

already spoken its judgment. A few minutes after Gerda's arrival, Sifrid her father, was severely wounded by the stumbling of his horse, brought on a bier to the door of Reichenstein; he requested friendly admittance, and blessed, from free inclination a union which, to accomplish, God unmistakeably had determined. The given promise to the knight of Ehrenfels had already been discharged by Death; for in the same boat, in which some hours before Kurt exulting was conducted to the Rheinstein, one now carried back to Ehrenfels a wedding dressed corpse: chasing in blind rage after the ambler running away with Gerda, the unfortunate had fallen with his charger on a rock of the bank, and had broken his skull.

Lorch.

The Devil's ladder.

On a castle at Lorch, the ruins of which one sees not far from Assmannshausen, once sat knight Gilgen silent and absorbed. Almost an old man, he reviewed his past stirring life and the unsuccess of his hitherto exertions and actions.

As a young man he had been with Brömser of Rüdesheim in the Holy Land, and had been a valiant combatant for the conquering of the Holy

Sepulchre. After his return he had married a beautiful, although poor maiden, an orphan, to whom he was most devotedly attached. But after a year's domestic felicity, he lost his wife by the birth of a daughter named Gerlinde.

In order to stun the pain of that loss, and if possible forget it, he had mixed himself in the disputes and affairs of the neighbourhood, and so defended several years a number of quarrels in the interests of his friends. The consequences were unfortunately the loss of his possessions, and the necessity to satisfy himself with the small income of his family-castle. Morosely he retired therefore from every intercourse, and only the dear child, to which he applied all love and care, held him to this world. In such a monotonous life he had passed many years. He was visited by a hermit, whose cell was in the near mountains, and who was recognised every where as a magician. He understood to awaken in the morose knight the taste for palmistry, astrology and other secrets arts, and after repeated visits, won his interest so much for these things, that instruction in the same formed Gilgens favourite occupation. The knight had the hope by the black-art to open a connection with the world of spirits, and thereby obtain knowledge of hidden treasure, as well as the possibility, to raise them, — an endeavour, which in those times was not unusual, and as the legend was, had already often been richly rewarded.

Gerlinde was and remained her father's favourite, and his highest joy. For her principally it was that he strove for money and property, so that once, a rich heiress she might be the wish of all knights, not only for her fortune as she promised to be, but by her beauty and grace. Her bodily charms began to develop themselves in a surprising manner, already with her thirteenth year, and as well proportioned as her mother, she appeared to have inherited fortunately her virtues, and a quiet almost melancholy manner rendered her tender traits still more interesting.

It was on a spring-evening, that the knight silent and absorbed sat in his armchair. The hermit had just left him, and his exertions, by all magical operations to find out, according to tradition, an immense treasure in the mountain, had remained without effect. However the chiromancer had left him with the assurance, that he would certainly succeed in pointing out the place, latest in seven days, by the beginning of a complete eclipse of the moon; but the knight doubted so much the more of the success, because already many similar assertions of the magician had proved themselves false.

The weather was rough and uncomfortable; the wind howled round the towers and bastions of the castle, the weather-vane creaked, and the clouds hurried past. All nature seemed to be in revolution, and only with attention, could one hear, the

watcher's horn at such an unusual hour. Scarcely had these tones ceased, as a groom entered to announce, there was a strange little man standing before the door who demanded a night's-lodging. His appearance was so singular and strange, that the porter hesitated to open, and therefore had sent to learn the knight's wishes. The knight, inquisitive to see the guest, went to the door, and perceived by the pale light of the moon, momentarily shining through the clouds, —

A dwarf scarcely six span tall,
In scarlet coloured garment,
Flowing over his shoulders as a pall,
The grey-locked hair seemed to torment.

A small yellow cap, in tassels rich,
First narrow then wide, as a pear,
Ascended almost like a crown, which,
The deeply feared-brow seemed to bear.

He twirled a small staff in the air
And unintelligibly talked —
Appearing a Being of precipice rare
As if from deep ravine he walked.

The hermit had already warned the knight against an inimical gnome-tribe; he therefore called rudely and indignantly to the dwarf: „What is your wish?“ „Let me enter“, it echoed, „I wish

refreshment and lodging for the night; to-morrow I shall travel farther, and will reward you for the service of love.“ „With nothing“, replied Gilgen, whom the deep bass of the stranger highly-displeased, „such rascality does not come into my castle. You were the right one, to bewitch my cattle, and corn and eggs carry away through the air, and as reward to trouble me in some manner. March off, to your equals, and do not trouble me any longer.“ So calling out, he shut the window and hastened back; the dwarf murmured something to himself, and disappeared in the bushes.

The next morning Gilgen went hunting and only returned late in the afternoon, and then learned to his great astonishment that Gerlinde had disappeared. She had not returned from a promenade, which she had taken alone, and notwithstanding all the searchings of the servants, she could not be found. Immediately all the men-servants were obliged to mount and rummage the country in all directions. The knight himself did not regard fatigue and weakness; he mounted his best charger and searched through mountain and valley, forest and field, in calling out the name of his loved child. Coming to a mountain, called the Kedrich, he met a shepherd boy of whom he inquired concerning his daughter. The boy informed him, that at noon he had seen three dwarfs in red mantles, who had led-away on horseback, a beautiful maiden of about fourteen years, and they

had disappeared under the alder trees of the mountain. Beside himself with grief Gilgen rode as near as possible to the Kedrich, and there called-out three times: „Gerlinde, where are you?“ Scarcely had he done so, as he perceived on the summit of the inaccessible mountain-cone his child, that longingly stretched out her arms towards him. But behind the maiden stood the same gnome, who yesterday had demanded admittance to the castle, and mockingly the dwarf called to him: „That is the reward for your Hospitality.“

What was to be done? To climb the rocky mountain was impossible; Hitherto nobody had ventured, to make the trial, for it was known, the crevices could not be hewn. Yet the knight would make himself a road. A number of workmen appeared the next day with chisels, axes, and hammers; but they could not work the hard rock, and after fatiguing themselves the whole day, a shower of stones fell upon them from the height and drove them away. Despairing of all, the knight hastened, although the night had already commenced, to the hermit's hut. He related to him, what had occurred, and the old man sank into a deep meditation, then he lit a fire, boiled a beverage from all sorts of herbs, in stirring which sparks crackled, and he muttered unintelligible words, then he poured the fluid into a hole in the wall, where they sparkled in a thousand flames and thereby spoke loudly:

„Regard here from your flaring throne
On your servant and faithful son,
Hear my deep, profound request
And, be executed my behest.

The on Kedrich, living gnomes,
A knight's child have stolen;
Thee father is in pitiful distress
For his child, his heart's mistress.

Oh! help with your whole might,
You master of the midnight,
Thee a pair of owls bring I you
And a goat as sacrifice true.“

As soon as he had spoken these conjuring words, there began a fearful noise in the chimney; the wind whistled through doors and windows with cutting tones, so that the knight was overcome with horror and anxiety. After a time the magician murmured articulate sounds, and directly it was again still. Then he said to Gilgen: „Return home, knight, and hope for the best. On the very same day, that I will deliver you a treasure, I hope also, to free your daughter from the malicious power of the dwarf.“

Somewhat quieted Gilgen returned to his castle, and the next morning the Hermit announced to him, that the subterranean prince, to whom he called, had given the following answer:

„A black knight, and horse as black,
With fine arms for attack,
In dream, he the maid already saw,
Whom to save, Kedrich will draw.“

The denoted black knight must also be waited for. On the third day towards evening a black knight really appeared at the castle, in black armour, and on a black charger, and inquired after a very young maiden who had in a dream appeared to him, and whom he was destined to save from some great danger. Who was happier than Gilgen? The guest, who named himself Ruthelm, was heartily welcomed, and the next morning early saw the two knights riding to the Hermit, where further proceedings were spoken about and directly commenced.

All three went to a height opposite Kedrich, and crept into a cavern at its base. Here the magician lit a large fire and threw a quantity of magical perfume into the flame, in murmuring the form of incantation. The knight Ruthelm was obliged to place himself in a circle, which the magician designated on the ground, and before long, it began to be animated in the depths of the cavern. By the light of the clear flaring fire the astonished knight saw a most wonderful apparition:

From dark rocky lap well'd
Of dwarfs a great multitude bow'd,
Soon was the wide cavern held,
By the cries of the lamenting crowd.

It was their chalk-like faces
In colour like their clothes,
Creeping about as twilight graces
Filling the cavern with living throes.

The chief and tallest of them advanced to
Ruthelm, bowed seven times to the earth and said:

„Are you the selected knight,
The noble maiden's bold adder,
So speak if it please your might,
We begin to build the ladder.“

The knight consented and directly the dwarfs
hastened into the wood. Then began carpenting,
hammering, sawing, and cutting which lasted till
evening. Then the dwarf-king again stepped be-
fore the knight and repeated:

„What us the master of the depths found,
Of water-abyss and fire-gulf bound,
Commanded, is before dark night
Completed by diligence of our might.

Then ascend, fighter, plead
By seven hundred steps not fatigued
The ladder to the mountains rally,
To be the tender maiden's ally.

There above, are star'd
To you cunningness sped;
Therefore be on your guard,
Else they will strike you dead.

Consider are they
The known red gnomes
Secure on Kederich's stones
Destine you their prey."

Scarcely had he said this, so the whole swarm of dwarfish carpenters passed quickly into the cavern and disappeared; but their work, the gigantic ladder, stood leaning against the steep wall of the rock. The knight Ruthelm prepared himself, to commence the dangerous ascent; the Hermit put a miraculous ring on his finger, and recommended, to turn the Talisman in the moment of danger. The twilight had meanwhile begun, and the party remaining behind passed the night in the wood, curious, to learn the success of the ladder-way.

Notwithstanding the severe climbing, the knight could not reach the height before day-break. Firstly, as the morning fog from the valley dissipated itself, he saw that he was on a wide plain, on which the most luxuriant landscape, and a charming garden was spread before him. He could scarcely believe in his eyes, and his astonishment increased as he wandered through the garden; for all the fruits of the tropics grew here in abundance and in incomparable beauty. Soon the adventurer saw a crystal palace, before which two red gnomes, evidently should have stood as sentinels, but fortunately had fallen asleep. Without much reflection, he cut off their heads, then forced his way

into the castle, and here he met the ravisher of Gerlinde. Immediately they seized their swords, and began a violent struggle. The little one fought quickly and cleverly, he was obliged to avoid Ruthelm's heavy blows; but as he could do nothing against his bravery, he had recourse to magic, and suddenly he sat heavily on the knight's neck. He did not neglect, to turn the ring, and in consequence he was able to rid himself of his enemy, and throw him to the ground. He then threw himself on the sorcerer, and in threatening him with a dagger, he extorted the confession of Gerlinde's place of concealment. Then he stabbed the gnome, and hastened to the place, where he hoped to find the imprisoned.

After having wandered through the magical apartments of the miraculous palace, he found the hiding place of Gerlinde. She reposed in an agreeable morning slumber, and the knight thought never to have seen a more charming creature. For a time he stood surprised and dazzled by so much beauty, and he could not resolve, to disturb her sweet sleep. At last he awoke the beauty with a kiss, and in begging her not to be frightened, he told her, he was come, to free her and to conduct her to her father's arms. The dear child believed to dream, as she heard such words from an unknown person; however she willingly resigned herself to the guidance of the knight. Both now traversed the long row of apartments, and after

they had loaded themselves with the valuable jewels, which had been employed for ornamenting the rooms, they entered the garden. Scarcely had they passed through it, when it, with castle and beautiful environs, sank into the earth with a terrible crash, so that nothing remained but the bare rocks. Horrified they hastened to the ladder, and with great difficulty they descended it; however they fortunately succeeded, and with indescribable joy father and daughter embraced each other.

Some weeks afterwards the knight Ruthelm led Gerlinde as his wife to a fine castle, which he possessed in Lower-Franken, the father sold his, and not to live alone, left with his children. As the jewels which they had brought from the magic castle were of immense value, the knight Gilgen with his family possessed riches in abundance, and also the Hermit received a large share of the treasure. But in the neighbourhood of Lorch one has since heard nothing more of the malicious gnomes of the Kederich, who had done so much evil to the inhabitants of the vicinity.

The Archer.

Near Lorch, on the boundary of the Rhine-valley stand the ruins of the former castle Fürsteneck. Knight Oswald, owner of this castle, an excellent archer, lived in bitter enmity with Wilm

von Saneck, a neighbouring nobleman, who attempted by all sorts of cunning snares to get him in his power. He succeeded in doing this, in attacking Oswald from an ambush, as accompanied by a groom he was returning home. The prisoner was dragged to Saneck, and thrown into the depths of a tower, and soon afterwards cruelly deprived of his sight.

At Fürsteneck it was at first believed he had been killed by robbers; but as there were no indications of such an act, so Edwin, Oswald's only son, knowing the malice and cunning of Saneck, had the suspicion, his father could have fallen into his power.

Resolved, to venture all to procure certitude upon this point, Edwin disguised himself as an itinerant singer, in which he was assisted by his dexterity in playing the harp, and wandered towards Saneck. Near the castle he rested under a tree, and directed his regards principally to a large tower of the castle, where as a foreboding told him, was his father's prison.

He had not long lain there, as a man joined him, who seemed to be a peasant from the neighbourhood and accosted him in these terms: „Why do you regard so particularly that strong tower? that is a cage, in which they confine birds after they have well plucked off their feathers.“ „Is it a prison then?“ asked Edwin. „Certainly“, he replied, and made confidential by the young man's

friendly conversation, and more so by a touching song which he sung, the unknown related, how he had been an unseen spectator, that in that tower a knight and his servant had been imprisoned. Edwin had much trouble, to repress and hide the impression, which this assertion made on him, and tried to learn other particulars; but all, he could learn was, that in some days there would be a grand banquet at Saneck. He determined, to use this circumstance in order to examine the place, to visit the castle disguised as a singer. On the mentioned day he repaired thither. Jubilation and noisy joy echoed from the saloons, and as he entered, the heads of the persons present were already much heated by wine. They welcomed the strange singer, and readily listened to his songs; but after drinking so much that they were partly intoxicated, they paid no more attention to him, and he remained unnoticed. More excited by wine than his table-companion, the knight Wilm talked in a very lively manner with him; and the masked singer neared to overhear their conversation.

„Do you know too“, said the neighbour to Saneck, „one suspects you of capturing the knight Oswald of Fürsteneck, and of having imprisoned him.“ „Hum“, answered the other, „all tales are not lies.“ „One asserts too“, continued the other, „you have even blinded him.“ „Well“, answered the other, „what does it signify if a candle is blown out, or goes out, that is the same thing.“ „But it

is a pity“, said a third, who heard the conversation, „for the art of archery which Oswald possessed in so high a degree.“

„I will wager, he will still hit his object if one makes it known to him“, said another knight. „Done, I will wager that he will not“, called out in arrogant inebriation Saneck, and ordered the prisoner to be brought before him. Edwin who had heard all, could scarcely restrain himself, for grief and anger almost made him mad, as his father's pity exciting figure entered the saloon. All present sprang to their feet, to be spectators of the result of the quickly known wager. As Wilm made the unfortunate prisoner acquainted with the wager, and ordered bow and arrows to be given to him, a sudden thought seemed to penetrate through the blind knight; convulsively he seized the weapons, and said: „Knight Saneck give me a sign where you place the object?“ „Here“, he answered, „on this table, I place the cup which you are to hit.“

„I shall hit my object“, said in the same moment Oswald, the arrow flew deep into — the heart of Saneck. A wild cry arose; but Edwin sprang forward, stepped before his father, and called loudly: „I am the son of this poor, against all laws of chivalry, imprisoned and blinded man! Whichever of you who loves honour and right, will approve of his act, whoever thinks otherwise, I will answer with my sword.“ All were astonished, but most of the knights present declared themselves