

Altenaar.

The last knight of Altenaar.

In the rocky and narrow valley, which flows through the Aar, now splashing as a torrent, now foaming and rushing as a wood-stream, lies on the top of one of the many precipitous mountain-cones which wreath the bank, the ruined remains of the formerly powerful castle Altenaar.

In times of yore the race of the same named possessor and inhabitant of this castle ended by a terrible death, still known by the people, and never since the seat of a noble of the country, although the castle was long stately and inhabitable. Kurt of Altenaar, the last of his race, a liberty-loving courageous knight, who energetically opposed the presumption of the Bishops and Princes of his country, suddenly saw himself inclosed in his castle by enemies. The resistance was courageous, and worthy of an honourable knight, the rocks defied the attacks, and many a mercenary fell by the fists of Kurt and his followers, or was struck by the throw of heavy stones. The Siege however continued, and the want of provisions was at last the most dangerous enemy of the garrison.

Kurt could name the day on which he should be obliged to share his last loaf among his comrades and then surrender or perish. But there occurred

on the side of the besiegers, if not want of provisions still moroseness and discouragement. The extremity of the garrison was unknown to them, and they believed, never to be able to become masters of the castle, the height and resistance of which mocked their boldest attacks.

Already the Bishops and Princes saw the near outburst of discontent in their ranks, daily already a number of their servants and vassals deserted from a dangerous useless struggle, and already revolt and disobedience threatened a complete dissolution of the besieging army, as there appeared on the highest tower of the castle, irradiated by the first morning rays, in splendid, complete equipment and mounted, the venerable Kurt. The tall noble figure, the long silver hair, the marble paleness of his face, over which waved the feather of his helmet the white steel armour on milk coloured charger imparted to the knight something August, almost Spiritual, and expectantly every eye, in a large circle was raised to the tower. The extended right hand of the knight signified that he wished to speak, and as the besiegers listened anxiously, he spoke audibly so: „See here the last man and the last steed of all, which breathed in the tower. Hunger has snatched away wife, child, comrades; none is left. But they died free from hated tyranny and ignominious yoke. And so I die as I lived, worthy of a knight, unconstrained and free.“ After these words he