered limbs in this refreshing pool. For awhile she gazed around, timid and fearful as the starting deer. But not a step, not a murmur was to be heard. Reassured, she flung aside her loose and flowing garments and plunged into the crystal flood, whose wave for a

moment parted and as quickly closed around her snowy limbs.

Forgetting her fears she abandoned herself to the delicious enjoyment, till she was suddenly startled by a noise in the adjacent wood. In the first impulse of her terror she imagined she had been surprised by some intrusive peasant or sportsman. But ere she had time to envelop herself in her robe the hoarse and savage howl of a wild beast reverberated through the thicket and at the same instant a huge she wolf, followed by her whelps, sprung forward. Flight was useless—cries were of no avail. Alas! the luckless maiden had scarce time to recommend her soul to God, ere the limpid element was dyed with the purple stream that gushed from her mangled limbs.

From that moment the spring acquired and retained the denomination of “the wolf’s well” in commemoration of this tragic event. At a later period when her prophecies concerning the city of Heidelberg were fulfilled, when art, science, industry and wealth crowded to the banks of the Neckar, attracted by the riches of the Rhenish Palatines, the spot where Jetta met with her cruel and untimely fate became justly celebrated and was adorned with cottages and resorted to by numerous pilgrims. Never however was it more interesting than when the castle of Heidelberg was inhabited by Elizabeth Stuart daughter of James the 1st of England and consort of Frederic Elector Palatine who unfortunately accepted the Bohemian crown.

Even at this period it presents many attractions although the venerable trees which for centuries had surrounded the trout ponds are now no more. Thither the lover of nature escapes from the tumult of the city. Having traversed the beautiful castle gardens he will do well to direct his steps along the brow of the hill beneath the shade of the stately walnut trees that line the road. Thence, following the course of the stream, he will visit the village of Schlierbach and enjoy the prospect on the right bank, where on one side the Heiligenberg crowned with the ruins of an ancient convent raises its proud head, and further on the white walls of the Neuburg, glistening in the rays of a declining sun, smile upon the spectator and lend a cheerful variety to the lovely landscape.