

Cleve.

The Swan knight.

The young Countess of Cleve was profoundly sad and in great distress. A bold daring Vassal had not only had the temerity to announce his disobedience, but made himself master of her castle, and her liberty, even demanded her hand and with it the government of her lands. She saw no means to save herself from her rebellious subject; for no knight of her country would venture to challenge an opponent, whose dexterity in arms, gigantic figure, and bodily strength allowed no hope of a successful result. Unceasingly the severely oppressed Lady directed her fervent prayers to Heaven, that an assistant might appear in her need, and the heart of a combatant might be roused, to free her from the burdensome importunate Vassal. On her chaplet, according to the legend, is said to have hung a small silver bell with the wonderful property, that the lightest tone of it in the distance, however only in a particular direction, won in strength and sound, and a distant king is said to have regarded it as a cry for help, and a demand to send assistance up the Rhine to the oppressed innocent. This, perhaps originating in a dream, the king regarded as an adventurous opportunity for his only son, and it was accepted

by him with that ardour, with which the noble knights of Antiquity seized every occasion, to lend their protecting arms to the weak, and particularly to women.

A swan appeared on the waves of the stream; by a golden chain it drew a boat, and so placed itself on the bank, as if demanding to be used, from where the king's son longingly regarded the mysterious distance. To the young man it seemed a manifest sign and command of the higher powers, to step into the boat, and scarcely had he done so, when the swan ascended the Rhine, and disappeared from the sight of the astonished king.

Meanwhile the day had arrived for the marriage of the master become rebel with the Countess, and she could not escape this destiny, unless she found a knight, bold enough, to challenge the villain to mortal combat.

The anxious one, who should dress herself for the festival, and already considered herself as lost, saw from her window, a swan drawing a boat up the Rhine, in which boat reposed a sleeping knight. Immediately she recollected, that a pious Nun had once prophesied to her, a sleeping youth would once save her from great danger; and joyfully surprised, the miracle amazed her, as the youth awoke and landed, the swan and boat immediately disappearing.

The knights turned his steps direct to the

castle, fell on one knee before the Countess, and requested to be allowed to combat for her possession. Joyfully the request was granted, and directly preparations were made in the court of the castle for this trial by arms.

Furious, like an enraged boar, the proud Vassal accepted the combat. Many participators, partial to the Countess beating hearts, anxiously awaited this, to them, unfortunate struggle, believing the young man, although expert and strong, would be obliged to succumb to the bodily size of his powerful opponent.

But the just cause triumphed; heavily struck by the sword the villain fell dead, and with exclamations of joy, the victor knelt to the saved Countess. With glances of sincere love she uttered her thanks; but not only with words did she praise the Hero, for some weeks later, he conducted the Countess to the altar, where they were united in the bonds of matrimony.

Not easily could a wife be happier than the Countess was with her husband, who returned her love with the sincerest fidelity.

Only one thing inquieted the heart of the Countess; viz no one knew whence the knight came and to what family he belonged. Before he engaged himself with her, she had been obliged to give him her solemn promise that she would never ask him concerning his home and name; for on this question, he had warningly

alluded his destiny was connected, and if she did so, he would be necessitated, for ever, to leave her. The Countess had vowed to obey his wishes, and years passed without their happiness being disturbed, but increased by the growth of 3 sons promising to be an ornament to Chivalry.

But the more excellent and strong the boys grew, so much the more annoying was it to the mother's heart, that they could not enjoy their father's name, which was certainly of a higher origin. Once therefore as she could not more resist the impulse of her heart, she entreated her husband, not to leave her sons without their father's name, which was what the lowest inherited from his father, and not to wait till they would be regarded as bastards and mocked. Whence he came, and his name, therefore he could not longer keep secret.

Pale and frightened he heard her words, and then exclaimed in a most grievous voice: „Woe, unhappy mother, what have you done! destroyed our happiness by your words! From this moment I must leave you, and never return.“ Then he had his silver-horn blown to the waters, and distantly it echoed in the silent night. At day-break the swan appeared swimming over the waves; but not bringing felicity, as before. The husband stepped into the boat, before the eyes of the terrified, chilled Countess, and descending, the mighty swan returned, and was never seen