

A German Tale.

This morning we offer a tale, the title of which is familiar to our readers, from the popularity of the operas of the same name, but which, hitherto, has not been printed in this country, notwithstanding it has been so often translated in Europe. Those who have not read any of the dramas, may be curious to know what means the *Der Freischütz*, which has so often met their eyes. They will find here the original story, which, when passed, and considered as a specimen of this favorite branch of composition among the Germans, will not, we think, be deemed too long even for a newspaper. A tale of the terrible and supernatural, with a striking moral, is not unsuitable for a Saturday eve, especially in weather so misty and dank, as the present.

National Gazette.

Der Freischütz; or, The Magic Balls.
From the German of A. Apel.

Black spirits and white,
Blue spirits and grey,
Mingle, mingle, mingle,
That the magic may.

"LISTEN, dear wife," said Bertram, the forester of Lindenhayn, to his good and faithful Anne; "listen, I beseech you, one moment. You know I have ever done my utmost to make you happy, and will still continue to do so; but this project is out of the question. I intreat you, do not encourage the girl any farther in the notion; settle the matter decidedly at once, and she will only drop a few silent tears, and then resign herself to my wishes; but by these silly delays nothing rational can be effected."

"But, dearest husband," objected the coaxing wife, "may not Catherine be as happy with William the clerk as with Robert the game-keeper? Indeed, you do not know him: he is clever, so good, so kind—"

"But no marksman," interrupted the forester. "The situation which I hold here has been possessed by my family for more than two hundred years, and has always descended down in a straight line from father to son. If, instead of this girl, Anne, you had brought me a boy, all would have been well; he would have had my situation, and the wench, if she had been in existence, might have chosen for her bridegroom him whom she loved best; now the thing is impossible. My son-in-law, must also be my successor, and must therefore be a marksman. I shall have, in the first place, some trouble to obtain the trial for him; and in the second, if he should not exceed, truly, I shall have thrown my girl away: so a clever huntsman she shall have. But observe, if you do not like him, I do not exactly insist upon Robert: find another active clever fellow for the girl, I will resign my situation to him, and we shall pass the rest of our lives free from anxiety and happily with our children. But hush!—not another word!—I beseech you let me hear no more of the steward's clerk."

Mother Anne was silenced; she would fain have said a few more words in favour of poor William, but the forester, who was well acquainted with the power of female persuasion, gave her no further opportunity: he took his gun, whistled his dog, and strode away to the forest. The next moment, the fair curled head of Catherine, her face radiant with smiles, was popped in at the door—"Is all right, dear mother?" said she. "Alas! no, my child; do not rejoice too soon!" replied the sorrowing Anne. "Your father speaks kindly, but he has determined to give you to nobody but a huntsman; and I know he will not change his mind." Catherine wept, and declared she would sooner die than wed any other than her own William. Her mother wept, fretted, and scolded by turns; till at length it was finally determined to make another grand attack upon the tough heart of old Bertram; and, in the midst of a deliberation respecting the manner in which this was to be effected, the rejected lover entered the apartment.

When William had heard the cause of the forester's objection—"Is that all, my Catherine?" said he, pressing the weeping girl to his bosom; "then keep up your spirits, dearest, for I will myself become a forester. I am not unacquainted with woodcraft, for I was, when a boy, placed under the care of my uncle the chief forester of Finsterbuch, in order to learn it, and only at the earnest request of my uncle the steward, I exchanged the shooting-pouch for the writing-desk. Of what use," continued the lover, "would his situation and fine house be to me, if I cannot carry my Catherine

there as the mistress of it. If you are not more ambitious than your mother, dearest, and William the game-keeper will be as dear to you as William the steward, I will become a woodsman directly; for the merry life of a forester is more delightful to me than the constrained habits of the town."

"O dear, dear William," said Catherine,—all the dark clouds of sorrow sweeping rapidly over her countenance, and leaving only a few drops of glittering sunny rain, sparkling in her sweet blue eyes.—"O beloved William! if you will indeed do this, all may yet be well: hasten to the forest, seek my father, and speak to him ere he have time to pass his word to Robert." "Away," replied William, "to the forest; I will seek him out, and offer my services as game-keeper: fear nothing, Catherine; give me a gun, and now for the huntsman's salute."

What success he had in his undertaking was soon visible to the anxious eye of Catherine, on her father's return with him from the forest. "A clever lad, that William," said the old man, "who would have expected such a shot in a townsman? I'll speak to the steward myself to-morrow; it would be a thousand pities such a marksman should not stick to the noble huntsman craft. Ha! ha! he will become a second Kuno. But do you know who Kuno was?" demanded he of William.

The latter replied in the negative.

"Lo you there now!" ejaculated Bertram; "I thought I had told you long since. He was my ancestor, the first who possessed this situation. He was originally a poor horse boy in the train of the knight of Wippach; but he was clever, obliging, grew a favourite, and attended his master every where, to tournaments and hunting parties. Once his knight accompanied the duke on a grand hunting match, at which all the nobles attended. The hounds chased a huge stag towards them, upon whose back, to their great astonishment, sat tied a human being, shrieking aloud in a most frightful manner. There existed at that period, among the feudal lords, an inhuman custom of tying unhappy wretches who incurred their displeasure (perhaps by slight transgressions against the hunting laws) upon stags, and then driving them into the forest to perish miserably by hunger. The duke was excessively enraged at this sight, and offered immense rewards to any one who would shoot the stag; but clogged his benefactions with death to the marksman, should his erring bullet touch the victim, whose life he was desirous to preserve, in order to ascertain the nature of his offence. Started by the conditions, not one of the train attempted the rescue of the poor wretch, till Kuno, pitying his fate, stepped forward and boldly offered his services. The duke having accepted them he took his rifle, loaded it in God's name, and earnestly recommending the ball to all the saints and angels in heaven, fired steadily into the bushes in which he believed the stag had taken refuge. His aim was true; the animal instantly sprung out, plunged to the earth, and expired; but the poor culprit escaped unhurt, except that his hands and face were miserably torn by the briars. The duke kept his word well, and gave to Kuno, and his descendants forever this situation of forester. But envy naturally follows merit, and my good ancestor was not long in making the discovery. There were many of the duke's people who had an eye to this situation, either for themselves or some cousin or dear friend, and these persuaded their master that Kuno's wonderful success was entirely owing to sorcery; upon which, though they could not turn him out of his post, they obtained an order that every one of his descendants should undergo a trial of his skill before he could be accepted: but which, however, the chief forester of the district, before whom the essay is made, can render as easy or difficult as he pleases. I was obliged to shoot a ring out of the beak of a wooden bird, which was swung backward and forwards; but I did not fail, any more than my forefathers; and he who intends to succeed me, and wed my Catherine, must be at least as good a marksman."

William, who had listened very atten-

tively, was delighted with this piece of family history; he seized the old man's hand, and joyously promised to become, under his direction, the very first of marksmen; such as even grandfather Kuno himself should have no cause to blush for.

Scarcely had fourteen happy days passed over his head, ere William was settled as game-keeper in the forester's house; and Bertram, who became fonder of him every day, gave his formal consent to his engagement with Catherine. It was, however, decreed that their betrothment should be kept secret until the day of the marksman's trial, when the forester expected to give a greater degree of splendour to his family festival by the presence of the duke's commissary. The bridegroom swam in an ocean of delight, and so entirely forgot himself and the whole world in the sweet opening heaven of love, that Bertram frequently insisted, that he had not been able to hit a single mark since he had aimed so successfully at Catherine.

And so it really was. From the day of his happy betrothment, William had encountered nothing but disasters while shooting. At one time his gun missed fire; at another, when he aimed at a deer he lodged the contents of his rifle in the trunk of a tree: when he came home, and emptied his shooting-pouch, he found, instead of partridges, rooks and crows, and in lieu of hares, dead cats.—The forester at length grew seriously angry, and reproved him harshly for his carelessness; even Catherine began to tremble for the success of the master-shot.

William redoubled his diligence, but to no purpose; the nearer the approach of the important day, the more alarming grew his misfortunes, every shot missed. At length he was almost afraid to fire a gun, lest he should do some mischief, for he had already lamed a cow, and almost killed the cowherd.

"I insist upon it," said the game-keeper Rudolph, one evening to the party, "I insist upon it some wizard has bewitched William, for such things could not happen naturally; therefore let us endeavour to loosen the charm—" "Superstitious stuff!" interrupted Bertram angrily; "an honest woodsman should not even think of such trash. Do you forget the three things which a forester ought to have and with which he will always be successful in spite of sorcery? Come, to your wits, answer my query." "That can I truly," answered Rudolph; "he should have great skill, a keen dog, and a good gun." "Enough," said Bertram; "with these three things every charm may be loosened, or the owner of them is a dunce and no shot."

"Under favour, father Bertram," said William, "here is my gun; what have you to object against it? and as for my skill, I do not like to praise myself, but I think I am as fair a sportsman as any in the country; nevertheless, it seems as if all my balls went crooked, or as if the wind blew them away from the barrel of my gun. Only tell me what I shall do.—I am willing to do any thing." "It is singular," muttered the forester, who did not know what else to say.

"Believe me, William," again began Rudolph, "it is nothing but what I have said. Try only one: go on a Friday, at midnight, to a cross-road, and make a circle round you with a ramrod, or with a bloody sword, which must be blessed three times with the name of Samiel—" "Silence!" interrupted Bertram angrily; "know ye whose name that is? he is one of the fiend's dark legion. God protect us and every Christian from him!" William crossed himself devoutly, and would hear nothing further, though Rudolph still maintained his opinion. He, passed the night in cleaning his gun, and examining minutely every screw, resolving, at dawn of day, once more to sally forth, and try his fortune in the forest. He did so, but alas! in vain. Mischiefs thickened round him: at ten paces distance he fired three times at a deer: twice his gun missed fire, and although it went off the third time, yet the stag bounded away unhurt in the midst of the forest. Full of vexation he threw himself under a tree, and cursed his fate, when suddenly a rustling was heard among the bushes, and a queer-looking soldier, with a wooden leg, came hopping out from among them.

"Hollo! huntsman," he began, laughing at the disconsolate looking William. "what is the matter with you? Are you in love, or is your purse empty, or has any body charmed your gun? Come,

don't look so blank; give me a pipe of tobacco, and we'll have a chat together."

William sullenly gave him what he asked, and the soldier threw himself down in the grass by the side of him.—The conversation naturally turned upon woodcraft, and William related his misfortunes to him. "Let me see your gun," said the soldier. William gave it. "It is assuredly bewitched," said he. "The wooden leg, the moment he had taken it in his hand; you will not be able to fire a single shot with it; and if they have done it according to rule, it will be the same with every gun you shall take into your hands."

William was startled; and endeavoured to raise objections against the stranger's belief in witches, but the latter offered to give him a proof of the justice of his opinions. "To us soldiers," said he, "there is no hing strange; and I could tell you many wonderful things, but which would detain us here till night. But look here, for instance; this is a ball that is sure of hitting its mark, because it possesses some particular virtue: try it; you won't miss." William loaded his gun, and looked around for an object to aim at. A large bird of prey hovered high above the forest, like a moving dot;—"Shoot that kite," said the one-legged companion. William laughed at his absurdity, for the bird was hovering at a height which the eye itself could scarcely reach; "Laugh not, but fire," said the other, grimly; "I will lay my wooden leg that it falls." William fired, the black dot sunk, and a huge kite fell bleeding to the ground. "You would not be surprised at that," said he of the wooden leg to the huntsman, who was speechless and staring with astonishment: "you would not, I repeat, be surprised at that, if you were better acquainted with the wonders of your craft. Even the casting of such balls as these is one of the least important things in it; it merely requires dexterity and courage, because it must be done in the night. I will teach you for nothing when we meet again, now I must away, for the bell has tolled seven. In the mean time—here, try a few of my balls; still you look incredulous, well—till we meet again."

The soldier gave William a handful of balls and departed. Full of astonishment, and still distrusting the evidence of his senses, the latter tried another of the balls, and again struck an almost unattainable object: he loaded his gun in the usual manner, and again missed the easiest! He darted forward to follow the crippled soldier, but the latter was no longer in the forest, and William was obliged to remain satisfied with the promise which he had given of meeting him again hereafter.

Great joy it gave to the honest forester when William returned, as before, loaded with game from the forest. He was now called upon to explain that circumstance; but not being prepared to give a reason, and above all, deeming to say any thing upon the subject of his infallible balls, attributed his ill luck to a fault in his gun, which he had only, he pretended, that night discovered and rectified. "Did I not tell you so wife," said Bertram, laughing. "Your demon lodged in the barrel; and the goblin which threw down father Kuno this morning, sat grinning on the rusty nail." "What say you of a goblin," demanded William; "and what happened to father Kuno?" "Simply this," replied Bertram; his portrait fell of itself from the wall this morning, just as the bell tolled seven; and the silly woman settled it that a goblin must be at the bottom of the mischief and that we are haunted accordingly."

"At seven, repeated William, "at seven!" and he thought, with a strange feeling of affright, of the soldier who parted from him exactly at that moment. "Yes, seven," continued Bertram, still laughing. "I do not wonder at your surprise; it is not a usual ghostly hour, but Anne would have it so." The latter shook her head doubtfully, and prayed that all might end well; William shivered from head to foot, and would secretly have vowed not to use the magic balls, but that the thought of his ill luck haunted him. "Only one of them," only one of them for the master shot, and then I am done with them forever." But the forester urged him the next instant to accompany him into the forest; and as he dared not excite fresh suspicions of want of skill, nor offend the old man by refusing, he was again compelled to make use of his wonderous balls; and in the course of a few days he had so accustomed himself to the use of them, & so entirely reconciled his conscience to their doubtful origin, that he saw nothing sinful or even objectionable in the business. He constantly traversed the forest, in the hope of meeting the strange giver of the balls; for the handful had decreased to two, and if he wished to make sure of the master-shot, the utmost economy was necessary. One day he even refused to accompany Bertram, for the next was to be the day of trial, and the chief forester was expected: it was possible he might require other proofs than the mere formal essay, and William thus felt himself secure. But in the evening, instead of the commissary, came the messenger from the duke, with an order for a large delivery of game, and to announce that the visit of the chief forester would be postponed for eight days longer.

William felt as if he could have sunk into the bosom of the earth, as he listened to the message, and his excessive alarm would have excited strange suspicion, if all present had not been ready to ascribe it to the delay of his expected nuptials. He was now obliged to sacrifice at least one of his balls, but he solemnly swore that nothing should rob him of the other but the forester's master-shot.

Bertram was outrageously angry when William returned from the forest with only one stag; for the delivery order was considerable. He was still more angry the next day at noon, when Rudolph returned loaded with an immense quantity of game, and William returned, with none: he threatened to dismiss him, and retract his promise respecting Catherine, if he did not bring down at least two deer on the following day. Catherine was in the greatest consternation, and earnestly besought him to make use of his utmost skill, and not let a thought of her interrupt his duties while occupied in the forest. He departed—his heart loaded with despair. Catherine, he saw too plainly, was lost to him forever; and nothing remained but the choice of the manner in which he should destroy his happiness. Whilst he stood lost in the agonizing anticipation of his impending doom, a herd of deer approached close to him. Mechanically he felt for his last ball; it felt tremendously heavy in his hand: he was on the point of dropping it back, resolving to preserve his treasure at every hazard, when suddenly he saw—O sight of joy!—the one-legged soldier approaching. Delightedly he let the ball drop into the barrel, fired, brought down a brace of deer, and hastened forward to meet his friend; but he was gone! William could not discover him in the forest.

"Hark ye, William!" said the forester to him in the evening, rousing him from the torpor of grief into which he had fallen; "you must resent this affront as earnestly as myself; nobody shall dare utter falsehoods of our ancestor Kuno, nor accuse him as Rudolph is now doing." "I insist," continued he, turning again to the latter, "if good angels helped him, (which was very likely, for in the Old Testament we frequently read of instances of their protection,) we ought to be grateful, and praise the wonderful goodness of God. But nobody shall accuse Kuno of practising the black art. He died happily—ay, and holily, in his bed, surrounded by children—which he who carries on a correspondence with the evil one never does. I saw a terrible example of that myself, when I was a forester's boy in Bohemia."

"Let us hear how it happened, good Bertram," said all the listeners; and the forester nodded gravely, and continued.

"I shiver when I think of it; but I will tell you, nevertheless. When a young man, practising with other youths under the chief foresters, there used frequently to join us, a town lad, a fine daring fellow, & being a great lover of field sports, came out to us as often as he could. He would have made a good marksman, but was too flighty and thoughtless, so that he frequently missed his mark. Once when we ridiculed his awkwardness, we provoked him into a rage, and he swore by all that was holy, he would soon fire with a more certain aim than any game-keeper in the country, and that no animal should escape him, either in the air or on the earth. But he kept his light oath badly. A few days afterwards an unknown huntsman roused us early, and told us that a man was lying in the road and dying without assistance. It was poor Schmid. He was covered by wounds and blood as if he had been torn by wild beasts: he could not speak, for he was quite senseless, with scarcely any appearance of life. He was conveyed to Prague, and just before his death declared that he had been out with an old mounted huntsman to a cross-road, in order to cast the magic balls, which are sure of hitting their mark; but that making some fault or omission, the demon had treated him so roughly that it would cost him his life."

"Did he not explain?" asked William, shuddering.

"Surely," replied the forester. "He declared before a court of justice, that he went out to the cross-road with the old game-keeper; that they made a circle with a bloody sword, and afterwards set it round with skulls and bones. The mountain hunter then gave his direction to Schmid as to what he was to do: he was to begin when the clock struck eleven to cast the balls, and neither to cast more nor fewer than sixty-three; and either above or under this number would, when the bell tolled midnight, be the cause of his destruction: neither was he to speak a single word during his work, nor move from the circle, whatever might happen above, below, or around him. Fulfilling these conditions, sixty balls would be sure of hitting, and the remaining three only would miss.—Schmid had actually begun casting the balls when, according to what we could gather from him, he was beset by such cruel & dreadful apparitions, that he shrieked and sprang out of the circle, falling senseless to the ground; from which trance he did not recover till under the hand of the physician in Prague."

[Concluded next week.]