

Undine

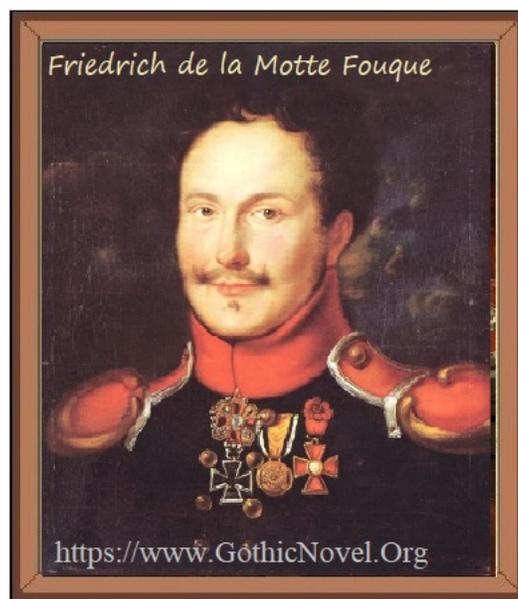
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PREFACE NOTE

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UNDINE.

CHAPTER I.

How the Knight came to the Fisherman's Cottage.

ONCE—it may be some hundreds of years ago—there lived a good old Fisherman, who, on a fine summer's evening, was sitting before the door, mending his nets. He dwelt in a land of exceeding beauty. The green slope upon which he had built his hut stretched far out into a great lake; and it seemed either that the cape, enamored of the glassy blue waters, had pressed forward into their bosom, or that the lake had lovingly folded in its arms the blooming promontory, with her waving grass and flowers, and the refreshing shade of her tall trees. Each bade the other welcome, and increased its own beauty by so doing. This lovely nook was scarcely ever visited by mankind, except by the Fisher-

man and his family. For behind the promontory lay a very wild forest, which, besides being gloomy and pathless, had too bad a name as the resort of wondrous spirits and goblins to be crossed by any one who could help it. Yet the pious old Fisherman went through it without being molested, whenever he walked to a large city beyond the forest to dispose of the costly fish that he caught in the lake. For him, indeed, there was little danger, even in that forest; for his thoughts were almost all thoughts of devotion, and his custom was to carol forth to Heaven a loud and heart-felt hymn on first setting foot within the treacherous shades.

As he sat this evening most peacefully over his nets, he was startled in an unwonted manner by a rustling sound in the forest, like that of a man and horse; and the noise came nearer and nearer. The dreams he had had in many a stormy night of the spirits of the forest started up before his mind, particularly the image of a gigantic, long, snow-white man, who kept nodding his head mysteriously. Nay, as he raised his eyes and looked into the forest, he could fancy he saw through the thick screen of leaves the nodding creature advance towards him. But he soon composed himself, recollecting that even in the heart of the woods nothing had ever befallen him: much less here, in the open air, could the bad spirits have power to touch him. He, moreover, repeated a text from the Bible aloud and earnestly, which quite restored his courage, and he almost laughed to see how his fancy had misled him. The white nodding

man suddenly resolved himself into a little brook he knew of old, which gushed bubbling out of the wood, and emptied itself into the lake. And the rustling had been caused by a horseman in gorgeous attire, who now came forwards towards the hut from beneath the trees.

He wore a scarlet mantle over his purple, gold-embroidered jerkin; a plume of red and purple feathers waved over his gold-colored barret cap; and from his golden belt hung a glittering jewelled sword. The white courser which carried him was of lighter make than the generality of chargers, and trod so airily that the enamelled turf seemed scarcely to bend under him. The aged fisherman could not quite shake off his uneasiness, although he told himself that so noble a guest could bring him no harm, and accordingly doffed his hat courteously, and interrupted his work when he approached.

The Knight reined in his horse, and asked whether they could both obtain one night's shelter.

"As to your horse, good sir," answered the Fisherman, "I have no better stable to offer him than the shady meadow, and no provender but the grass which grows upon it. But you shall yourself be heartily welcome to my poor house, and to the best of my supper and night lodging."

The stranger seemed quite content; he dismounted, and they helped each other to take off the horse's girth and saddle, after which

the Knight let him graze on the flowery pasture, saying to his host: "Even if I had found you less kind and hospitable, my good old man, you must have borne with me till tomorrow, for I see we are shut in by a wide lake, and Heaven forbid that I should cross the haunted forest again at nightfall!"

"We will not say much about that," replied the Fisherman; and he led his guest into the cottage.

There, close by the hearth, from whence a scanty fire shed its glimmering light over the clean little room, sat the Fisherman's old wife. When their noble guest came in, she rose to give him a kind welcome, but immediately resumed her place of honor without offering it to him, and the Fisherman said with a smile: "Do not take it amiss, young sir, if she does not give up to you the most comfortable place: it is the custom among us poor people that it should always belong to the oldest."

"Why, husband," said his wife quietly, "what are you thinking of? Our guest is surely a Christian gentleman, and how could it come into his kind young heart to turn old people out of their places? Sit down, my young lord," added she, turning to the Knight; "there stands a very comfortable chair for you; only remember it must not be too roughly handled, for one leg is not so steady as it has been." The Knight drew the chair carefully forwards, seated himself sociably, and soon felt quite at home in this little household, and as if he had just returned to it from a far journey.

The three friends began to converse openly and familiarly together. First the Knight asked a few questions about the forest, but the old man would not say much of that; least of all, said he, was it fitting to talk of such things at nightfall; but, on household concerns, and their own way of life, the old folks talked readily; and were pleased when the Knight told them of his travels, and that he had a castle near the source of the Danube, and that his name was Lord Huldbrand of Ringstetten. In the middle of their discourse, the stranger often observed a noise outside the small window, as if some one were dashing water against it. The old man knit his brows, and looked grave whenever this occurred: at last, when a great splash of water came full against the panes, and some found its way into the room, he could bear it no longer, but started up, crying: "Undine! will you never leave off these childish tricks,—when we have a stranger gentleman in the house too!" This produced silence outside, all but a sound of suppressed giggling, and the Fisherman said as he came back: "My honored guest, you must put up with this, and perhaps with many another piece of mischief; but she means no harm. It is our adopted child Undine: there is no breaking her of her childish ways, though she is eighteen years old now. But as I told you she is as good a child as ever lived, at bottom."

"Ay, so you may say!" rejoined his wife, shaking her head. "When you come home from fishing, or from a journey, her playfu.

nonsense may be pleasant enough. But to be keeping her out of mischief all day long, as I must do, and never get a word of sense from her nor a bit of help and comfort in my old age, is enough to weary the patience of a saint."

"Well, well," said the good man, "you feel towards Undine as I do towards the lake. Though its waves are apt enough to burst my banks and my nets, yet I love them for all that, and so do you love our pretty wench, with all her plaguy tricks. Don't you?"

"Why, one cannot be really angry with her, to be sure," said the dame, smiling.

Here the door flew open, and a beautiful fair creature tripped in, and said, playfully: "Well, father, you made game of me; where is your guest?" The next moment she perceived the Knight, and stood fixed in mute admiration; while Huldbrand gazed upon her lovely form, and tried to impress her image on his mind, thinking that he must avail himself of her amazement to do so, and that in a moment she would shrink away in a fit of bashfulness. But it proved otherwise. After looking at him a good while, she came up to him familiarly, knelt down beside him, and playing with a golden medal that hung from his rich chain, she said: "So, thou kind, thou beautiful guest! hast thou found us out in our poor hut at last? Why didst thou roam the world so many years without coming near us? Art come through the wild forest, my handsome friend?" The old woman allowed him no time to answer. She desired her to get up instantly, like a mod-

est girl, and to set about her work. But Undine, without replying, fetched a footstool and put it close to Huldbrand's chair, sat down there with her spinning, and said cheerfully: "I will sit and work here." The old man behaved as parents are apt to do with spoilt children. He pretended not to see Undine's waywardness, and was beginning to talk of something else: but she would not let him.— She said: "I asked our visitor where he came from, and he has not answered me yet."

"From the forest I came, you beautiful sprite," answered Huldbrand: and she continued:—

"Then you must tell me how you came there, and what wonderful adventures you had in it, for I know that nobody can escape without some."

Huldbrand could not help shuddering on being reminded of his adventures, and involuntarily glanced at the window, half expecting to see one of the strange beings he had encountered in the forest, grinning at him through it; but nothing was to be seen except the deep black night, which had now closed in. He recollected himself, and was just beginning his narrative, when the old man interposed: "Not just now, Sir Knight; this is no time for such tales."

But Undine jumped up passionately, put her beautiful arms akimbo, and standing before the Fisherman, exclaimed: "What, may not he tell his story, father? may not he? But I will have it: he must! He shall indeed! And she stamped

angrily with her pretty feet, but it was all done in so comical and graceful a manner, that Huldbrand thought her still more bewitching in her wrath than in her playful mood.

Not so the old man; his long restrained anger burst out uncontrolled. He scolded Undine smartly for her disobedience, and unmannerly conduct to the stranger, his wife chiming in.

Undine then said: "Very well, if you will be quarrelsome, and not let me have my own way, you may sleep alone in your smoky old hut!" and she shot through the door like an arrow, and rushed into the dark night.

CHAPTER II.

How Undine first came to the Fisherman.

HULDBRAND and the Fisherman sprang from their seats, and tried to catch the angry maiden, but before they could reach the house door, Undine had vanished far into the thick shades, and not a sound of her light footsteps was to be heard, by which to track her course. Huldbrand looked doubtfully at his host; he almost thought that the whole fair vision which had so suddenly plunged into the night, must be a continuation of the phantom way which had whirled around him in his pas-

slid through the forest. But the old man mumbled through his teeth: "It is not the first time she has served us so. And here are we, left in our anxiety, with a sleepless night before us; for who can tell what harm may befall her, all alone out of doors till daybreak?"

"Then let us be after her, good father, for God's sake!" cried Huldbrand, eagerly.

The old man replied: "Where would be the use? It were a sin to let you set off alone in pursuit of the foolish girl, and my old legs would never overtake such a will-with-the-wisp, even if we could guess which way she is gone."

"At least let us call her, and beg her to come back," said Huldbrand; and he began calling after her in most moving tones: "Undine! oh, Undine! do return!"

The old man shook his head, and said that all the shouting in the world would do no good, with such a willful little thing. But yet he could not himself help calling out from time to time in the darkness: "Undine! ah, sweet Undine! I entreat thee, come back this once."

The Fisherman's words proved true. Nothing was to be seen or heard of Undine; and as her foster-father would by no means suffer Huldbrand to pursue her, they had nothing for it but to go in again. They found the fire on the hearth nearly burnt out, and the dame, who did not take to heart Undine's flight and danger so much as her husband, was gone to bed. The old man blew the coals, laid on dry wood, and by the light of the reviving flames he found a flagon of wine, which he passed between himself

and his guest. "You are uneasy about that silly wench, Sir Knight," said he, "and we had better kill part of the night chatting and drinking than toss about in our beds trying to sleep in vain. Had not we?"

Huldbrand agreed: the Fisherman made him sit in his wife's empty armchair, and they both drank and talked together, as a couple of worthy friends should do. Whenever, indeed, there was the least stir outside the window, or even sometimes without any, one of them would look up and say: "There she comes." Then they would keep silence for a few moments, and as nothing came, resume their conversation, with a shake of the head and a sigh.

But as neither could think of much besides Undine, the best means they could devise for beguiling the time was that the Fisherman should relate, and the Knight listen to, the history of her first coming to the cottage. He began as follows:—

"One day, some fifteen years ago, I was carrying my fish through that dreary wood to the town. My wife stayed at home, as usual; and at that time she had a good and pretty reason for it,—the Lord had bestowed upon us (old as we already were) a lovely babe. It was a girl, and so anxious were we to do our best for the little treasure, that we began to talk of leaving our beautiful home, in order to give our darling a good education among other human beings. With us poor folks wishing is one thing and doing is quite another, Sir Knight; but what then? we can only try our

best. Well, then, as I plodded on, I turned over the scheme in my head. I was loth to leave our own dear nook, and it made me shudder to think, in the din and brawls of the town, so it is here we shall soon live, or in some place nearly as bad! Yet I never murmured against our good God, but rather thanked him in secret for His last blessing; nor can I say that I met with anything extraordinary in the forest, either coming or going: indeed nothing to frighten me has ever crossed my path. The Lord was ever with me in the awful shades."

Here he uncovered his bald head, and sat for a time in silent prayer; then putting his cap on again, he continued: "On this side of the wood it was,—on this side, that the sad news met me. My wife came towards me with eyes streaming like two fountains: she was in deep mourning. 'O, good Heaven!' I called out, 'where is our dear child? Tell me!'

"'Gone, dear husband,' she replied; and we went into our cottage, together, weeping silently. I looked for the little corpse, and then first heard how it had happened. My wife had been sitting on the shore with the child, and playing with it, all peace and happiness, when the babe all at once leaned over, as if she saw something most beautiful in the water; there she sat smiling, sweet angel, and stretching out her little hands; but the next moment she darted suddenly out of her arms, and down into the smooth waters. I made much search for the poor little corpse, but in vain; not a trace of her could I find.

“When evening was come, we, childless parents, were sitting together in the hut, silent; neither of us had a mind to speak, even if the tears had let us. We were looking idly into the fire. Just then something made a noise at the door. It opened, and a beautiful little maid, of three or four years old, stood there gaily dressed, and smiling in our faces. We were struck dumb with surprise, and at first hardly knew if she were a little human being, or only an empty shadow. But I soon saw that her golden hair and gay clothes were dripping wet, and it struck me the little fairy must have been in the water, and distressed for help. ‘Wife,’ said I, ‘our dear child had no friend to save her: shall we not do for others what would have made our remaining days so happy, if any one had done it for us?’ We undressed the child, put her to bed, and gave her a warm drink, while she never said a word, but kept smiling at us with her sky-blue eyes.

“The next morning we found that she had done herself no harm; and I asked her who were her parents, and what had brought her here; but she gave me a strange, confused answer. I am sure she must have been born far away, for these fifteen years have we kept her, without ever finding out where she came from; and besides, she is apt to let drop such marvellous things in her talk, that you might think she had lived in the moon. She will speak of golden castles, of crystal roofs, and I can’t tell what besides. The only thing she has told us clearly is that as she was sailing

on the lake with her mother, she fell into the water, and when she recovered her senses found herself lying under these trees, in safety and comfort, upon our pretty shore.

“So now we had a serious, anxious charge thrown upon us. To keep and bring up the foundling, instead of our poor drowned child,—that was soon resolved upon. But who should tell us if she had yet been baptised or no? She knew not how to answer the question. That she was one of God’s creatures, made for His glory and service, that much she knew, and anything that would glorify and please Him she was willing to have done. So my wife and I said to each other: ‘If she has never been baptised, there is no doubt it should be done; and if she has, better do too much than too little in a matter of such consequence.’ We therefore began to seek a good name for the child. Dorothea seemed to us the best; for I had once heard that meant God’s gift; and she had indeed been sent us by Him as a special blessing, to comfort us in our misery. But she would not hear of that name. She said Undine was what her parents used to call her, and Undine she would still be. That I thought sounded like a heathen name, and occurred in no calendar; and I took counsel with a priest in the town about it. He also objected to the name Undine, and at my earnest request came home with me, through the dark forest, in order to baptise her. The little creature stood before us looking so gay and charming in her holiday clothes that the priest’s heart warmed

towards her, and what with coaxing and willfulness she got the better of him, so that he clean forgot all the objections he had thought of to the name Undine. She was therefore so christened, and behaved particularly well and decently during the sacred rite, wild and unruly as she had always been before. For what my wife said just now was too true—we have indeed found her the wildest little fairy! If I were to tell you all—”

Here the Knight interrupted the Fisherman, to call his attention to a sound of roaring waters, which he had noticed already in the pauses of the old man's speech, and which now rose in fury as it rushed past the window. They both ran to the door. By the light of the newly risen moon they saw the brook which gushed out of the forest breaking wildly over its banks and whirling along stones and branches in its eddying course. A storm, as if awakened by the uproar, burst from the heavy clouds that were chasing each other across the moon; the lake howled under the wings of the wind; the trees on the shore groaned from top to bottom and bowed themselves over the rushing waters. “Undine! for God's sake, Undine!” cried the Knight and the old man. No answer was to be heard; and heedless now of any danger to themselves they ran off in different directions, calling her in frantic anxiety.





CHAPTER III.

How they found Undine again.

THE longer Huldbrand wandered in vain pursuit for Undine, the more bewildered he became. The idea that she might be a mere spirit of the woods sometimes returned upon him with double force; nay, amid the howling of waves and storm, the groaning of trees, and the wild commotion of the once peaceful spot, he might have fancied the whole promontory, its hut and its inhabitants, to be a delusion of magic, but that he still heard in the distance the Fisherman's piteous cries of "Undine!" and the old housewife's loud prayers and hymns above the whistling of the blast.

At last he found himself on the margin of the overflowing stream, and saw it by the moonlight rushing violently along, close to the edge of the mysterious forest, so as to make an island of the peninsula on which he stood. "Gracious Heaven!" thought he, "Undine may have ventured a step or two into that awful forest,—perhaps in her pretty waywardness, just because I would not tell her my story, and the swollen stream has cut her off, and left her weeping alone among the spectres!" A cry of terror escaped him, and he clambered down the bank by means of some stones and fallen

trees, hoping to wade or swim across the flood, and seek the fugitive beyond it. Fearful and unearthly visions did indeed float before him, like those he had met with in the morning, beneath these groaning, tossing branches. Especially he was haunted by the appearance of a tall, white man, whom he remembered but too well, grinning and nodding at him from the opposite bank. However, the thought of these grim monsters did but urge him onwards, as he recollected Undine, now perhaps in deadly fear among them, and alone.

He had laid hold of a stout pine branch, and, leaning on it, was standing in the eddy, though scarcely able to stem it, but he stepped boldly forwards, when a sweet voice exclaimed close behind him: "Trust him not,--trust not! The old fellow is tricky,—the stream!"

Well he knew those silver tones. The moon was just disappearing behind a cloud, and he stood amid the deepening shades, made dizzy as the water shot by him with the speed of an arrow. Yet he would not desist. "And if thou art not truly there, if thou flittest before me an empty shadow, I care not to live: I will melt into air like thee, my beloved Undine!" This he cried aloud, and strode further into the flood.

"Look round, then; look round, fair youth!" he heard just behind him; and, looking round, he beheld by the returning moonbeams, on a fair island left by the flood, under some thickly laterlaced branches, Undine, all smiles and oveliness, nestling in the flowery grass. How

much more joyfully than before did the young man use his pine staff to cross the waters! A few strides brought him through the flood that had parted them; and he found himself at her side, on the nook of soft grass, securely sheltered under the shade of the old trees. Undine half arose, and twined her arms around his neck in the green arbor, making him sit down by her on the turf. "Here you shall tell me all, my own friend," said she in a low whisper: "the cross old folks cannot overhear us. And our pretty bower of leaves is well worth their wretched hut."

"This is Heaven!" cried Huldbrand, as he clasped in his arms the beautiful flatterer.

Meantime the old man had reached the banks of the stream, and he called out: "So, Sir Knight, when I had made you welcome, as one honest man should another, here are you making love to my adopted child, to say nothing of your leaving me to seek her, alone and terrified, all night."

"I have but this moment found her, old man!" cried the Knight in reply.

"Well, I am glad of that," said the Fisherman. Now, then, bring her back to me at once.

But Undine would not hear of it. She had rather, she said, go quite away into the wild woods with the handsome stranger than return to the hut, where she had never had her own way, and which the Knight must sooner or later leave. Embracing Huldbrand, she sang with peculiar charm and grace:—

*From misty cave the mountain wave
Leapt out and sought the main!
The Ocean's foam she made her home,
And ne'er returned again.*

The old man wept bitterly as she sang, but this did not seem to move her. She continued to caress her lover till at length he said: "Undine, the poor old man's grief goes to my heart, if not to yours. Let us go back to him."

Astonished, she raised her large blue eyes towards him, and after a pause answered slowly and reluctantly: "To please you, I will: whatever you like pleases me too. But the old man yonder must first promise me that he will let you tell me all you saw in the forest, and the rest we shall see about."

"Only come back: do come!" cried the Fisherman, and not another word could he say. At the same moment he stretched his arms over the stream towards her, and nodded his head by way of giving her the desired promise; and as his white hair fell over his face, it gave him a strange look, and reminded Huldbrand involuntarily of the nodding, white man in the woods. Determined, however, that nothing should stop him, the young Knight took the fair damsel in his arms, and carried her through the short space of foaming flood which divided the island from the mainland. The old man fell upon Undine's neck and rejoiced, and kissed her in the fullness of his heart. His aged wife also came up, and welcomed their recovered child most warmly. All re-

proaches were forgotten; the more so as Undine seemed to have left her sauciness behind, and overwhelmed her foster parents with kind words and caresses.

When these transports of joy had subsided, and they began to look about them, the rosy dawn was just shedding its glow over the lake, the storm had ceased, and the birds were singing merrily on the wet branches. As Undine insisted upon hearing the story of the Knight's adventure, the old folks cheerfully indulged her. Breakfast was set out under the trees between the cottage and the lake; and they sat down before it with glad hearts, Undine placing herself resolutely on the grass at the Knight's feet. Huldbrand began his narrative as follows.

CHAPTER IV.

Of what had befallen the Knight in the Forest.

“ABOUT eight days ago I rode into the imperial city beyond this forest. A grand tournament and tilting was held there, and I spared neither lance nor steed. As I stood still a moment to rest myself, in a pause of the noble game, and had just given my helmet in charge to a squire, my eye fell upon a most beautiful woman, who stood, richly adorned, in one of the galleries, looking on. I inquired

her name, and found that this charming lady was Bertalda, the adopted daughter of one of the principal lords in the neighborhood. I observed that her eye was upon me too, and, as is the way with us young knights, I had not been slack before, but I now fought more bravely still. That evening I was Bertalda's partner in the dance, and so I was again every evening during the jousting."

Here a sudden pain in his left hand, which hung beside him, checked the Knight in his tale, and he looked at his hand. Undine's pearly teeth had bitten one of his fingers sharply, and she looked very black at him. But the next moment that look changed into an expression of tender sadness, and she whispered low: "So you are faithless too!" Then she hid her face in her hands, and the Knight proceeded with his tale, though staggered and perplexed.

"That Bertalda is a high-spirited, extraordinary maid. On the second day she charmed me far less than the first, and on the third less still. But I remained with her because she was more gracious to me than to any other knight, and so it fell out that I asked her in jest for one of her gloves. 'You shall have it,' said she. 'if you will visit the haunted forest alone, and bring me an account of it.' It was not that I cared much for her glove, but the words had been spoken, and a Knight that loves his fame does not wait to be twice urged to such a feat."

"I thought she had loved you," interrupted Undine.



Undine, Huldbrand, and the Priest in the forest.

"It looked like it," he replied.

"Well," cried the maiden, laughing, "she must be a fool indeed! To drive *him* away whom she loves! and into a haunted forest besides! The forest and its mysteries might have waited long enough, for me."

"I set out yesterday morning," continued the Knight, smiling kindly at Undine. "The stems of the trees looked so bright in the morning sunshine, as it played upon the green turf, and the leaves whispered together so pleasantly, that I could not but laugh at those who imagined any evil to lurk in such a beautiful place. I shall very soon have ridden through it and back again, thought I, pushing on cheerily, and, before I was aware of it, I found myself in the depths of its leafy shades, and the plains behind me far out of sight. It then occurred to me, that I was likely enough to lose my way in this wilderness of trees, and that this might be the only real danger to which the traveller was here exposed. So I halted, and took notice of the course of the sun: it was now high in the heavens.

"On looking up, I saw something black among the boughs of a tall oak. I took it for a bear, and seized my rifle: but it addressed me in a human voice, most hoarse and grating, saying: 'If I did not break off the twigs up here, what should we do tonight for fuel to roast you with, Sir Simpleton?' And he gnashed his teeth and rattled the boughs so as to startle my horse, which ran away with me

before I could make out what kind of a devil it was."

"You should not mention *his* name," said the Fisherman, crossing himself. His wife silently did the same, while Undine turned her beaming eyes upon her lover, and said:

"He is safe now: it is well they did not really roast him. Go on, pretty youth."

He continued: "My terrified horse had almost dashed me against many a trunk and branch. He was running down with fright and heat, and yet there was no stopping him. At length he rushed madly towards the brink of a stony precipice; but here, as it seemed to me, a tall, white man threw himself across the plunging animal's path, and made him start back and stop. I then recovered the control of him, and found that instead of a white man my preserver was no other than a bright, silvery brook, which gushed down from a hill beside me, checking and crossing my horse in his course."

"Thanks, dear brook!" cried Undine, clapping her hands. But the old man shook his head, and seemed lost in thought.

"Scarcely had I settled myself in the saddle, and got firm hold of my reins again," proceeded Huldbrand, "when an extraordinary little man sprang up beside me, wizen and hideous beyond measure. He was of a yellow-brown hue, and his nose almost as big as the whole of his body. He grinned at me in the most fulsome way with his wide mouth, bowing and scraping every moment. As I could not abide these

antics, I thanked him abruptly, pulled my still trembling horse another way, and thought I would seek some other adventure, or perhaps go home: for daring my wild gallop the sun had passed his meridian, and was now declining westward. But the little imp sprang round like lightning, and stood in front of my horse again.

“‘Make way!’ cried I impatiently; ‘the animal is unruly, and may run over you.’”

“‘Oh,’ snarled the imp, with a laugh more disgusting than before, ‘first give me a piece of coin for having caught your horse so nicely. But for me, you and your pretty beast would be lying in the pit down yonder. Whew!’”

“‘Only have done with your grimaces,’ said I, ‘and take your money along with you, though it is all a lie. Look there, it was that honest brook that saved me, not you,—you pitiful wretch?’ So saying, I dropped a gold coin into his comical cap, which he held out towards me like a beggar.

“I trotted on, but he still followed screaming, and, with inconceivable rapidity, whisked up to my side. I put my horse into a gallop: he kept pace with me, though with much difficulty, and twisted his body into various frightful and ridiculous attitudes, crying at each step as he held up the money: ‘Bad coin! bad gold! bad gold! bad coin!’ And this he shrieked in such a ghastly tone that you would have expected him to drop down dead after each cry.

“At last I stopped, much vexed, and asked: ‘What do you want with your shrieks. Take

another gold coin, — take two if you will, only let me alone.’

“He began his odious smirking again, and snarled: ‘It’s not gold, it’s not gold that I want, young gentleman: I have rather more of that than I can use. You shall see.’

“All at once the surface of the ground became transparent. It looked like a smooth globe of green glass; and within it I saw a crowd of goblins at play with silver and gold. Tumbling about, head over heels, they pelted each other in sport, making a toy of the precious metals, and powdering their faces with gold dust. My ugly companion stood half above, half below the surface. He made the others reach up to him quantities of gold, and showed it me laughing, and then flung it into the fathomless depths beneath. He displayed the piece of gold I had given him to the goblins below, who held their sides with laughing, and hissed at me in scorn. At length all their bony fingers pointed at me together; and louder and louder, closer and closer, wilder and wilder, grew the turmoil as it rose towards me, till not my horse only but I myself was terrified. I put spurs into him, and cannot tell how long I may have scoured the forest this time.

“When at last I halted, the shades of evening had closed in. Through the branches I saw a white foot-path gleaming, and hoped it must be a road out of the forest to the town. I resolved to work my way thither; but, lo! an indistinct dead-white face, with ever-changing features, peeped at me through the leaves. I

tried to avoid it, but wherever I went, there it was. Provoked, I attempted to push my horse against it; then it splashed us both over with white foam, and we turned away blinded for the moment. So it drove us, step by step, further and further from the foot-path, and indeed never letting us go on undisturbed but in one direction. While we kept to this, it was close upon our heels, but did not thwart us. Having looked around once or twice, I observed that the white foaming head was placed on a gigantic body, equally white. I sometimes doubted my first impression, and thought it merely a waterfall, but I never could satisfy myself that it was so. Wearily did my horse and I precede this active white pursuer, who often nodded at us, as if saying: 'That's right! that's right!' and it ended by our issuing from the wood here, where I rejoiced to see your lawn, the lake, and this cottage, and where the long white man vanished."

"Thank Heaven, he is gone," said the old man; and he then proceeded to consider how his guest could best return to his friends in the city. Upon this, Undine was heard to laugh in a whisper.

Huldbrand observed it, and said: "I thought you had wished me to stay; and now you seem pleased when we talk of my going?"

"Because," replied Undine, "you cannot get away. Only try to cross the swollen brook, in a boat, on horseback, or on foot. Or rather, do not try, for you would be dashed to pieces by the branches and stones that it hurls along.

And as to the lake, I know how that is: **Father** never ventures across it in his boat."

Huldbrand laughed, and got up to see whether she had spoken true. The old man went with him: and the maiden tripped along playfully by their side. They found she had told them no worse than the truth, and the Knight resigned himself to staying in the island, as it might now be called, till the floods had subsided. As they returned homewards, he whispered in his pretty companion's ear: "Well, my little Undine, are you angry at my staying?"

"Ah," said she sullenly, "never mind. If I had not bitten you, who knows what might have come out in your story of Bertalda?"

CHAPTER V.

Of the life which the Knight led on the Island.

HAS it ever befallen thee, gentle reader, after many ups and downs in this troublesome world, to alight upon a spot where thou foundest rest; where the love which is been with us for fireside comfort and domestic peace revived in thee; where thou couldst fancy thy early home with the blossoms of childhood, its pure, heartfelt affection, and the holy influence breathed from thy fathers' graves, to be re-

stored to thee, and that it must indeed be 'good for thee to be here, and to build tabernacles?'

The charm may have been broken, the dream dispelled; but that has nothing to do with our present picture: nor wilt thou care to dwell on such bitter moments; but recall to mind that period of unspeakable peace, that foretaste of angelic rest which was granted thee, and thou wilt partly conceive what the Knight Huldbrand felt while he lived on the promontory. Often, with secret satisfaction, did he mark the forest streams rolling by more wildly every day. Its bed became wider and wider, and he felt the period of his seclusion from the world must be still prolonged. Having found an old cross-bow in a corner of the cottage, and mended it, he spent part of his days roving about, waylaying the birds that flew by, and bringing whatever he killed to the kitchen as rare game. When he came back laden with spoil, Undine would often scold him for taking the life of the dear little joyous creatures, soaring in the blue depths of heaven. She would even weep bitterly over the dead birds. But if he came home empty-handed, she found fault with his awkwardness and laziness, which obliged them to be content with fish and crabs for dinner. Either way, he took delight in her pretty fits of anger,—the more so as she rarely failed to make up for them by the fondest caresses afterwards. The old folks, having been in the young people's confidence from the first, unconsciously looked upon them as a betrothed or even married pair, shut out from the world

with them in this retreat, and bestowed upon them for comforts in their old age. And this very seclusion helped to make the young Knight feel as if he were already Undine's bridegroom. It seemed to him that the whole world was contained within the surrounding waters, or at any rate that he could never more cross that charmed boundary, and rejoin other human beings. And if at times the neighing of his steed reminded him of former feats of chivalry, and seemed to ask for more; if his coat of arms, embroidered on the saddle and trappings, caught his eye; or if his good sword fell from the nail on which he had hung it, and slipped out of its scabbard, he would silence the misgivings that arose by thinking Undine is not a fisherman's daughter, but most likely sprung from some highly noble family in distant lands. The only thing that ever ruffled him was to hear the old woman scolding Undine. The wayward girl only laughed at her; but to him it seemed as if his own honor were touched; and yet he could not blame the good wife, for Undine mostly deserved ten times worse than she got, therefore he still felt kindly towards the old dame, and these little rubs scarcely disturbed the even current of their lives.

At length, however, a grievance did arise. The Knight and the Fisherman were in the habit of sitting cheerfully over a flask of wine, both at noon and also at eventide while the wind whistled around, as it generally did at night. But they had now exhausted the whole stock which the Fisherman had long since

brought from the town with him, and they both missed it sadly. Undine laughed at them all day for it, but they could not join in her mirth as heartily as usual. Towards evening she left the cottage, saying she could no longer bear such long dismal faces. As the twilight looked stormy and the waters were beginning to moan and heave, the Knight and the old man ran out anxiously to fetch her back, remembering the agony of that night when Huldbrand first came to the cottage. But they were met by Undine, clapping her hands merrily. "What will you give me if I get you some wine? but, indeed, I want no reward for it," she added: "I shall be satisfied if you will but look brighter, and find more to say than you have done all these tedious mornings. Come along, the floods have washed a barrel ashore, and I will engage to sleep a whole week through if it is not a barrel of wine!"

The men both followed her to a shady creek, and there found a barrel, which did look as if it contained the generous liquor which they longed for. They rolled it towards the hut as fast as they could, for a heavy storm seemed stalking across the sky, and there was light enough left to show them the waves of the lake tossing up their foaming heads, as if looking out for the rain which would soon pour down upon them. Undine lent a hand in the work, and presently, when the shower threatened to break instantly over their heads, she spoke to the big clouds in playful defiance: "You, you there! mind you do not give us a

drenching; we are some way from home yet." The old man admonished her that this was sinful presumption, but she laughed slyly to herself, and no harm came of it. Beyond their hopes they all three reached the comfortable fireside, with their prize, unhurt; and it was not till they had opened the barrel and found it to contain excellent wine that the rain broke from the heavy clouds in torrents, and they heard the storm roaring among the trees, and over the lake's heaving billows.

A few bottles were soon filled from the great barrel, enough to last them several days; and they sat sipping and chatting over the bright fire, secure from the raging tempest. But the old man's heart presently smote him. "Dear me," said he, "here are we making merry over the blessings of Providence while the owner of it has perhaps been carried away by the flood, and lost his life!" "No, that he has not," said Undine, smiling; and she filled the Knight's glass again. He replied, "I give you my word, good father, that if I knew how to find and save him, no danger should deter me: I would not shrink from setting out in this darkness. This much I promise you, if ever I set foot in an inhabited country again, I will make inquiry after him or his heirs, and restore to them twice or three times the value of the wine." This pleased the old man: he gave an approving nod to the Knight, and drained his glass with a better conscience and a lighter heart. But Undine said to Huldbrand: "Do as you like with your money; you

may make what compensation you please ; but as to setting out and wandering after him, that was hastily said. I should cry my heart out if we chanced to lose you ; and had not you rather stay with me and with the good wine ?” “ Why, yes !” said Huldbrand, laughing. “ Well then,” rejoined Undine, “ it was a foolish thing you talked of doing ; charity begins at home, you know.” The old woman turned away, shaking her head and sighing ; her husband forgot his usual indulgence for the pretty lassie, and reproved her sharply. “ One would think,” said he, “ you had been reared by Turks and heathens ; God forgive you and us, you perverse child.” “ Ay but it *is* my way of thinking,” pursued Undine, “ whoever has reared me, so what is the use of your talking ?” “ Peace !” cried the Fisherman ; and she, who with all her wildness was sometimes cowed in a moment, clung tremblingly to Huldbrand, and whispered : “ And are you angry with me, dear Friend ?” The Knight pressed her soft hand, and stroked down her ringlets. Not a word could he say ; his distress at the old man’s harshness towards Undine had sealed his lips ; and so each couple remained sitting opposite the other in moody silence and constraint.





CHAPTER VI.

Of a Bridal.

A GENTLE tap at the door broke the silence, and made them all start: it sometimes happens that a mere trifle, coming quite unexpectedly, strikes the senses with terror. They looked at each other, hesitating; the tap was repeated, accompanied by a deep groan, and the Knight grasped his sword. But the old man muttered: "If it is what I fear, it is not a sword that will help us!" Undine, however, stepped forward to the door, and said boldly and sharply: "If you are after any mischief, you spirits of earth, Kühleborn shall teach you manners."

The terror of the others increased at these strange words; they looked at the maiden with awe, and Huldbrand was just mustering courage to ask her a question, when a voice answered her from without: "I am no spirit of earth; call me if you will a spirit pent in mortal clay. If you fear God and will be charitable, you dwellers in the cottage, open the door to me. Undine opened it before he had done speaking, and held out a lamp into the stormy night, so as to show them the figure of an aged Priest, who started back as the radiant beauty of Undine flashed upon his sight. Well might

he suspect magic and witchery when so bright a vision shone out of a mean-looking cottage : he accordingly began a canticle, "All good spirits give praise to the Lord !"

"I am no ghost," said Undine, smiling ; "am I so frightful to behold? And you may see that a pious saying has no terrors for me. I worship God, too, and praise Him after my own fashion. He has not created us all alike. Come in, venerable father : you will find worthy folks here."

The holy man walked in, bowing and casting his eyes around, and looking most mild and venerable. Every fold of his dark garment was dripping with water, and so were his long white beard and hoary locks. The Fisherman and the Knight led him to a bedroom, and gave him a change of clothing, while the women dried his wet garments by the hearth fire. The aged stranger thanked them with all humility and gentleness, but would by no means accept of the Knight's splendid mantle which he offered him. He chose himself an old gray wrapper of the Fisherman's instead. So they returned to the kitchen. The dame gave up her own arm-chair to the Priest, and had no peace till he sat himself down in it : "For," said she, "you are old and weary, and a priest besides." Undine pushed her little foot-stool, on which she generally sat by Huldbrand, towards the good man's feet, and altogether behaved to him quite properly and gracefully. Huldbrand took notice of this, in a playful whisper ; but she answered very gravely : "Because he is a

servant of the Maker of us all. That is too serious for a jest."

Meantime the two men set meat and wine before their guest, and when he had recruited his strength a little, he began his story; saying that the day before he had left his monastery, which was a good way off beyond the lake, intending to visit the bishop at his palace, and report to him the distress which these almost supernatural floods had caused the monks and their poor tenantry. After going around a long way, to avoid these very floods, he had been obliged towards evening to cross an arm of the overflowing lake, with the help of two honest sailors. "But," added he, "no sooner had our little vessel touched the waves than we were wrapped in the tremendous storm which is still raging over our heads now. It looked as if the waters had only awaited our coming to give a loose to their fury. The oars were soon dashed from the seamen's hands, and we saw their broken fragments carried further and further from us by the waves. We floated on the wave tops helpless, driven by the furious tempest towards your shores, which we saw in the distance whenever the clouds parted for a moment. The boat was tossed about still more wildly and gidily, and whether it upset or I fell out I cannot tell. I floated on, with the dark prospect of instant death before me, till a wave landed me at the foot of a tree in this your island.

"Ay, island, indeed!" said the Fisherman.
"It was a promontory but a short time ago;

but since the stream and our lake are gone mad together everything about us is new and strange."

The Priest continued: "As I crept along the waterside in the dark, with a wild uproar around me, something caught my eye, and presently I discerned a beaten pathway, which was soon lost in the shades. I spied the light in your cottage, and ventured to come hither; and I cannot sufficiently thank my heavenly Father, who has not only delivered me from the waters but guided me to such kind souls. I feel this blessing the more as it is very likely I may never see any faces but yours again." "How so?" asked the Fisherman. "Can you guess how long this fury of the elements may last?" replied the Priest. "And I am an old man. My stream of life may perhaps lose itself in the earth before these floods subside. And besides, it may be the foaming waters will divide you from the forest more and more, till you are unable to get across in your fishing boat; and the people of the mainland, full of their own concerns, would quite forget you in your retreat."

Shuddering and crossing herself, the Fisherman's wife exclaimed: "God forbid!" But the old man smiled at her and said: "What creatures we are! That would make no difference to you at least, my dear wife. How many years is it since you have set foot within the forest? And have you seen any face but Undine's and mine? Lately indeed we have had the good Knight and Priest besides. But they

would stay with us; so that if we are forgotten in this island, you will be the gainer."

"So I see," said the dame, "yet somehow it is cheerless to feel ourselves quite cut off from the rest of the world, however seldom we had seen it before." "Then *you* will stay with us!" murmured Undine in a sweet voice, and she pressed closer to Huldbrand's side. But he was lost in deep thought. Since the Priest had last spoken, the land beyond the wild stream had seemed to his fancy more dark and distant than ever, while the flowery island he lived in, and his bride the fairest flower in the picture, bloomed and smiled more and more freshly in his imagination. Here was the Priest at hand to unite them; and, to complete his resolution, the old dame just then darted a reproving look at Undine for clinging to her lover's side in the holy man's presence. An angry lecture seemed on the point of beginning. He turned towards the Priest, and these words burst from him: "You see before you a betrothed pair, reverend Sir. If this damsel and the kind old people will consent, you shall unite us this very evening."

The old folks were much surprised. Such a thought had often crossed their minds, but they had never till this moment heard it uttered: and it now fell upon their ears like an unexpected thing. Undine had suddenly become quite grave, and sat musing deeply, while the Priest inquired into various circumstances and asked the old couple's consent to the deed. After some deliberation, they gave it. The

lame went away to prepare the young people's bridal chamber, and to fetch from her stores two consecrated tapers for the wedding ceremony. Meanwhile the Knight was pulling two rings off his gold chain for himself and his bride to exchange. But this roused Undine from her reverie, and she said: "Stay! my parents did not send me into the world quite penniless. They looked forward long ago to this occasion, and provided for it." She quickly withdrew, and returned bringing two costly rings, one of which she gave to her betrothed and kept the other herself. This astonished the old Fisherman, and still more his wife, who came in soon after; for they neither of them had seen these jewels about the child. "My parents," said Undine, "had these rings sewed into the gay dress which I wore when first I came to you. They charged me to let no one know of them till my wedding day came; therefore I took them secretly out of the dress, and have kept them hidden till this evening."

Here the Priest put a stop to the conversation by lighting the holy tapers, placing them on the table, and calling the young pair to him. With few and solemn words he joined their hands; the aged couple gave their blessing, while the bride leaned upon her husband, pensive and trembling.

When it was over, the Priest said: "You are strange people after all! What did you mean by saying you were the only inhabitants of this island? During the whole ceremony there was a fine-looking tall man, in a white

cloak, standing just outside the window opposite me. He must be near the door still, if you like to invite him in." "Heaven forbid!" said the dame, shuddering. The old man shook his head without speaking: and Huldbrand rushed to the window. He could fancy he saw a streak of white, but it was soon lost in darkness. So he assured the Priest he must have been mistaken; and they all sat down comfortably around the fire.

CHAPTER VII.

How the rest of the Evening passed away.

UNDINE had been perfectly quiet and well-behaved both before and during the marriage ceremony; but now her wild spirits seemed the more uncontrollable from the restraint they had undergone, and rose to an extravagant height. She played all manner of childish tricks on her husband, her foster parents, and even the venerable Priest, and when the old woman began to check her, one or two words from Huldbrand, who gravely called Undine "his wife," reduced her to silence. The Knight himself, however, was far from being pleased at Undine's childishness but no hint or sign would stop her. When-

ever she perceived his disapproving looks—which she occasionally did—it subdued her for the moment: she would sit down by him, whisper something playfully in his ear, and so dispel the frown as it gathered on his brow. But the next instant some wild nonsense would dart into her head, and set her off worse than ever. At last the Priest said to her, in a kind but grave manner: “My dear young lady, no one that beholds you can be severe upon you, it is true; but remember it is your duty to keep watch over your soul, that it may be ever in harmony with that of your wedded husband.” “Soul!” cried Undine, laughing, “that sounds very fine, and for most people may be very edifying and moral advice. But if one has no soul at all, pray how is one to keep watch over it? And that is my case.” The Priest was deeply hurt, and turned away his face in mingled sorrow and anger. But she came up to him beseechingly and said: “Nay, hear me before you are angry, for it grieves me to see you displeased, and you would not distress any creature who has done you no harm. Only have patience with me and I will tell you all, from the beginning.”

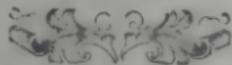
They saw she was preparing to give them a regular history; but she stopped short, appearing thrilled by some secret recollection, and burst into a flood of gentle tears. They were quite at a loss what to think of her, and gazed upon her, distressed from various causes. At length drying her eyes, she looked at the Priest earnestly and said: ‘ There must be

much to love in a soul, but much that is awful too. For God's sake, holy father, tell me—were it not better to be still without one?" She waited breathlessly for an answer, restraining her tears. Her hearers had all risen from their seats, and now stepped back from her, shuddering. She seemed to have no eyes but for the saintly man; her countenance assumed an expression of anxiety and awe, which yet more alarmed the others. "Heavy must be the burden of a soul," added she, as no one answered her,—“heavy indeed! for the mere approach of mine overshadows me with anxious melancholy. And ah! how light-hearted, how joyous I used to be!" A fresh burst of weeping overcame her, and she covered her face with her veil.

The Priest then approached her with much gravity and adjured her by the holiest names to confess the truth, if any evil lurked in her unknown to them. But she fell on her knees, before him, repeated after him all his words of piety, gave praise to God, and declared she was in charity with all the world. The Priest turned to the young Knight: "Sir, bridegroom," said he, "I leave you alone with her whom I have made your wife. As far as I can discover, there is no evil, although much that is mysterious in her. I exhort you to be sober, loving, and faithful." So he went out, and the old people followed, crossing themselves.

Undine was still on her knees; she uncovered her face and looked timidly at Huldbrand, saying: "Ah, thou wilt surely cast me off now

and yet I have done nothing wrong, poor, poor child that I am!" This she said with so touching and gentle an expression that her husband forgot all the gloom and mystery that had chilled his heart: he hastened towards her and raised her in his arms. She smiled through her tears—it was like the glow of dawn shining upon a clear fountain. "Thou canst not forsake me!" whispered she in accents of the firmest reliance; and she stroked his cheeks with her soft little hands. He tried to shake off the gloomy thoughts which still lurked in a corner of his mind, suggesting to him that he had married a fairy or some shadowy being from the world of spirits. One question, however, he could not help asking: "My dear little Undine, just tell me one thing, what was that you said about spirits of earth, and Kühleborn, when the Priest knocked at the door?" "All nonsense!" said Undine, laughing, with her usual gaiety. "First I frightened you with it, and then you frightened me. And that is the end of the story, and of our wedding day!" "No, it is not over," said her now delighted lover. He extinguished the tapers, and by the light of the moon which beamed brightly through the casement, he carried his beautiful wife into the bridal chamber.





CHAPTER VIII.

The Day after the Marriage.

A BRIGHT morning light wakened the young people, and Huldbrand lay musing silently. As often as he had dropped asleep, he had been scared by horrible dreams of spectres, who suddenly took the form of fair women, or of fair women who were transformed into dragons. And when he started up from these grim visions, and saw the pale cold moonlight streaming in at the window, he would turn an anxious look towards Undine: she lay slumbering in undisturbed beauty and peace. Then he would compose himself to sleep again—soon again to wake in terror. When he looked back upon all this in broad daylight, he was angry with himself for having let a suspicion, a shade of distrust of his beautiful wife, enter his mind. He frankly confessed to her this injustice; she answered him only by pressing his hand, and sighing from the bottom of her heart. But a look, such as her eyes had never before given, of the deepest and most confiding tenderness, left him no doubt that she forgave him. So he arose cheerfully, and joined the family in the sitting room. The three others were gathered around the hearth, looking uneasy, and neither of them having ventured to

express his thoughts yet. The Priest seemed to be secretly praying for deliverance from evil. But when the young husband appeared, beaming with happiness, the care-worn faces brightened up; nay, the Fisherman ventured upon a few courteous jokes with the Knight, which won a smile even from the good housewife. Meanwhile Undine had dressed herself, and now came in: they could not help rising to meet her, and stood still, astonished: the young creature was the same, yet so different. The Priest was the first to address her, with an air of paternal kindness, and when he raised his hands in benediction, the fair woman sank on her knees, trembling with pious awe. In a few meek and humble words she begged him to forgive the folly of the day before, and besought him with great emotion to pray for the salvation of her soul. Then rising, she kissed her foster parents, and thanking them for all their kindness, she said: "Oh, now I feel from the bottom of my heart how much you have done for me, how deeply grateful I ought to be, dear, dear people!" She seemed as if she could not caress them enough; but soon observing the dame glance towards the breakfast, she went towards the hearth, busied herself arranging and preparing the meal, and would not suffer the good woman to take the least trouble herself.

So she went on all day; at once a young matron, and a bashful, tender, delicate bride. The three who knew her best were every moment expecting this mood to change, and give

place to one of her crazy fits; but they watched her in vain. There was still the same angelic mildness and sweetness. The Priest could not keep his eyes away from her; and he said more than once to the bridegroom: "Sir, it was a great treasure which Heaven bestowed upon you yesterday, by my poor ministration; cherish her worthily, and she will be to you a blessing in time and eternity."

Towards evening Undine clasped the Knight's arm with modest tenderness, and gently led him out before the door, where the rays of the setting sun were lighting up the fresh grass, and the tall, taper stems of trees. The young wife's face wore a melting expression of love and sadness, and her lips quivered with some anxious, momentous secret, which as yet betrayed itself only by scarce audible sighs. She silently led her companion onwards. If he spoke, she replied by a look which gave him no direct answer, but revealed a whole heaven of love and timid submission. So they reached the banks of the stream which had overflowed, and the Knight started on finding the wild torrent changed into a gentle, rippling brook, without a trace of its former violence left. "By tomorrow it will have dried up completely," said the bride in a faltering voice, "and thou mayest begone whither thou wilt." "Not without thee, my Undine," said the Knight playfully. "Consider, if I had a mind to forsake thee, the Church, the Emperor, and his ministers might step in, and bring thy truant home." "No, no, you are free; it shall be as

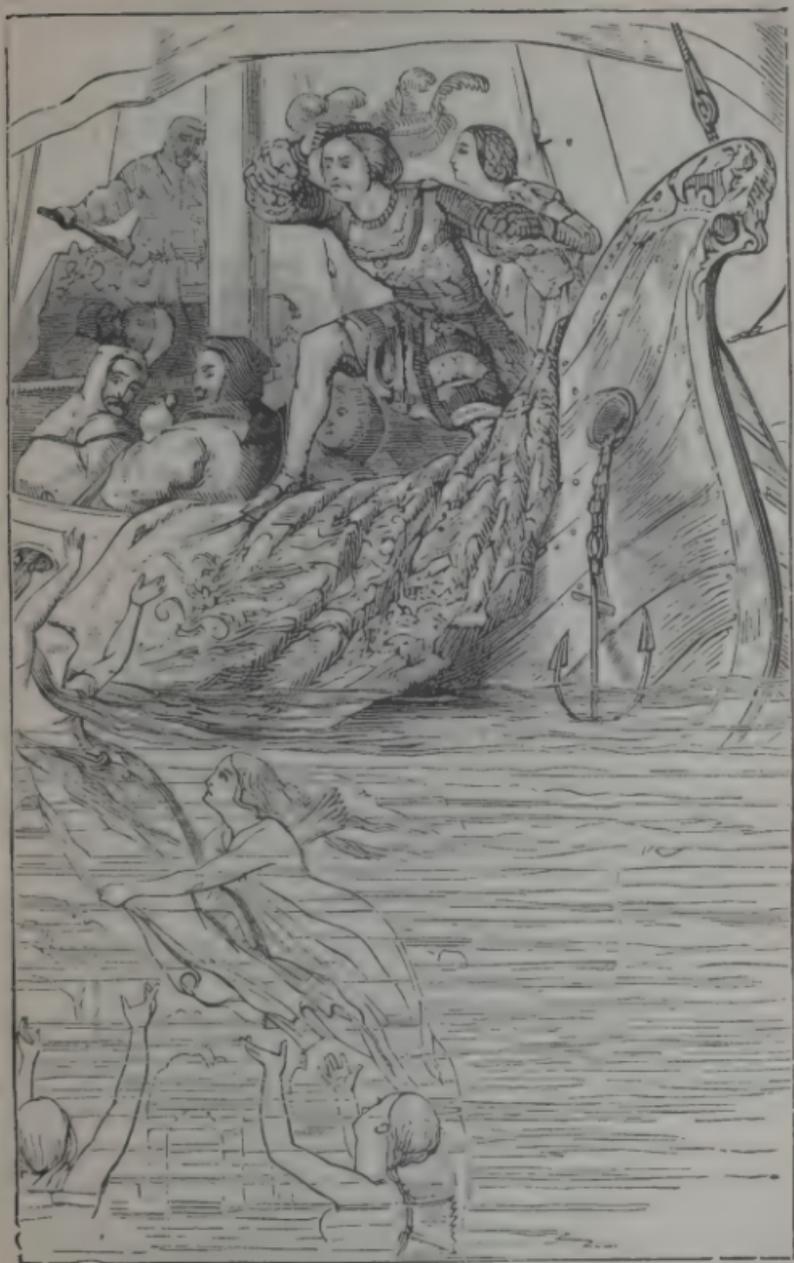
you please," murmured Undine, half tears, half smiles. "But I think thou wilt not cast me away. Is not my heart bound up in thine? Carry me over to that little island opposite. There I will know my fate. I could indeed easily step through the little waves; but I love to rest in thine arms; and thou *mayest* cast me off: this may be the last time." Huldbrand, full of anxious emotion, knew not how to answer. He took her up in his arms and carried her over, now recollecting that from this very island he had borne her home to the Fisherman on the night of his arrival. When there, he placed his fair burden on the turf, and was going to sit down by her, but she said: "No, sit there, opposite me. I will read my doom in your eyes before your lips have spoken it. Now listen, and I will tell you all." And she began:—

"You must know, my own love, that in each element exists a race of beings whose form scarcely differs from yours, but who very seldom appear to mortal sight. In the flames, the wondrous Salamanders glitter and disport themselves. In the depths of earth dwell the dry, spiteful race of Gnomes. The forests are peopled by Wood-nymphs, who are also spirits of air; and the seas, the rivers, and brooks contain the numberless tribes of Water-sprites. Their echoing halls of crystal, where the light of heaven pours in, with its sun and stars, are glorious to dwell in; the gardens contain beautiful coral plants, with blue and red fruits; they wander over bright sea sands and gay col-

ored shells, among the hidden treasures of the old world, too precious to be bestowed on these latter days, and long since covered by the silver mantle of the deep. Many a noble monument still gleams there below, bedewed by the tears of ocean, who garlands it with flowery sea weeds and wreaths of shells. Those that dwell there below are noble and lovely to behold, far more so than mankind. Many a fisherman has had a passing glimpse of some fair water-nymph, rising out of the sea with her song. He would then spread the report of her apparition, and these wonderful beings came to be called *Undines*. And you now see before you, my love, an Undine."

The Knight tried to persuade himself that his fair wife was in one of her wild moods, and had invented this strange tale in sport. But though he said this to himself, he could not for a moment believe it. A mysterious feeling thrilled him; and, unable to utter a word, he kept his eyes riveted on the beautiful speaker. She shook her head sadly, heaved a deep sigh, and went on.

"We might be happier than our human fellow-creatures (for we call you fellow-creatures, as our forms are alike), but for one great evil. We, and the other children of the elements, go down to the dust, body and spirit: not a trace of us remains; and when the time comes for you to rise again to a glorified existence, we shall have perished with our native sands, flames, winds, and waves. For we have no souls: the elements move us, obey us while we



The Voyage on the Danube.

live, close over us when we die; and we light spirits live as free from care as the nightingale, the gold fish, and all such bright children of nature. But no creatures rest content in their appointed place. My father, who is a mighty prince in the Mediterranean sea, determined that his only child should be endowed with a soul, even at the cost of much suffering, which is ever the lot of souls. But a soul can be infused into one of our race only by being united in the closest bands of love to one of yours. And now I have obtained a soul. To thee I owe it, oh, best beloved! and for that gift I shall ever bless thee, unless thou dost devote my whole futurity to misery. For what is to become of me should thou recoil from me and cast me off? Yet I would not detain thee by deceit. And if I am to leave thee, say so now: go back to the land alone. I will plunge into this brook. It is my uncle who leads a wonderful, sequestered life in this forest, away from all his friends. But he is powerful, and allied to many great rivers; and as he brought me here to the Fisherman a gay and laughing child, so he is ready to take me back to my parents, a loving, suffering, forsaken woman."

She would have gone on, but Huldbrand, full of compassion and love, caught her in his arms and carried her back. There, with tears and kisses, he swore never to forsake his beloved wife; and said he felt more blessed than the Greek statuary Pygmalion, whose beautiful statue dame Venus transformed into a living woman. Hanging on his arm in peaceful reli-

ance, Undine returned; and she felt from her inmost heart how little cause she had to regret the crystal palaces of her father.

CHAPTER IX.

How the Knight and his young Bride departed

WHEN Huldbrand awoke from sleep the next morning, he missed his fair companion; and again he was tormented with a doubt whether his marriage and the lovely Undine might not be all a fairy dream. But she soon reappeared, came up to him and said: "I have been out early, to see if my uncle had kept his word. He has recalled all the straying waters into his quiet bed, and now takes his lonely and pensive course through the forest as he used to do. His friends in the lake and the air are gone to rest also; all things have returned to their usual calmness; and you may set out homewards on dry land as soon as you please." Huldbrand felt as if dreaming still, so little could he understand his wife's wonderful relations. But he took no notice of this, and his sweet Undine's gentle attentions soon charmed every uneasy thought away.

A little while after, as they stood at the door together, looking over the fair scene with its

boundary of clear waters, his heart yearned so towards this cradle of his love, that he said: "But why should we go away so soon? we shall never spend happier days in yonder world than we have passed in this peaceful nook. Let us at least see two or three more suns go down here." "As my Lord wishes," answered Undine, with cheerful submission: "but you see the old people will be grieved at parting with me, whenever it is; and if we give them time to become acquainted with my soul, and with its new powers of loving and honoring them, I fear that when I go their aged hearts will break under the load of sorrow. As yet, they take my gentle mood for a passing whim, such as they saw me liable to formerly, like a calm on the lake when the winds are lulled; and they will soon begin to love some favorite tree or flower in my place. They must not learn to know this newly obtained, affectionate heart in the first overflowings of its tenderness, just at the moment when they are to lose me for this world; and how could I disguise it from them, if we remained together longer?"

Huldbrand agreed with her. He went to the old couple, and finding them ready to consent, he resolved upon setting out that very hour. The Priest offered to accompany them; after a hasty farewell, the pretty bride was placed on the horse by her husband, and they crossed the stream's dry bed quickly, and entered the forest. Undine shed silent but bitter tears, while the old folks wailed after her aloud. It seemed as if some foreboding were crossing

their minds, of how great their loss would prove.

The three travellers reached the deepest shades of the forest, without breaking silence. It was a fair sight to behold, as they passed through the leafy bowers: the graceful woman sitting on her noble steed, guarded on one side by the venerable Priest in the white habit of his order, on the other by the youthful Knight, with his gorgeous attire and glittering sword. Huldbrand had no eyes but for his precious wife; Undine, who had dried her dateous tears, no thought but for him; and they soon fell into a noiseless interchange of glances and signs, which at length was interrupted by the sound of a low murmur proceeding from the Priest and a fourth fellow-traveller who had joined them unobserved. He wore a white robe, very like the Priest's dress, except that the hood almost covered his face, and the rest of it floated round him in such large folds that he was perpetually obliged to gather it up, throw it over his arm, or otherwise arrange it; yet it did not seem to impede him at all in walking. When the young people saw him he was saying: "And so, my worthy father, I have dwelt in the forest for many a year, yet I am not what you commonly call a hermit. For, as I told you, I know nothing of penance, nor do I think it would do me much good. What makes me so fond of the woods is, that I have a very particular fancy for winding through the dark shades and forest walks, with my loose white clothes floating about me: now and then a pretty

sunbeam will glance over me as I go." "You seem to be a very curious person," replied the Priest, "and I should like to know more about you." "And pray who are you, to carry on the acquaintance?" said the stranger. "They call me Father Heilmann," answered the Priest, "and I belong to St. Mary's Monastery, beyond the lake." "Ay, ay!" rejoined the other. "My name is Kühleborn, and if I stood upon ceremony I might well call myself Lord of Kühleborn, or Baron (Freiherr) Kühleborn: for free I am, as the bird of the air, or a trifle more free. For instance I must now have a word with the young woman there." And before they could look round, he was on the other side of the Priest, close to Undine, and stretching up his tall figure to whisper in her ear. But she turned hastily away, saying: "I have nothing more to do with you now." "Heyday!" said the stranger, laughing, "what a prodigiously grand marriage yours must be, if you are to cast off your relations in this way. Have you forgotten Uncle Kühleborn, who brought you all the way here on his back so kindly?"

"But I entreat you," said Undine, "never come to me again. I am afraid of you now; and will not my husband become afraid of me, if he finds I have so strange a family?" "My little niece," said Kühleborn, "please to remember that I am protecting you all this time: the foul Spirits of Earth might play you troublesome tricks if I did not. So you had better let me go on with you, and no more words. The old Priest there has a better memory than

yours, for he would have it that he knew my face very well, and that I must have been with him in the boat when he fell into the water. And he may well say so, seeing that the wave which washed him over was none but myself, and I landed him safe on the shore in time for your wedding."

Undine and the Knight looked at Father Heilmann, but he seemed to be plodding on in a waking dream, and not listening to what was said. Undine said to Kühleborn: "There, I can see the end of the wood, we want your help no longer, and there is nothing to disturb us but you. So, in love and kindness I entreat you begone, and let us go in peace." This seemed to make Kühleborn angry: he twisted his face hideously, and hissed at Undine, who cried aloud for help. Like lightning the Knight passed round her horse, and aimed a blow at Kühleborn's head with his sword. But instead of the head he struck into a waterfall, which gushed foaming down a high cliff near them, and now showered them all with a splash that sounded like laughter and wetted them to the bone. The Priest seeming to wake up, said: "Well, I was expecting this, because that brook gushed down the rock so close to us. At first I could not shake off the idea that it was a man, and was speaking to me." The waterfall whispered distinctly in Huldbrand's ear: "Rash youth, dashing youth, I chide thee not, I shame thee not: still shield thy precious wife safe and sure, rash young soldier, dashing Knight!"

A little further on they emerged into the open

plains. The city lay glittering before them; and the evening sun that gilded her towers lent its grateful warmth to dry their soaked garments.

CHAPTER X.

Of their way of Life in the Town.

THE sudden disappearance of the young Knight Huldbrand of Ringstetten had made a great stir in the city and distressed the inhabitants, with whom his gallantry in the lists and the dance, and his gentle, courteous manners, had made him very popular. His retainers would not leave the place without their master, but yet none had the courage to seek him in the haunted forest. They, therefore, remained in their hostelry, idly hoping, as men are so apt to do, and keeping alive the remembrance of their lost lord by lamentations. But soon after, when the tempest raged, and the rivers overflowed, few doubted that the handsome stranger must have perished. Bertalda among others mourned him for lost, and was ready to curse herself for having urged him to the fatal ride through the forest. Her ducal foster parents had arrived to take her away, but she prevailed upon them to wait a little, in hope that a true report of Huldbrand's death or safety might reach them. She

tried to persuade some one of the young knights who contended for her favor to venture into the forest, and seek for the noble adventurer. But she would not offer her hand as the reward, because she still hoped to bestow it some day on the wanderer himself; and to obtain a glove, a scarf, or some such token from her, none of them cared to expose his life to bring back so dangerous a rival.

Now, when Huldbrand unexpectedly reappeared, it spread joy among his servants, and all the people generally, except Bertalda; for while the others were pleased at his bringing with him such a beautiful wife, and Father Heilmann to bear witness to their marriage, it could not but grieve *her*,—first, because the young Knight had really won her heart; and next because she had betrayed her feelings by so openly lamenting his absence far more than was now becoming. However, she behaved like a prudent woman, and suited her conduct to the circumstances by living in the most cordial intimacy with Undine, who passed in the town for a princess, released by Huldbrand from the power of some wicked enchanter of the forest. If she or her husband were questioned about it, they gave evasive answers. Father Heilmann's lips were sealed on all such idle topics, besides which he had left them soon after they arrived, and returned to his cloister. So the citizens were left to their own wondering conjectures, and even Bertalda came no nearer the truth than others.

Meanwhile, Undine grew daily more fond of

this winning damsel. "We must have known each other before," she would often say, "or else some secret attraction draws us towards each other; for without some cause—some strange, mysterious cause—I am sure nobody would love another as I have loved you from the moment we met. Bertalda, on her part, could not deny that she felt strongly inclined to like Undine, notwithstanding the grounds of complaint she thought she had against this happy rival. The affection being mutual, the one persuaded her parents, the other her wedded lord, to defer the day of departure repeatedly. They even went so far as to propose that Bertalda should accompany Undine to the castle of Ringstetten, near the source of the Danube.

They were talking of this one fine evening as they sauntered by starlight around the market-place, which was surrounded by high trees. The young couple had invited Bertalda to join their evening stroll, and they now paced backwards and forwards in pleasant talk, with the dark-blue sky over their heads, and a beautiful fountain before them in the centre, which, as it bubbled and sprang up into fanciful shapes, often caught their attention, and interrupted the conversation. All around them was serene and pleasant; through the foliage gleamed the light of many a lamp from the surrounding houses; and the ear was soothed by the hum of children at play, and of sauntering groups like themselves. They enjoyed at once the pleasure of solitude and the social happiness

of being near the cheerful haunts of men. Every little difficulty that had occurred to their favorite plan seemed to vanish upon nearer examination, and the three friends could not imagine that Bertalda's consent to the journey need be delayed a moment. But as she was on the point of naming a day for joining them and setting out, a very tall man came forwards from the middle of the place, bowed to them respectfully, and began whispering in Undine's ear. She, though apparently displeased with the interruption and with the speaker, stepped aside with him, and they began a low discourse together in what sounded like a foreign language. Huldbrand thought he knew this strange man's face, and fixed his attention upon him so earnestly that he neither heard nor answered the astonished Bertalda's questions. All at once, Undine clapped her hands joyfully, and turned her back laughing upon the stranger. He shook his head and walked off in an angry, hurried manner, and stepped into the fountain. This confirmed Huldbrand in his guess; while Bertalda inquired: "My dear Undine, what business had that man of the fountain with you?" Her friend smiled archly and replied: "On your birthday, the day after tomorrow, I will tell you, my sweet girl"; and she would say no more. She only pressed Bertalda to come and dine with them on that day, and bring her foster parents, after which they separated.

"Kühleborn?" said Huldbrand to his wife with a suppressed shudder, as they walked

home through the dark streets. "Yes, it was he," replied Undine; "and he tried to put all sorts of nonsense into my head. However, without intending it, he delighted me by one piece of news. If you wish to hear it now, my kind lord, you have but to say so, and I will tell you every word. But if you like to give your Undine a *very* great delight, you will wait two days, and then have your share in the surprise."

The Knight readily granted her what she had asked so meekly and gracefully; and as she dropped asleep she murmured: "How it will delight her! How little she expects such a message from the mysterious man,—dear, dear Bertalda!"

CHAPTER XI.

Bertalda's Birthday.

THE guests were now assembled at table: Bertalda sat at the top, adorned with flowers like the goddess of spring, and flashing with jewels, the gifts of many friends and relations. Undine and Huldbrand were on either side of her. When the sumptuous meal was ended and the dessert served, the doors were opened—according to the good old German custom—to let the common people look in and have their share in the gaiety of the rich. The attendants offered wine and cake to the assem-

bled crowd. Huldbrand and Bertalda were eagerly watching for the promised disclosure, and both kept their eyes fixed upon Undine. But she was still silent; her cheeks dimpled occasionally with a bright, conscious smile. Those that knew what she was about to do, could perceive that her interesting secret was ready to burst from her lips, but that she was playfully determined to keep it in, as children sometimes will save their daintiest morsels for the last. Her silent glee communicated itself to the other two, who watched impatiently for the happy news that was about to gladden their hearts. Some of the company now asked Undine for a song. She seemed to be prepared with one, and sent for her lute, to which she sang as follows:—

*The sun gilds the wave,
The flowers are sweet,
And the ocean doth lave
The grass at our feet.*

*What lies on the earth
So blooming and gay?
Doth a blossom peep forth
And greet the new day?*

*An, 'tis a fair child!
She sports with the flowers,
So gladsome and mild,
Through the warm sunny hours.*

*O sweet one, who brought thee?
From far distant shore
Old Ocean he caught thee,
And many a league bore.*

*Poor babe, all in vain
Thou dost put forth thy hand,
None clasp it again,
'Tis a bleak foreign land :*

*The flowers bloom brightly
And soft breathes the air,
But all pass thee lightly,
Thy mother is far !*

*Thy life scarce begun,
Thy smiles fresh from Heaven,
Thy best treasure is gone,
To another 'tis given !*

*A gallant charger treads the dell,
His noble rider pities thee :
He takes thee home, he tends thee well,
And cares for thee right gen'rously.*

*Well thou becom'st thy station high,
And bloom'st the fairest in the land :
And yet, alas, the purest joy
Is left on thine own distant strand.*

Undine put down her lute with a melancholy smile; and the eyes of the Duke and Duchess filled with tears. "So it was when I found you, my poor innocent orphan!" said the Duke

with great emotion : as the fair singer said, your best treasure was gone, and we have been unable to supply its place."

"Now let us think of the poor parents," said Undine ; and she struck the chords and sang :—

1.

*Mother roams from room to room
Seeking rest she knows not how :
The house is silent as the tomb,
And who is there to bless her now ?*

2.

*Silent house ! oh words of sorrow !
Where is now her darling child ?
She who should have cheered the morrow
And the evening hours beguiled ?*

3.

*The buds are swelling on the tree,
The sun returns when night is o'er :
But mother, ne'er comes joy to thee,
Thy child shall bless thine eyes no more !*

4.

*And when the evening breezes blow
And father seeks his own fireside,
He smiles, forgetful of his woe,
But ah ! his tears that smile shall hide.*

5.

*Father knows that in his home
Deathlike stillness dwells for aye :
The voice of mirth no more shall come,
And mother sighs the livelong day.*

“Oh! Undine, for God’s sake, where are my parents?” cried Bertalda, weeping. “Surely you know, you have discovered it, most wonderful woman: else how could you have stirred my inmost heart as you have done? They are perhaps even now in the room — can it be?” — and her eyes glanced over the gay assembly, and fixed upon a reigning Princess who sat next to the Duke. But Undine bent forward to the door, her eyes overflowing with the happiest tears. “Where are they, the poor anxious parents!” said she; and the old Fisherman and his wife came out from the crowd of bystanders. They turned an inquiring eye upon Undine, and then upon the handsome lady whom they were to call daughter. “There she is,” faltered the delighted Undine, and the aged couple caught their long-lost child in their arms, thanking God, and weeping aloud.

Affrighted and enraged, Bertalda shrank from their embrace. It was more than her proud spirit could bear, to be thus degraded: at a moment, too, when she was fully expecting an increase of splendor, and fancy was showering pearls and diadems upon her head. She suspected that her rival had contrived this, on purpose to mortify her before Huldbrand and all the world. She reviled both Undine and the old people; the hateful words “treacherous creature! and bribed wretches!” burst from her lips. The old woman said in a half whisper: “Dear me, she has grown up a wicked woman, and yet my heart tel’s me she is my own child.” The Fisherman had clasped his

hands and was praying silently that this girl might not prove to be theirs indeed. Undine, as pale as death, looked from Bertalda to the parents, from the parents to Bertalda, and could not recover the rude shock she had sustained, at being plunged from all her happy dreams into a state of fear and misery, such as she had never known before.

“Have you a soul? Have you indeed a soul, Bertalda?” she exclaimed once or twice, trying to recall her angry friend to reason, from what she took for a fit of madness, or a kind of nightmare. But Bertalda only stormed the louder; the repulsed parents wailed piteously; and the company began to dispute angrily and to side with one or the other, when Undine stepped forwards and asked with so much earnest gentleness to be listened to in her husband’s house, that all was hushed in a moment. She took the place which Bertalda had left, at the head of the table, and as she stood there in modest dignity, the eyes of all turned towards her, and she said: “You all that cast such angry looks at each other and so cruelly spoil the joy of my poor feast, alas! I little knew what your foolish, angry passions were, and I think I shall never understand you. What I had hoped would do so much good has led to all this; but that is not my fault, it is your own doing, believe me. I have little more to say; but one thing you must hear, I have told no falsehood. Proofs I have none to give, beyond my word, but I will swear to the truth of it. I heard it from him who decoyed Ber

talda from her parents into the water, and then laid her down in the meadow where the Duke was to pass."

"She is a sorceress:" cried Bertalda, "a witch who has dealings with evil spirits! she has acknowledged it."

"I have not," said Undine, with a heaven of innocence and guilelessness in her eyes. "Nor am I a witch,—only look at me!"

"Then she lies," cried Bertalda, "and she dares not assert that I was born of these mean people. My noble parents, I beseech you to take me out of this room and this town, where they are leagued together to insult me."

But the venerable Duke stood still, and his lady said: "We must first sift this matter to the bottom. Nothing shall make me leave the room till my doubts are satisfied."

Then the old woman came up, made a deep obeisance to the Duchess, and said: "You give me courage to speak, my noble, worthy Lady. I must tell you, that if this ungodly young woman is my daughter, I shall know her by a violet mark between her shoulders and another on the left instep. If she would but come with me into another room—"

"I will not uncover myself before that country woman," said Bertalda, proudly turning away.

"But before me you will," rejoined the Duchess, gravely. "You shall go with me into that room, young woman, and the good dame will accompany us." They withdrew together, leaving the party in silent suspense.

In a few minutes they came back; Bertalda was deadly pale, and the Duchess said: "Truth is truth, and I am bound to declare that our lady hostess has told us perfectly right. Bertalda is the Fisherman's daughter; more than that it concerns nobody to know." And the princely pair departed, taking with them their adopted child, and followed (upon a sign from the Duke) by the Fisherman and his wife. The rest of the assembly broke up, in silence or with secret murmurs, and Undine sank into Huldbrand's arms, weeping bitterly.

CHAPTER XII.

How they left the Imperial City.

THERE was certainly much to displease the Lord of Ringstetten in the events of this day: yet he could not look back upon them without feeling proud of the guileless truth and the generosity of heart shown by his lovely wife. "If indeed her soul was my gift," thought he, "it is nevertheless much better than my own"; and he devoted himself to the task of soothing her grief, and determined he would take her away the next morning from a spot now so full of bitter recollections.

They were mistaken, however, in thinking that she had lost in the eyes of the world by

this adventure. So prepared were the minds of people to find something mysterious in her, that her strange discovery of Bertalda's origin scarcely surprised them; while, on the other hand, every one that heard of Bertalda's history and of her passionate behavior, was moved with indignation. Of this, the Knight and Undine were not aware; nor would it have given them any comfort, for she was still as jealous of Bertalda's good name as of her own. Upon the whole, they had no greater wish than to leave the town without delay.

At day-break next morning, Undine's chariot was in readiness at the door, and the steeds of Huldbrand and his squires stood around it, pawing the ground with impatience. As the Knight led his fair bride to the door, a fishing girl accosted them: "We want no fish," said Huldbrand, "we are just going away." The girl began to sob bitterly, and they then recognized her as Bertalda. They immediately turned back into the house with her; and she said that the Duke and Duchess had been so incensed at her violence the day before, as to withdraw their protection from her, though not without giving her a handsome allowance. The Fisherman, too, had received a liberal gift, and had departed that evening with his wife, to return to the promontory. "I would have gone with them," she continued, "but the old Fisherman, whom they call my father"—

"And so he is, Bertalda," interrupted Undine. "He is your father. For the man you saw at the fountain told me how it is. He was trying

to persuade me that I had better not take you to Ringstetten, and he let drop the secret."

"Well, then," said Bertalda, "my father—if so it must be—my father said, 'You shall not live with us till you are an altered creature. Take courage, and come across the haunted forest to us,—that will show that you sincerely wish to belong to your parents. But do not come in your finery,—be like what you are, a fisherman's daughter.' And I will do as he bids me; for the whole world has forsaken me, and I have nothing left but to live and die humbly in a poor hut, alone with my lowly parents. I do dread the forest very much. They say it is full of grim spectres; and I am so timid! But what can I do? I came only to implore the Lady of Ringstetten's pardon for my rude language yesterday. I have no doubt you meant what you did kindly, noble Dame; but you little knew what a trial your words would be to me, and I was so alarmed and bewildered that many a hasty, wicked word escaped my lips. Ah forgive me, forgive me! I am unhappy enough already. Only consider what I was yesterday morning, even at the beginning of your feast, and what I am now."

Her words were lost in a flood of bitter tears, and Undine, equally affected, fell weeping on her neck. It was long before her emotion would let her speak. At length she said: "You shall go to Ringstetten with us: all shall be as we had settled it before; only call me Undine again, and not 'Lady' and noble 'Dame.' You see, we began by being exchanged in our cra-

ales. Our lives have been linked from that hour; and we will try to bind them so closely that no human power shall sever us. Come with us to Ringstetten, and all will be well. We will live like sisters there; trust me for arranging that." Bertalda looked timidly at Huldbrand. The sight of this beautiful, forsaken maiden affected him. He gave her his hand, and encouraged her kindly to trust herself to him and his wife. "As to your parents," said he, "we will let them know why you do not appear"; and he would have said much more concerning the good old folks, but he observed that Bertalda shuddered at the mention of them, and therefore dropped the subject. He gave her his arm, placed first her and then Undine in the carriage, and rode cheerfully after them. He urged the drivers on so effectually that they very soon found themselves out of sight of the city, and beyond the reach of sad recollections; and the two ladies could fully enjoy the beautiful country through which the road wound along.

After a few days' travelling, they arrived one sunny evening at the Castle of Ringstetten. Its young lord had much business with his steward and laborers to occupy him, so that Undine was left alone with Bertalda. They took a walk on the high ramparts of the castle, and admired the rich Swabian landscape, which lay far and wide around them. A tall man suddenly came up with a courteous obeisance; and Bertalda could not help thinking him very like the ominous man of the fountain. The like-

ness struck her still more when, upon an impatient and even menacing gesture of Undine's, he went away with the same hasty step and shake of the head as before. "Do not be afraid, dear Bertalda," said Undine; "the ugly man shall not harm you this time": after which she told her whole history, beginning from her birth, and how they had been exchanged in their earliest childhood. At first her friend looked at her with serious alarm. She thought that Undine was possessed by some delirium. But she became convinced it was all true as she listened to the well-connected narrative, which accounted so well for the strange events of the last months; besides which, there is something in genuine truth which finds an answer in every heart, and can hardly be mistaken. She was bewildered when she found herself one of the actors in a living fairy tale, and as wild a tale as any she had read. She gazed upon Undine with reverence, but could not help feeling a chill thrown over her affection for her; and that evening, at supper time, she wondered at the Knight's fond love and familiarity towards a being whom she now looked upon as rather a spirit than a human creature.





CHAPTER XIII.

How they lived in the Castle of Ringstetten.

AS he who relates this tale is moved to the heart by it, and hopes that it may affect his readers too, he entreats of them one favor, namely, that they will bear with him while he passes rapidly over a long space of time, and be content if he barely touches upon what happened therein. He knows well that some would relate in great detail, step by step, how Huldbrand's heart began to be estranged from Urdine and drawn towards Bertalda, while she cared not to disguise from him her ardent love, and how between them the poor injured wife came to be rather feared than pitied; and when he showed her kindness, a cold shiver would often creep over him, and send him back to the child of earth, Bertalda; — all this, the author knows, might be dwelt upon; nay, perhaps it ought so to be. But his heart shrinks from such a task, for he has met with such passages in real life, and cannot even abide their shadows in his memory. Perhaps, gent's reader, such feelings are known to thee also, for they are the common lot of mortal man. Well is thee if thou hast felt, not inflicted, these pangs. In these cases it is more blessed to receive than to give. As such recollections

wake up from their cells, they will but cast a soft shade over the past; and it may be the thought of thy withered blossoms, once so fondly loved, brings a gentle tear down thy cheek. Enough of this; we will not go on to pierce our hearts with a thousand separate arrows, but content ourselves with saying that so it happened in the present instance.

Poor Undine drooped day by day, and the others were neither of them happy; Bertalda especially was uneasy, and ready to suspect the injured wife whenever she fancied herself slighted by Huldbrand. Meantime she had gradually assumed the command in the house, and the deluded Huldbrand supported her openly. Undine looked on, in meek resignation. To increase the discomfort of their lives, there was no end to the mysterious sights and sounds that haunted Huldbrand and Bertalda in the vaulted galleries of the castle, such as had never been heard of before. The long white man, too well known to him as uncle Kühleborn and to her as the spirit of the fountain, often showed his threatening countenance to both; but chiefly to Bertalda, who had more than once been made ill by the fright, and thought seriously of leaving the castle. But her love for Huldbrand detained her, and she quieted her conscience by thinking that it had never come to a declaration of love between them; and besides, she would not have known which way to turn. After receiving the Lord of Ringstetten's message that Bertalda was with them, the old Fisherman had traced a few

lines, scarcely legible, from infirmity and long disuse, saying: "I am now a poor old widower, for my dear good wife is dead. But, lonely as I am by my fireside, I had rather Bertalda stayed away than came here. Provided she does not harm my dear Undine! My curse be upon her if she does." Bertalda scattered these last words to the winds, but treasured up her father's command that she should not join him, as is the way with us selfish beings.

One day, when Huldbrand had just ridden out, Undine sent for her servants and desired them to fetch a large stone and carefully to stop up the mouth of the magnificent fountain which played in the centre of the court. The men objected that they must then always go down the valley to a great distance for water. Undine smiled mournfully. "It grieves me to add to your burdens, my good friends," said she; "I had rather go and fill my pitcher myself; but this fountain must be sealed up. Trust me, nothing else will do, and it is our only way of escaping a much worse evil."

The servants rejoiced at any opportunity of pleasing their gentle mistress. Not a word more was said, and they lifted the huge stone. They had raised it, and were about to let it down on the mouth of the spring, when Bertalda ran up calling out to them to stop. The water of this fountain was the best for her complexion, and she never would consent to its being stopped. But Undine, instead of yielding, as usual, kept firmly, though gently, to her resolution. She said that it behoved

her as mistress of the house to order all such matters as appeared best to her, and none but her lord and husband should call her to account. "Look, oh look!" cried Bertalda, eagerly and angrily, "how the poor bright water curls and writhes because you would deprive it of every gleam of sunshine, and of the cheerful faces of men, whose mirror it was created to be!" In truth, the spring did writhe and bubble up wonderfully, just as if some one were trying to force his way through; but Undine pressed them the more to dispatch the work. Nor was there much need to repeat her commands. The household people were too glad at once to obey their gentle lady and to mortify the pride of Bertalda, in spite of whose threats and wrath, the stone was soon firmly fastened down on the mouth of the spring. Undine bent over it thoughtfully, and wrote on its surface with her delicate fingers. Something very hard and sharp must have been hidden in her hand; for when she walked away, and the others came up, they found all manner of strange characters on the stone, none of which were there before.

When the Knight came home that evening, Bertalda received him with tears and complaints of Undine. He looked sternly at his poor wife, who mournfully cast down her eyes, saying, however, with firmness: "My lord and husband would not chide the meanest of his vassals without giving him a hearing, much less his wedded wife." "Speak, then; what was your reason for this strange proceeding?"



Undine emerging from the fountain.

said the knight with a frown. "I would rather tell it you quite alone," sighed Undine. "You can say it just as well in Bertalda's presence," replied he. "Yes, if thou requirest it," said Undine; "but require it not." She looked so humble and so submissive in her touching beauty that the Knight's heart was melted, as by a sunbeam from happier days. He took her affectionately by the hand and led her to his own room, where she spoke to him as fellows.

"You know that wicked uncle Kühleborn, my dearest lord, and have often been provoked at meeting him about the castle. Bertalda, too, has been often terrified by him. No wonder; he is soulless, shallow, and unthinking as a mirror, in whom no feeling can pierce the surface. He has two or three times seen that you were displeased with me, that I in my childishness could not help weeping, and that Bertalda might chance to laugh at the same moment. And upon this he builds all manner of unjust suspicions, and interferes, unasked, in our concerns. What is the use of my reproaching him, or repulsing him with angry words? He believes nothing that I say. A poor cold life is his! How should he know that the sorrows and the joys of love are so sweetly alike, so closely linked, that it is not in human power to part them? When a tear gushes out, a smile lies beneath; and a smile will draw the tears from their secret cells."

She smiled through her tears in Huldbrand's face, and a warm ray of his former love shone through his heart. She perceived this, pressed

closer to him, and with a few tears of joy she went on.

“As I found it impossible to get rid of our tormentor by words, I had nothing for it but to shut the door against him. And his only access to us was that fountain. He has quarrelled with the other fountain spirits in the surrounding valleys, and it is much lower down the Danube, below the junction of some of his friends with the great river, that his power begins again. Therefore I stopped the mouth of our fountain, and inscribed the stone with characters that cripple the might of my restless uncle; so that he can no longer cross your path, or mine, or Bertalda’s. Men can indeed lift the stone off as easily as ever. The inscription has no power over them. So you are free to comply with Bertalda’s wish; but indeed she little knows what she asks. Against her the wild Kühleborn has a most particular spite, and if some of his forebodings were to come true (as they might, without her intending any harm), oh, dearest, even thou wert not free from danger!”

Huldbrand deeply felt the generosity of his noble-minded wife in so zealously shutting out her formidable protector, even when reviled by Bertalda for so doing. He clasped her fondly in his arms, and said with much emotion: “The stone shall remain; and everything shall be done as thou wishest, now and hereafter, my sweetest Undine.”

Scarce could she trust these words of love, after so dreary an estrangement. She returned

his caresses with joyful but timid gratitude, and at length said: "My own dear love, as you are so exceedingly kind to me to-day, may I ask you to promise one thing? Herein you are like the summer. Is he not most glorious when he decks his brows with thunders, and frowns upon us from his throne of clouds? So it is when your eyes flash lightning. It becomes you well; although in my weakness I may often shed a tear at it. Only, if you would promise to refrain from it when we are sailing, or even near any water. For there, you see, my relations have a right to control me. They might relentlessly tear me from you in their wrath, fancying there is an insult offered to one of their race; and I should be doomed to spend the rest of my life in the crystal palaces below, without ever coming to you; or, if they did send me up again,—oh, Heaven, that would be far worse! No, no, my best beloved, you will not let it come to that, if you love your poor Undine."

He solemnly promised to do as she asked him, and they returned to the saloon, quite restored to comfort and peace. They met Bertalda, followed by a few laborers whom she had sent for, and she said in a tone of bitterness that had grown common with her of late, "So, now your private consultation is over, and we may have the stone taken up. Make haste, you people, and do it for me." But Huldbrand, incensed at her arrogance, said shortly and decidedly: "The stone shall not be touched"; and he then reproved Bertalda

for her rudeness to his wife; upon which the laborers walked off, exulting secretly, while Bertalda hurried away to her chamber, pale and disturbed.

The hour of supper came, and they waited in vain for Bertalda. A message was sent to her. The servants found her room empty, and brought back only a sealed letter directed to the Knight. He opened it with trepidation and read: "I feel with shame that I am only a fisherman's daughter. Having forgotten it a moment, I will expiate my crime in the wretched hut of my parents. Live happy with your beautiful wife!"

Undine was sincerely grieved. She entreated Huldbrand to pursue their friend at once, and bring her back with him. Alas! there was little need of entreaty. His passion for Bertalda returned with fresh violence. He searched the castle all over, asking every one if they could tell him in what direction the fair one had fled. He could discover nothing; and now he had mounted his horse in the court, and stood ready to set forth and try the route by which he had brought Bertalda to the castle. A peasant boy just then came up, saying that he had met the Lady riding towards the Black Valley. Like a shot the Knight darted through the gate and took that direction, without heeding Undine's anxious cries from a window: "To the Black Valley?—oh, not there, Huldbrand! not there! or take me with you, for God's sake!" Finding it vain to cry, she had

her white palfrey saddled in all haste, and galloped after her husband, without allowing any one to attend her.

CHAPTER XIV.

How Bertalda drove home with the Knight.

THE Black Valley lay among the deepest recesses of the mountains. What it is called now none can tell. In those times it bore that name among the countrymen, on account of the deep gloom shed over it by many high trees, mostly pines. Even the brook which gushed down between the cliffs was tinged with black and never sparkled like the merry streams from which nothing intercepts the blue of heaven. Now, in the dusk of twilight, it looked darker still as it gurgled between the rocks. The Knight spurred his horse along its banks, now fearing to lose ground in his pursuit, and now again that he might overlook the fugitive in her hiding-place if he hurried past too swiftly. He presently found himself far advanced in the valley, and hoped he must soon overtake her if he were but in the right track. Then again, the thought that it might be a wrong one, roused the keenest anxiety in his breast. Where was the tender Bertalda to lay her head if he missed her in this bleak stormy night, which was setting in, black and

awful, upon the valley? And now he saw something white gleaming through the boughs on the slope of the mountain; he took it for Bertalda's robe, and made for it. But the horse started back, and reared so obstinately that Huldbrand, impatient of delay, and having already found him difficult to manage among the brambles of the thicket, dismounted, and fastened the foaming steed to a tree: he then felt his way through the bushes on foot. The boughs splashed his head and cheeks roughly with cold wet dew; far off he heard the growl of thunder beyond the mountains, and the whole strange scene had such an effect upon him that he became afraid of approaching the white figure which he now saw lying on the ground at a short distance. And yet he could distinguish it to be a woman, dressed in long white garments like Bertalda's, asleep or in a swoon. He came close to her, made the boughs rustle, and his sword ring; but she stirred not. "Bertalda!" cried he, first gently, then louder and louder, — in vain. When at length he shouted the beloved name with the whole strength of his lungs, a faint mocking echo returned it from the cavities of the rocks — Bertalda! but the sleeper awoke not. He bent over her, but the gloom of the valley and the shades of night prevented his discerning her features. At length, though kept back by some boding fears, he knelt down by her on the earth, and just then a flash of lightning lighted up the valley. He saw a hideous distorted face close to his own, and heard a hollow voice say:

“Give me a kiss, thou sweet shepherd!” With a cry of horror Huldbrand started up, and the mouster after him. “Go home!” it cried, “the bad spirits are abroad; go home! or I have you!” and its long white arm nearly grasped him. Spiteful Kähleborn!” cried the Knight, taking courage; “what matters it, I know thee, foul spirit! there is a kiss for thee!” And he raised his sword furiously against the figure. But it dissolved, and a drenching shower made it sufficiently clear to the Knight what enemy he had encountered. “He would scare me away from Bertalda,” said he aloud to himself; “he thinks he can subdue me by his absurd tricks, and make me leave the poor terrified maiden in his power, that he may wreak his vengeance upon her. But *that* he never shall — wretched goblin! What power lies in a human breast, when steeled by firm resolve, the contemptible juggler has yet to learn.” And he felt the truth of his own words, and seemed to have nerved himself afresh by them. He thought, too, that fortune now began to aid him, for before he had got back to his horse again, he distinctly heard the piteous voice of Bertalda as if near at hand, borne towards him on the winds as their howling mingled with the thunder. Eagerly did he push on in that direction, and he found the trembling damsel, who was just attempting to climb the mountain’s side, in order at any risk to get out of these awful shades.

He met her affectionately, and however proudly she might before have determined to

hold out, she could not but rejoice at being rescued by her much loved Huldbrand from the fearful solitude, and warmly invited to return to his cheerful home in the castle. She accompanied him with scarcely a word of reluctance, but was so exhausted that the Knight felt much relieved when they had reached the horse in safety. He hastened to loose him, and would have placed his tender charge upon him, and walked by her side to guide her carefully through the dangerous shades. But Kühleborn's mad pranks had driven the horse quite wild. Hardly could the Knight himself have sprung upon the terrified, plunging creature's back. To place the trembling Bertalda upon him was quite impossible; so they made up their minds to walk home. With his horse's bridle over one arm, Huldbrand supported his half fainting companion on the other. Bertalda mastered what strength she could, in order the sooner to get beyond this dreaded valley, but fatigue weighed her down like lead, and every limb shook under her,—partly from the recollection of all she had already suffered from Kühleborn's spite, and partly from terror at the continued crashing of the tempest through the mountain forests.

At length she slid down from her protector's arm, and sinking on the moss she said: "Leave me to die here, noble Huldbrand; I reap the punishment of my folly, and must sink under this load of fatigue and anguish." "Never, my precious friend, never will I forsake you," cried Huldbrand, vainly striving to curb his

raging steed, who was now beginning to start and plunge worse than ever. The Knight contrived to keep him at some distance from the exhausted maiden, so as to save her the terror of seeing him near her. But no sooner had he withdrawn himself and the wild animal a few steps, than she began to call him back in the most piteous manner, thinking he was indeed going to desert her in this horrible wilderness. He was quite at a loss what to do; gladly would he have let the horse gallop away in the darkness and expend his wild fury but that he feared he might rush down upon the very spot where Bertalda lay.

In this extremity of distress it gave him unspeakable comfort to descry a wagon slowly descending the stony road behind him. He called out for help; a man's voice replied telling him to have patience, but promising to come to his aid. Soon two white horses became visible through the thicket, and next the white smock-frock of the wagoner, and a large sheet of white linen that covered his goods inside. "Ho, stop!" cried the man, and the obedient horses stood still. "I see well enough," said he, "what ails the beast. When first I came through these parts my horses were just as troublesome; because there is a wicked water sprite living hard by who takes delight in making them play tricks. But I know a charm for this. If you will give me leave to whisper it in your horse's ear, you will see him as quiet as mine yonder in a moment." "Try your charm, if it will do any good!" said the impa-

tient Knight. The driver pulled the unruly horse's head towards him, and whispered a couple of words in his ear. At once the animal stood still, tamed and pacified, and showed no remains of his former fury but by panting and snorting, as if he still chafed inwardly. This was no time for Huldbrand to inquire how it had been done. He agreed with the wagoner that Bertalda should be taken into the wagon, which by his account was loaded with bales of soft cotton, and conveyed to the Castle of Ringstetten, while the Knight followed on horseback. But his horse seemed too much spent by his former violence to be able to carry his master so far, and the man persuaded Huldbrand to get into the wagon with Bertalda. The horse was to be fastened behind. "We shall go down hill," said the man, "and that is light work for my horses." The Knight placed himself by Bertalda: his horse quietly followed them, and the driver walked by steadily and carefully.

In the deep stillness of night, while the storm growled more and more distant, and in the consciousness of safety and easy progress, Huldbrand and Bertalda insensibly got into confidential discourse. He tenderly reproached her for having so hastily fled. She excused herself with bashful emotion, and through all she said it appeared most clearly that her heart was all his own. Huldbrand was too much engrossed by the expression of her words to attend to their apparent meaning, and he only replied to the former. Upon this the wagoner

cried out in a voice that rent the air: "Now, my horses, up with you; show us what you are made of, my fine fellows!" The Knight put out his head, and saw the horses treading, or rather swimming, through the foaming waters, while the wheels whirled loudly and rapidly like those of a water-mill, and the wagoner was standing upon the top of his wagon overlooking the floods. "Why, what road is this? It will take us into the middle of the stream," cried Huldbrand. "No, Sir," cried the driver, laughing; "it is just the other way. The stream is come into the middle of the road. Look around, and see how it is all flooded."

In fact, the whole valley was now heaving with waves, that had swollen rapidly to a great height. "This must be Kühleborn, the wicked sprite, trying to drown us!" cried the Knight. "Have you no charm to keep him off, friend?" "I do know of one," said the driver, "but I can't and won't make use of it till you know who I am." "Is this a time for riddles?" shouted the Knight. "The flood is rising every moment, and what care I to know who you are?" "It rather concerns you, however, to know," said the driver, "for I am Kühleborn." And he grinned hideously into the wagon, — which was now a wagon no longer, nor were the horses horses; but all dissolved into foaming waves. The wagoner himself shot up into a giant waterspout, bore down the struggling horses into the flood, and, towering over the heads of the hapless pair, till he had

swelled into a watery mountain, he would have swallowed them up the next moment.

But now the sweet voice of Undine was heard above the wild uproar. The moon shone out between the clouds; and at the same instant Undine came into sight upon the high grounds above them. She addressed Kühleborn in a commanding tone; the huge wave laid itself down, muttering and murmuring; the waters rippled gently away in the moon's soft light; and Undine alighted like a white dove from her airy height, and led them to a soft green spot on the hill side, where she refreshed their jaded spirits with choice food. She then helped Bertalda to mount her own white palfrey, and at length they all three reached the Castle of Ringstetten in safety.

CHAPTER XV.

The Trip to Vienna.

FOR some time after this adventure they led a quiet and peaceful life in the castle. The Knight was deeply touched by his wife's angelic goodness, so signally displayed by her pursuing and saving them in the Black Valley, where their lives were threatened by Kühleborn. Undine herself was happy in the peace of an approving conscience; besides that, many a gleam of hope now brightened her path, as her hus

hand's love and confidence seemed to revive. Bertalda meanwhile was grateful, modest, and timid, without claiming any merit for being so. If either of her companions alluded to the sealing up of the fountain, or the adventures in the Black Valley, she would implore them to spare her on those subjects, because she could not think of the fountain without a blush, nor the valley without a shudder. She was therefore told nothing further,—indeed what would have been the use of enlightening her? Nothing could add to the peace and happiness which had taken up their abode in the Castle of Ringstetten. They enjoyed the present in full security, and the future lay before them all blooming with fair fruits and flowers.

The winter had gone by without any interruption to their social comfort; and spring, with her young green shoots and bright blue skies, began to smile upon men. Their hearts felt light, like the young season; and from its returning birds of passage they caught a fancy to travel. One day, as they were walking together near the sources of the Danube, Huldbrand fell into talk about the glories of that noble river, how proudly he flowed on through fruitful lands to the spot where the majestic city of Vienna crowned his banks, and how every mile of his course was marked by fresh grandeur and beauty. “How delightful it would be to follow his course down to Vienna?” cried Bertalda; but instantly relapsing into her timid, chastened manner, she blushed and was silent. This touched Undine, and in her

eagerness to give her friend pleasure, she said "And why should not we take the trip?" Bertalda jumped for joy, and their fancy began to paint this pleasant recreation in the brightest colors. Huldbrand encouraged them cheerfully, but whispered once to Undine: "But, should not we get within Kühleborn's power again down there?" "Let him come," said she laughing; "I shall be with you, and in my presence he durst not attempt any mischief."

So the only possible objection seemed removed, and they prepared for departure, and were soon sailing along, full of spirit and of gay hopes. But, O Man! it is not for thee to wonder when the course of events differs widely from the paintings of thy fancy. The treacherous foe that lures us to our ruin lulls his victim to rest with sweet music and golden dreams. Our guardian angel, on the contrary, will often rouse us by a sharp and awakening blow.

The first days they spent on the Danube were days of extraordinary enjoyment. The further they floated down the proud stream, the nobler and fairer grew the prospect. But, just as they had reached a most lovely district, the first sight of which had promised them great delight, the unruly Kühleborn began openly to give signs of his presence and power. At first they were only sportive tricks, because, whenever he ruffled the stream and raised the wind, Undine repressed him by a word or two, and made him subside at once; but his attempts soon began again, and Undine was obliged to

warn him off, so that the pleasure of the little party was grievously disturbed. To make things worse, the watermen would mutter many a dark surmise into each other's ears, and cast strange looks at the three gentlefolks, whose very servants began to feel suspicious, and to show distrust of their lord. Huldbrand said to himself more than once: "This comes of uniting with other than one's like. A son of earth may not marry a wondrous maid of ocean." To justify himself (as we all love to do), he would add: "But I did not know she was a maid of ocean. If I am to be pursued and fettered wherever I go by the mad freaks of her relations, mine is the misfortune, not the fault." Such reflections somewhat checked his self reproaches; but they made him the more disposed to accuse, nay, even to hate Undine. Already he began to scowl upon her, and the poor wife understood but too well his meaning. Exhausted by this, and by her constant exertions against Kühleborn, she sank back one evening in the boat, and was lulled by its gentle motion into a deep sleep.

But no sooner were her eyes closed than every one in the boat thought he saw, just opposite his own eyes, a terrific human head rising above the water,—not like the head of a swimmer, but planted upright on the surface of the river, and keeping pace with the boat. Each turned to his neighbor to show him the cause of his terror, and found him looking equally frightened, but pointing in a different

direction, where the half-laughing, half-scowling goblin met his eyes. When at length they tried to explain the matter to each other, crying out: "Look there! no, there!" each of them suddenly perceived the other's phantom, and the water around the boat appeared all alive with ghastly monsters. The cry which burst from every mouth awakened Undine. Before the light of her beaming eyes, the horde of misshapen faces vanished. But Huldbrand was quite exasperated by these fiendish tricks, and would have burst into loud imprecations had not Undine whispered in the most beseeching manner: "For God's sake, my own lord, be patient now! Remember we are on the water." The Knight kept down his anger, and soon sank into thought. Presently Undine whispered to him: "My love, had not we better give up the foolish journey, and go home to Ringstetten in comfort?" But Huldbrand muttered angrily: "Then I am to be kept a prisoner in my own castle? and even there I may not breathe freely unless the fountain is sealed up? Would to Heaven the absurd connection"—but Undine pressed her soft hand gently upon his lips; and he held his peace, and mused upon all she had previously told him.

In the mean time Bertalda had yielded herself up to many and strange reflections. She knew something of Undine's origin, but not all; and Kühleborn in particular was only a fearful but vague image in her mind; she had not even once heard his name. And as she

considered these wonderful subjects, she half unconsciously took off a golden necklace which Huldbrand had bought for her of a travelling jeweller a few days before; she held it close to the surface of the river playing with it, and dreamily watching the golden gleam that it shed on the glassy water. Suddenly a large hand came up out of the Danube, snatched the necklace and ducked under with it. Bertalda screamed aloud, and was answered by a laugh of scorn from the depths below. And now the Knight could contain himself no longer. Starting up he gave a loose to his fury, loading with imprecations those who chose to break into his family and private life, and challenging them — were they goblins or sirens — to meet his good sword. Bertalda continued to weep over the loss of her beloved jewel, and her tears were as oil to the flames of his wrath; while Undine kept her hand dipped into the water, with a ceaseless low murmur, only once or twice interrupting her mysterious whispers to say to her husband in tones of entreaty: "Dearest love, speak not roughly to me here; say whatever you will, only spare me here, you know why; and he still restrained his tongue (which stammered with passion) from saying a word directly against her. She soon drew her hand from under the water, bringing up a beautiful coral necklace whose glitter dazzled them all. "Take it," said she, offering it kindly to Bertalda; "I have sent for this instead of the one you lost; do not grieve any more, my poor child." Huldbrand darted forwards, snatched

the shining gift from Undine's hand, hurled it again into the water and roared furiously : " So you still have intercourse with them? In the name of sorcery, go back to them with all your baubles, and leave us men in peace, witch as you are!" With eyes aghast, yet streaming with tears, poor Undine gazed at him, still holding out the hand which had so lovingly presented to Bertalda the bright jewel. Then she wept more and more, like a sorely injured, innocent child. And at length she said, faintly : " Farewell, my dearest, farewell ! They shall not lay a finger on thee ; only be true to me, that I may still guard thee from them. But I, alas ! I must be gone ; all this bright morning of life is over. Woe, woe is me ! what hast thou done ? woe, woe !" And she slipped out of the boat and passed away. Whether she went down into the river, or flowed away with it, none could tell ; it was like both and yet like neither. She soon mingled with the waters of the Danube, and nothing was to be heard but the sobbing whispers of the stream as it washed against the boat, seeming to say distinctly, " Woe, woe ! Oh be true to me ! woe, woe ! "

Huldbrand lay flat in the boat, drowned in tears, till a deep swoon came to the unhappy man's relief, and steeped him in oblivion.





CHAPTER XVI.

Of what befell Huldbrand afterwards.

SHALL we say alas, or thank God, that our grief is so often transient? I speak of such grief as has its source in the well-springs of life itself, and seems so identified with our lost friend as almost to fill up the void he has left! and his hallowed image seems fixed within the sanctuary of our soul, until the signal of our release comes, and sets us free to join him. In truth a good man will not suffer this sanctuary to be disturbed; yet even with him it is not the first the all-engrossing sorrow which abides. New objects will intermingle, and we are compelled to draw from our grief itself, a fresh proof of the perishableness of earthly things: alas, then, that our grief is transient!

So it was with the Lord of Ringstetten; whether for his weal or woe, the sequel of this story will show us. At first he could do nothing but weep abundantly, as his poor kind Undine had wept when he snatched from her the beautiful gift which she thought would have comforted and pleased them so much. He would then stretch out his hand as she had done, and burst into tears afresh, like her. He secretly hoped that he might end by altogether dissolving in tears: and are there not many whose

minds have been visited by the same painfully pleasing thought at some season of great sorrow? Bertalda wept with him, and they lived quietly together at Ringstetten a long while, cherishing the memory of Undine, and seeming to have forgotten their own previous attachment. Moreover, the gentle Undine often appeared to Huldbrand in his dreams; she would caress him meekly and fondly and depart again with tearful resignation, so that when he awoke he doubted whose tears they were that bedewed his face,— were they her's, or only his own?

But as time went on these visions became less frequent and the Knight's grief milder: still he might perhaps have spent the rest of his days contentedly, devoting himself to the memory of Undine, and keeping it alive by talking of her, had not the old Fisherman unexpectedly made his appearance and laid his serious commands upon Bertalda his daughter to return home with him. The news of Undine's disappearance had reached him, and he would no longer suffer Bertalda to remain in the castle alone with its lord. "I do not ask whether my daughter cares for me or not," said he; "her character is at stake, and where that is the case nothing else is worth considering."

This summons from the old man, and the prospect of utter loneliness amid the halls and long galleries of the castle after Bertalda's departure, revived in Huldbrand's heart the feeling that had lain dormant, and as it were buried under his mourning for Undine, **namely**.

his love for the fair Bertalda. The Fisherman had many objections to their marriage; Undine had been very dear to the old man, and he thought it hardly certain yet that his lost darling was really dead. But if her corpse were indeed lying stiff and cold in the bed of the Danube, or floating down its stream to the distant ocean, then Bertalda ought to reproach herself for her death, and it ill became her to take the place of her poor victim. However, the Fisherman was very fond of Huldbrand also; the entreaties of his daughter, who was now grown much more gentle and submissive, had their effect, and it seems that he did yield his consent at last, for he remained peaceably at the castle, and an express was sent to Father Heilmann, who in earlier, happier days had blessed Undine's and Huldbrand's union, that he might officiate at the Knight's second marriage.

No sooner had the holy man read the Lord of Ringstetten's letter than he set forth on his way thither with far greater speed than the messenger had used to reach him. If his straining haste took away his breath, or he felt his aged limbs ache with fatigue, he would say to himself: "I may be in time to prevent a wicked deed; sink not till thou hast reached the goal, my withered frame!" And so he exerted himself afresh, and pushed on, without flagging or halting, till late one evening he entered the shady court of Ringstetten.

The lovers were sitting hand in hand under a tree, with the thoughtful old man near them

As soon as they saw Father Heilmann, they rose eagerly and advanced to meet him. But he, scarcely noticing their civilities, begged the Knight to come with him into the castle. As he stared at this request, and hesitated to comply, the pious old Priest said: "Why, indeed, should I speak to you alone, my Lord of Ringstetten? What I have to say equally concerns the Fisherman and Bertalda; and as they must sooner or later know it, it had better be said now. How can you be certain, Lord Huldbrand, that your own wife is indeed dead? For myself, I can hardly think so. I will not venture to speak of things relating to her wondrous nature,—in truth, I have no clear knowledge about it. But a godly and faithful wife she proved herself, beyond all doubt; and these fourteen nights has she come to my bedside in dreams, wringing her poor hands in anguish, and sighing out: 'Oh, stop him, dear Father! I am yet alive! Oh, save his life! Oh, save his soul!' I understood not the meaning of the vision till your messenger came; and I have now hastened thither, not to join but to part those hands, which may not be united in holy wedlock. Part from her, Huldbrand! Part from him, Bertalda! He belongs to another. See you not how his cheek turns pale at the thought of his departed wife? Those are not the looks of a bridegroom, and the spirit tells me this. If thou leavest him not now, there is joy for thee no more." They all three felt at the bottom of their hearts that Father Heilmann's words were true, but they

would not yield to them. Even the old Fisherman was so blinded as to think that what had been settled between them for so many days could not now be relinquished. So they resisted the Priest's warnings, and urged the fulfillment of their wishes with headlong, gloomy determination, till Father Heilmann departed with a melancholy shake of the head, without accepting even for one night their proffered hospitalities, or tasting any of the refreshments they set before him. But Huldbrand persuaded himself that the old Priest was a weak dotard; and early next morning he sent to a monk from the nearest cloister, who readily promised to come and marry them in a few days.

CHAPTER XVII.

The Knight's Dream.

THE morning twilight was beginning to dawn, and the Knight lay half awake on his couch. Whenever he dropped asleep, he was scared by mysterious terrors, and started up as if sleep were peopled by phantoms. If he woke up in earnest, he felt himself fanned all around by what seemed like swans' wings, and soothed by watery airs, which lulled him back again into the half unconscious, twilight state. At length he did fall asleep, and fancied

himself lifted by swans on their soft wings, and carried far away over lands and seas, all to the sound of their sweetest melody. "Swans singing! swans singing!" thought he continually: is not that the strain of Death?" Presently he found himself hovering above a vast sea. A swan warbled in his ear that it was the Mediterranean; and as he looked down into the deep, it became like clear crystal, transparent to the bottom. This rejoiced him much, for he could see Undine sitting in a brilliant hall of crystal.

She was shedding tears, indeed, and looked sadly changed since the happy times which they had spent together at Ringstetten,—happiest at first, but happy also a short time since, just before the fatal sail on the Danube. The contrast struck Huldbrand deeply; but Undine did not seem to be aware of his presence. Kühleborn soon came up to her, and began rating her for weeping. She composed herself, and looked at him with a firmness and dignity before which he almost quailed. "Though I am condemned to live under these deep waters," said she, "I have brought my soul with me; therefore my tears cannot be understood by thee. But to me they are blessings, like everything that belongs to a loving soul." He shook his head incredulously, and said after a pause: "Nevertheless, niece, you are still subject to the laws of our element; and you know you must execute sentence of death upon him as soon as he marries again, and breaks faith with you." "To this hour he is a widower, said

Undine, "and loves and mourns me truly." "Ah, but he will be a bridegroom soon," said Kühleborn with a sneer: "wait a couple of days only and the marriage blessing will have been given, and you must go up and put the criminal to death." "I cannot!" answered the smiling Undine. "I have had the fountain sealed up against myself and my whole race." "But suppose he leaves his castle," said Kühleborn, "or forgets himself so far as to let them set the fountain 'free'! for he thinks mighty little of those matters." "And that is why," said Undine, still smiling through her tears, "that is why his spirit hovers at this moment over the Mediterranean, and listens to our conversation as in a dream. I have contrived it on purpose, that he may take warning." On hearing this Kühleborn looked up angrily at the Knight, scowled at him, stamped, and then shot upwards through the waves like an arrow. His fury seemed to make him expand into a whale. Again the swans began to warble, to wave their wings, and to fly: the Knight felt himself borne high over alps and rivers till he was deposited in the Castle of Ringstetten, and awoke in his bed.

He did awake in his bed, just as one of his squires entered the room and told him that Father Heilmann was still lingering near the castle; for he had found him the evening before in the forest living in a shed he had made for himself with branches and moss. On being asked what he was staying for, since he had refused to bless the betrothed couple, he ans

wered: "it is not the wedded only who stand in need of prayer; and though I came not for the bridal, there may yet be work for me of another kind. We must be prepared for everything. Sometimes marriage and mourning are not so far apart; and he who does not willfully close his eyes may perceive it." The Knight quitted all manner of strange conjectures upon these words and upon his dream. But if once a man has formed a settled purpose, it is hard indeed to shake it. The end of this was that their plans remained unchanged.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Of the Knight Huldbrand's second Bridal.

WERE I to tell you how the wedding-day at Ringstetten passed, you might imagine yourself contemplating a glittering heap of gay objects with a black crape thrown over them, through which the splendid pageant, instead of delighting the eye, would look like a mockery of all earthly joys. Not that the festive meeting was disturbed by any spectral apparitions. We have seen that the castle was safe from any intrusion of the malicious water sprites. But the Knight, the Fisherman, and all the guests were haunted by a feeling that

the chief person, the soul of the feast, was missing; and who was she but the gentle, beloved Undine? As often as they heard a door open, every eye turned involuntarily towards it, and when nothing ensued but the entrance of the steward with some more dishes, or of the cup-bearer with a fresh supply of rich wine, the guests would look sad and blank, and the sparks of gaiety kindled by the light jest or the cheerful discourse were quenched in the damp of melancholy recollections. The bride was the most thoughtless, and consequently the most cheerful person present; but even she, at moments, felt it unnatural to be sitting at the head of the table, decked out in her wreath of green and her embroidery of gold, while Undine's corpse was lying cold and stiff in the bed of the Danube, or floating down its stream to the ocean. For, ever since her father had used these words, they had kept ringing in her ears, and today especially they pursued her without ceasing.

The party broke up before night had closed in, not, as usual, dispersed by the eager impatience of the bridegroom to be alone with his bride; but dropping off listlessly, as a general gloom spread over the assembly. Bertalda was followed to her dressing-room by her women only, and the Knight by his pages. At this gloomy feast there was no question of the gay and sportive train of bridemaids and young men who usually attend the wedded pair.

Bertalda tried to call up brighter thoughts; she bade her women display before her a splen-

did set of jewels, the gift of Huldbrand, together with her richest robes and veils, that she might select the gayest and handsomest dress for the morrow. Her maids seized the opportunity of wishing their young mistress all manner of joy, nor did they fail to extol the beauty of the bride to the skies. Bertalda, however, glanced at herself in the glass, and sighed: "Ah, but look at the freckles just here, on my throat!" They looked and found it was indeed so, but called them beauty spots that would only enhance the fairness of her delicate skin. Bertalda shook her head, and replied: "Still it is a blemish, and I once might have cured it!" said she with a deep sigh. "But the fountain in the court is stopped up; that fountain which used to supply me with precious beautifying water. If I could but get one jugful today!" "Is that all?" cried an obsequious attendant, and slipped out of the room. "Why, she will not be so mad," asked Bertalda, in a tone of complacent surprise, "as to make them raise the stone this very night?" And now she heard men's footsteps crossing the court; and on looking down from her window, she saw the officious handmaid conducting them straight to the fountain. They carried levers and other tools upon their shoulders. "Well, it is my will, to be sure," said Bertalda, smiling, "provided they are not too long about it." And, elated by the thought that a hint from her could now effect what had once been denied to her entreaties, she watched the progress of the work in the moonlit court below.

The men began straining themselves to lift the huge stone; occasionally a sigh was heard, as some one recollected that they were now reversing their dear lady's commands. But the task proved lighter than they had expected. Some power from beneath seemed to second their efforts, and help the stone upwards. "Why," said the astonished workmen to each other, "it feels as if the spring below had turned into a waterspout." More and more did the stone heave, till, without any impulse from the men, it rolled heavily along the pavement with a hollow sound. But from the mouth of the spring arose, slowly and solemnly, what looked like a column of water. At first they thought so, but presently saw that it was no waterspout, but the figure of a pale woman, veiled in white. She was weeping abundantly, wringing her hands and clasping them over her head, while she proceeded with slow and measured step towards the castle. The crowd of servants fell back from the spot, while, pale and aghast, the bride and her women looked on from the window.

When the figure had arrived just under that window, she raised her tearful face for a moment, and Bertalda thought she recognized Undine's pale features through the veil. The shadowy form moved on, slowly and reluctantly, like one sent to execution. Bertalda screamed out that the Knight must be called. No one durst stir a foot, and the bride herself kept silence, frightened at the sound of her own voice.

While these remained at the window, as if rooted to the spot, the mysterious visitor had entered the castle and passed up the well-known stairs, and through the familiar rooms, still weeping silently. Alas! how differently had she trodden those floors in days gone by!

The Knight had now dismissed his train. Half undressed, and in a dejected mood, he was standing near a large mirror, by the light of a dim taper. He heard the door tapped by a soft, soft touch. It was thus Undine had been wont to knock when she meant to steal upon him playfully. "It is all fancy!" thought he. "The bridal bed awaits me." "Yes, but it is a cold one," said a weeping voice from without; and the mirror then showed him the door opening slowly, and the white form coming in, and closing the door gently behind her. "They have opened the mouth of the spring," murmured she; "and now I am come, and now must thou die." His beating heart told him this was indeed true; but he pressed his hands over his eyes and said: "Do not bewilder me with terror in my last moments. If thy veil conceals the features of a spectre, hide them from me still, and let me die in peace." "Alas!" rejoined the forlorn one, "wilt thou not look upon me once again? I am fair as when thou didst woo me on the promontory." "Oh, could that be true!" sighed Huldbrand, "and if I might die in thy embrace!" "Be it so, my dearest," said she. And she raised her veil, and the heavenly radiance of her sweet countenance beamed upon him.

Trembling, at once with love and awe, the Knight approached her. She received him with a tender embrace, but instead of relaxing her hold, she pressed him more closely to her heart, and wept as if her soul would pour itself out. Drowned in her tears and his own, Huldbrand felt his heart sink within him, and at last he fell lifeless from the fond arms of Undine upon his pillow.

“I have wept him to death!” said she to the pages whom she passed in the ante-chamber; and she glided slowly through the crowd, and went back to the fountain.

CHAPTER XIX.

How the Knight Huldbrand was Interred.

FATHER Heilmann had returned to the castle as soon as he heard of the Lord of Ringstetten's death; and he appeared there just after the monk who had married the hapless pair had fled, full of alarm and horror. “It is well,” answered Heilmann, when told this: “now is the time for my office: I want no assistant.” He addressed spiritual exhortations to the widowed bride; but little impression could be made on so worldly and thoughtless a mind. The old Fisherman, although

grieved to the heart, resigned himself more readily to the awful dispensation; and when Bertalda kept calling Undine a witch and a murderer, the old man calmly answered: "The stroke could not be turned away. For my part, I see only the hand of God therein; and none grieved more deeply over Huldbrand's sentence than she who was doomed to inflict it,—the poor forsaken Undine!" And he helped to arrange the funeral ceremonies in a manner suitable to the high rank of the dead. He was to be buried in a neighboring hamlet, whose churchyard contained the graves of all his ancestors, and which he had himself enriched with many noble gifts. His helmet and coat of arms lay upon the coffin, about to be lowered into earth with his mortal remains,—for Lord Huldbrand of Ringstetten was the last of his race.

The mourners began their dismal procession, and the sound of their solemn dirge rose into the calm blue depths of heaven. Heilmann walked first, bearing on high a crucifix, and the bereaved Bertalda followed, leaning on her aged father. Suddenly, amid the crowd of mourners who composed the widow's train, appeared a snow white figure, deeply veiled, with hands uplifted in an attitude of intense grief. Those that stood near her felt a shudder creep over them: they shrank back, and thus increased the alarm of those whom the stranger next approached, so that confusion gradually spread itself through the whole train. Here and there was to be found a soldier bold

enough to address the figure and attempt to drive her away; but she always eluded their grasp, and the next moment reappeared among the rest, moving along with slow and solemn step. At length, when the attendants had all fallen back, she found herself close behind Bertalda, and now slackened her pace to the very slowest measure, so that the widow was not aware of her presence. No one disturbed her again, while she meekly and reverently glided on behind her.

So they advanced till they reached the churchyard, when the whole procession formed a circle around the open grave. Bertalda then discovered the unbidden guest, and half angry, half frightened, she forbade her to come near the Knight's resting-place. But the veiled form gently shook her head and extended her hands in humble entreaty; this gesture reminded Bertalda of poor Undine, when she gave her the coral necklace on the Danube, and she could not but weep. Father Heilmann enjoined silence, for they had begun to heap earth over the grave, and were about to offer up solemn prayers around it. Bertalda knelt down in silence, and all her followers did the same. When they arose, lo! the white form had vanished! and on the spot where she had knelt, a bright silvery brook now gushed out of the turf and flowed around the Knight's tomb, till it had almost wholly encircled it; then it ran further on, and emptied itself into a shady pool which bounded one side of the churchyard. From that time forth the villagers are

said to have shown travellers this clear spring, and they still believe it to be the poor forsaken Undine, who continues thus to twine her arms around her beloved lord.



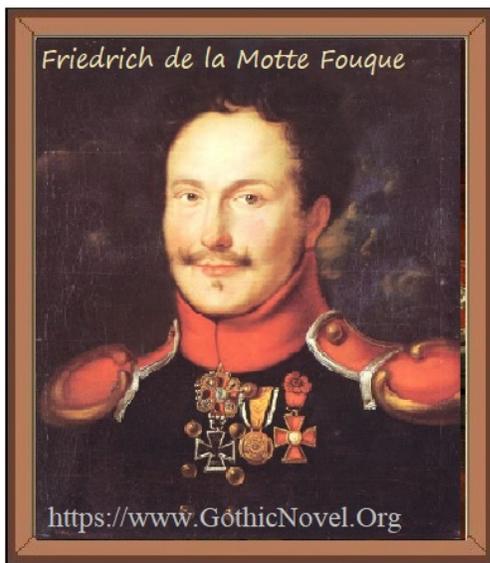
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