

## Castle Trifels.

### Richard Lion-heart.

**O**n the Upper Rhine boundary of France between Weissenburg, Bergzabern, Landau, Edenkoben, Neustadt on the Hardt and Dürkheim as far as Grünstadt is one of the finest countries of Germany, possibly of Europe. Provided with woods, vine-clad eminences, and fruitful fields, and richly ornamented with villages and hamlets, and crowned with old castle ruins, this country, although little known, can vie with all, and equal to every other in changement of beautiful and interesting objects. The Vosges the summits of which already begin to incline to the plain have not more the same wild character which surprises the traveller on the Swiss frontier and in Upper Alsace; so much the more lovely and softer is the country, and so much the more fruitful the ground, and only here and there one is reminded of the neighbourhood of the mountain by the proud projecting rocks. One of these eminences allows the free View to the North and South. The Domes of Strasburg and Speyer besides the churches of Worms, on the right bank of the Rhine the ruins of Heidelberg castle, to the left the Donnersberg with its projecting cupolas are the principal objects of a Panorama which charms the spectator. Not far from the Landau and An-

weiler lies as if thrown in, a row of wooded mountains and rocks with ruins. Three of these mountains render themselves particularly remarkable, they seem to have belonged to one, and to have been the property of one master who had his dwelling on one of them. The name Trifels signifies this unity, for it is the collective name of the 3 rocky ridges, although also only the most important with its castle-ruins is called so, and the 2 others are named Anebos and Scharfenburg. The ascent of Trifels is tiring, but this labour is repaid a hundred-fold by the lovely prospect of near and distant environs, and particularly of the splendid Rhine-valley with its finely situated districts. Landau before all attracts the notice of the spectator, it lies in the midst of numerous villages and one says therefore there proverbially, that the inhabitants of 200 districts visit its Market without requiring more than 1 day to do so. The founder of the castle Trifels is (as many buildings of the Middle Ages) unknown, one knows only that it is mentioned in old chronicles, as of the times of the Salic kings, and that it passed over to the Dynasties of Hohenstaufen and Habsburg, but in the year 1410 was the property of the Duke of Zweibrücken. Frederic Barbarossa has often, according to the legend, and willingly resided in the castle and enlarged it, and also built the once celebrated marble-hall, of its plan however scarcely a trace remains.

In the Middle-Ages Trifels served with its fortifications a three-fold purpose. It was Imperial fortress, state prison, and a place of conservation for jewels and treasure; and its possession often of great importance, because the height and strength of the place defied every attack. Just on that account it was adapted to hold important prisoners. The blood-thirsty Henry 6<sup>th</sup> Barbarossa's successor has here incarcerated many of his enemies and several state-criminals, and had them executed with unheard-of cruelties.

About Easter 1193 Richard Lion-heart was delivered as prisoner to Henry 6<sup>th</sup> by Leopold of Austria and by the order of the latter brought to Trifels. For the heroic King a terrible destiny might have been intended, for he was, as so many bloody-victims, thrown into one of the strongest and well built dungeons of which there were several. However the courage of Richard remained unconquered, he even amused himself with singing and harp-playing, but there was scarcely a hope that he could escape his bitter enemy, and he was obliged to resign himself to the idea of a cruel death.

The king had in England a faithful adherent of his former years a singer by name Blondel. As he learned that his beloved master had disappeared, or rather incarcerated, he vowed with an Oath indefatigably and incessantly to search for the place of sojourn of Richard, and

to venture all for his deliverance. Only a few devoted and valiant knights followed the faithful Blondel who wandered to Germany, traversing the whole country inquiring at all castles and making inquiries in all towns, and could never discover any traces of his master. Already he had searched out almost all places on the banks of the Danube and Rhine as one day he arrived in the wild valley of Anweiler, and perceived the tower of Trifels. A strange presentiment seemed to strike him that it was the king's prison, and he resolved to arrange his inquiries with the greatest care and prudence.

His companions were obliged to conceal themselves in the wood, while he would inspect the castle. Being on his road there he met a maiden who entered into conversation with him, and who living near Trifels related him many things of the castle, and its sights. As she wished to separate from him Blondel begged her to stay still some minutes, wishing to reward her communication. Thereupon he took his Zither and sang an old moving song which was also Richard's favourite song. „Ah that sounds“, indeed said the joyfully surprised, „exactly as the song which a poor captive knight, in the north tower of Trifels sings, when I pasture my sheep in the neighbourhood.“ With these words spoken so unsuspectingly, but so important for Blondel, the maiden sprang away. Full of happy hope to have at last reached

the object of his wandering the singer crept, by twilight, as near as possible to the marked tower, sang, with accompaniment, the same song, which the king had set to music, and composed. Scarcely had the first strophes ceased, the attentive listener heard the continuation of the song, which resounded from the window of the tower, and soon afterwards asked a well-known although suppressed voice from the same place: „Art thou my faithful Blondel?“ „Yes it is I my royal master“, replied the singer, „who thanks Heaven that he has at last found you. Depend upon my and some friend's zeal to free you.“

The following day the stranger tried and obtained entrance to the castle, but he was obliged soon to learn, how dangerous his enterprise was. The tower well watched and provided with a numerous garrison could neither be taken by force nor by surprise. It only seemed possible to attain the desired object by cunning. Blondel's lively manners and gay songs obtained for him the favour of the governor as well as the other guardians, and what was more useful to him also the love of the gaoler's daughter with whom he soon was on a confidential footing. After convincing himself that she loved him deeply, and resolved to fly with him, he believed to be able to discover himself. She promised her assistance to liberate the king, and so it was possible to accomplish the dangerous undertaking. Mathilda

so was the name of the maid knew exactly all the passages of the Tower-where her father kept the keys, and how she could unperceived obtain possession of them. On a dark stormy night, Blondel and Mathilda, after having arranged all, proceeded to act, they opened the king's Dungeon, handed him a helmet and a sword, and conducted him to the castle-yard, surprised the two sentinels, and compelled them to open the door. Before the garrison drawn together by the noise, could offer resistance, Blondels companion penetrated into the open castle, and after a sharp struggle, he succeeded in delivering the king, and to get clear-off with the heroic maiden on a steed which had been before hand kept ready. After long wandering they all fortunately arrived in England.

Blondel then conducted his beautiful Mathilde to the Altar, and received from the king the richest reward for his rare lasting fidelity. Also those who had accompanied the valiant Blondel were rewarded with royal liberality.

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