

EVIRADNUS.

THE KNIGHT ERRANT.

("Qu'est-ce que Sigismond et Ladislas ont dit.")

[Bk. XV. iii. 1.]

I.

THE ADVENTURER SETS OUT.

What was it Sigismond and Ladisläus said?

I know not if the rock, or tree o'erhead,
Had heard their speech;--but when the two spoke low,
Among the trees, a shudder seemed to go
Through all their branches, just as if that way
A beast had passed to trouble and dismay.
More dark the shadow of the rock was seen,
And then a morsel of the shade, between
The sombre trees, took shape as it would seem
Like spectre walking in the sunset's gleam.

It is not monster rising from its lair,

Nor phantom of the foliage and the air,
It is not morsel of the granite's shade
That walks in deepest hollows of the glade.
'Tis not a vampire nor a spectre pale
But living man in rugged coat of mail.
It is Alsatia's noble Chevalier,
Eviradnus the brave, that now is here.

The men who spoke he recognized the while
He rested in the thicket; words of guile
Most horrible were theirs as they passed on,
And to the ears of Eviradnus one--
One word had come which roused him. Well he knew
The land which lately he had journeyed through.

He down the valley went into the inn
Where he had left his horse and page, Gasclin.
The horse had wanted drink, and lost a shoe;
And now, "Be quick!" he said, "with what you do,
For business calls me, I must not delay."
He strides the saddle and he rides away.

II.

EVIRADNUS.

Eviradnus was growing old apace,
The weight of years had left its hoary trace,
But still of knights the most renowned was he,
Model of bravery and purity.
His blood he spared not; ready day or night
To punish crime, his dauntless sword shone bright
In his unblemished hand; holy and white
And loyal all his noble life had been,
A Christian Samson coming on the scene.
With fist alone the gate he battered down
Of Sickingen in flames, and saved the town.
'Twas he, indignant at the honor paid
To crime, who with his heel an onslaught made
Upon Duke Lupus' shameful monument,
Tore down, the statue he to fragments rent;
Then column of the Strasburg monster bore
To bridge of Wasselonne, and threw it o'er
Into the waters deep. The people round
Blazon the noble deeds that so abound
From Altorf unto Chaux-de-Fonds, and say,
When he rests musing in a dreamy way,
"Behold, 'tis Charlemagne!" Tawny to see
And hairy, and seven feet high was he,
Like John of Bourbon. Roaming hill or wood
He looked a wolf was striving to do good.
Bound up in duty, he of naught complained,

The cry for help his aid at once obtained.
Only he mourned the baseness of mankind,
And--that the beds too short he still doth find.
When people suffer under cruel kings,
With pity moved, he to them succor brings.
'Twas he defended Alix from her foes
As sword of Urraca--he ever shows
His strength is for the feeble and oppressed;
Father of orphans he, and all distressed!
Kings of the Rhine in strongholds were by him
Boldly attacked, and tyrant barons grim.
He freed the towns--confronting in his lair
Hugo the Eagle; boldly did he dare
To break the collar of Saverne, the ring
Of Colmar, and the iron torture thing
Of Schlestadt, and the chain that Haguenu bore.
Such Eviradnus was a wrong before,
Good but most terrible. In the dread scale
Which princes weighted with their horrid tale
Of craft and violence, and blood and ill,
And fire and shocking deeds, his sword was still
God's counterpoise displayed. Ever alert
More evil from the wretched to avert,
Those hapless ones who 'neath Heaven's vault at night
Raise suppliant hands. His lance loved not the plight
Of mouldering in the rack, of no avail,

His battle-axe slipped from supporting nail
Quite easily; 'twas ill for action base
To come so near that he the thing could trace.
The steel-clad champion death drops all around
As glaciers water. Hero ever found
Eviradnus is kinsman of the race
Of Amadys of Gaul, and knights of Thrace,
He smiles at age. For he who never asked
For quarter from mankind--shall he be tasked
To beg of Time for mercy? Rather he
Would girdle up his loins, like Baldwin be.
Aged he is, but of a lineage rare;
The least intrepid of the birds that dare
Is not the eagle barbed. What matters age,
The years but fire him with a holy rage.
Though late from Palestine, he is not spent,--
With age he wrestles, firm in his intent.

III.

IN THE FOREST.

If in the woodland traveller there had been
That eve, who lost himself, strange sight he'd seen.
Quite in the forest's heart a lighted space
Arose to view; in that deserted place

A lone, abandoned hall with light aglow
The long neglect of centuries did show.
The castle-towers of Corbus in decay
Were girt by weeds and growths that had their way.
Couch-grass and ivy, and wild eglantine
In subtle scaling warfare all combine.
Subject to such attacks three hundred years,
The donjon yields, and ruin now appears,
E'en as by leprosy the wild boars die,
In moat the crumbled battlements now lie;
Around the snake-like bramble twists its rings;
Freebooter sparrows come on daring wings
To perch upon the swivel-gun, nor heed
Its murmuring growl when pecking in their greed
The mulberries ripe. With insolence the thorn
Thrives on the desolation so forlorn.
But winter brings revenges; then the Keep
Wakes all vindictive from its seeming sleep,
Hurls down the heavy rain, night after night,
Thanking the season's all-resistless might;
And, when the gutters choke, its gargoyles four
From granite mouths in anger spit and pour
Upon the hated ivy hour by hour.

As to the sword rust is, so lichens are
To towering citadel with which they war.

Alas! for Corbus--dreary, desolate,
And yet its woes the winters mitigate.
It rears itself among convulsive throes
That shake its ruins when the tempest blows.
Winter, the savage warrior, pleases well,
With its storm clouds, the mighty citadel,--
Restoring it to life. The lightning flash
Strikes like a thief and flies; the winds that crash
Sound like a clarion, for the Tempest bluff
Is Battle's sister. And when wild and rough,
The north wind blows, the tower exultant cries
"Behold me!" When hail-hurling gales arise
Of blustering Equinox, to fan the strife,
It stands erect, with martial ardor rife,
A joyous soldier! When like yelping hound
Pursued by wolves, November comes to bound
In joy from rock to rock, like answering cheer
To howling January now so near--
"Come on!" the Donjon cries to blasts o'erhead--
It has seen Attila, and knows not dread.
Oh, dismal nights of contest in the rain
And mist, that furious would the battle gain,
'The tower braves all, though angry skies pour fast
The flowing torrents, river-like and vast.
From their eight pinnacles the gorgons bay,
And scattered monsters, in their stony way,

Are growling heard; the rampart lions gnaw
The misty air and slush with granite maw,
The sleet upon the griffins spits, and all
The Saurian monsters, answering to the squall,
Flap wings; while through the broken ceiling fall
Torrents of rain upon the forms beneath,
Dragons and snak'd Medusas gnashing teeth
In the dismantled rooms. Like armored knight
The granite Castle fights with all its might,
Resisting through the winter. All in vain,
The heaven's bluster, January's rain,
And those dread elemental powers we call
The Infinite--the whirlwinds that appall--
Thunder and waterspouts; and winds that shake
As 'twere a tree its ripened fruit to take.
The winds grow wearied, warring with the tower,
The noisy North is out of breath, nor power
Has any blast old Corbus to defeat,
It still has strength their onslaughts worst to meet.
Thus, spite of briars and thistles, the old tower
Remains triumphant through the darkest hour;
Superb as pontiff, in the forest shown,
Its rows of battlements make triple crown;
At eve, its silhouette is finely traced
Immense and black--showing the Keep is placed
On rocky throne, sublime and high; east, west,

And north and south, at corners four, there rest
Four mounts; Aptar, where flourishes the pine,
And Toxis, where the elms grow green and fine;
Crobius and Bleyda, giants in their might,
Against the stormy winds to stand and fight,
And these above its diadem uphold
Night's living canopy of clouds unrolled.

The herdsman fears, and thinks its shadow creeps
To follow him; and superstition keeps
Such hold that Corbus as a terror reigns;
Folks say the Fort a target still remains
For the Black Archer--and that it contains
The cave where the Great Sleeper still sleeps sound.
The country people all the castle round
Are frightened easily, for legends grow
And mix with phantoms of the mind; we know
The hearth is cradle of such fantasies,
And in the smoke the cotter sees arise
From low-thatched but he traces cause of dread.
Thus rendering thanks that he is lowly bred,
Because from such none look for valorous deeds.
The peasant flies the Tower, although it leads
A noble knight to seek adventure there,
And, from his point of honor, dangers dare.

Thus very rarely passer-by is seen;
But--it might be with twenty years between,
Or haply less--at unfixed interval
There would a semblance be of festival.
A Seneschal and usher would appear,
And troops of servants many baskets bear.
Then were, in mystery, preparations made,
And they departed--for till night none stayed.
But 'twixt the branches gazers could descry
The blackened hall lit up most brilliantly.
None dared approach--and this the reason why.

IV.

THE CUSTOM OF LUSACE.

When died a noble Marquis of Lusace
'Twas custom for the heir who filled his place
Before assuming princely pomp and power
To sup one night in Corbus' olden tower.
From this weird meal he passed to the degree
Of Prince and Margrave; nor could ever he
Be thought brave knight, or she--if woman claim
The rank--be reckoned of unblemished fame
Till they had breathed the air of ages gone,
The funeral odors, in the nest alone

Of its dead masters. Ancient was the race;
To trace the upward stem of proud Lusace
Gives one a vertigo; descended they
From ancestor of Attila, men say;
Their race to him--through Pagans--they hark back;
Becoming Christians, race they thought to track
Through Lechus, Plato, Otho to combine
With Ursus, Stephen, in a lordly line.
Of all those masters of the country round
That were on Northern Europe's boundary found--
At first were waves and then the dykes were reared--
Corbus in double majesty appeared,
Castle on hill and town upon the plain;
And one who mounted on the tower could gain
A view beyond the pines and rocks, of spires
That pierce the shade the distant scene acquires;
A walled town is it, but 'tis not ally
Of the old citadel's proud majesty;
Unto itself belonging this remained.
Often a castle was thus self-sustained
And equalled towns; witness in Lombardy
Crama, and Plato too in Tuscany,
And in Apulia Barletta;--each one
Was powerful as a town, and dreaded none.
Corbus ranked thus; its precincts seemed to hold
The reflex of its mighty kings of old;

Their great events had witness in these walls,
Their marriages were here and funerals,
And mostly here it was that they were born;
And here crowned Barons ruled with pride and scorn;
Cradle of Scythian majesty this place.
Now each new master of this ancient race
A duty owed to ancestors which he
Was bound to carry on. The law's decree
It was that he should pass alone the night
Which made him king, as in their solemn sight.
Just at the forest's edge a clerk was met
With wine in sacred cup and purpose set,
A wine mysterious, which the heir must drink
To cause deep slumber till next day's soft brink.
Then to the castle tower he wends his way,
And finds a supper laid with rich display.
He sups and sleeps: then to his slumbering eyes
The shades of kings from Bela all arise.
None dare the tower to enter on this night,
But when the morning dawns, crowds are in sight
The dreamer to deliver,--whom half dazed,
And with the visions of the night amazed,
They to the old church take, where rests the dust
Of Borivorus; then the bishop must,
With fervent blessings on his eyes and mouth,
Put in his hands the stony hatchets both,

With which--even like death impartially--
Struck Attila, with one arm dexterously
The south, and with the other arm the north.

This day the town the threatening flag set forth
Of Marquis Swantibore, the monster he
Who in the wood tied up his wife, to be
Devoured by wolves, together with the bull
Of which with jealousy his heart was full.

Even when woman took the place of heir
The tower of Corbus claimed the supper there;
'Twas law--the woman trembled, but must dare.

V.

THE MARCHIONESS MAHAUD.

Niece of the Marquis--John the Striker named--
Mahaud to-day the marquise has claimed.
A noble dame--the crown is hers by right:
As woman she has graces that delight.
A queen devoid of beauty is not queen,
She needs the royalty of beauty's mien;
God in His harmony has equal ends
For cedar that resists, and reed that bends,

And good it is a woman sometimes rules,
Holds in her hand the power, and manners schools,
And laws and mind;--succeeding master proud,
With gentle voice and smile she leads the crowd,
The sombre human troop. But sweet Mahaud
On evil days had fallen; gentle, good,
Alas! she held the sceptre like a flower;
Timid yet gay, imprudent for the hour,
And careless too. With Europe all in throes,
Though twenty years she now already knows,
She has refused to marry, although oft
Entreated. It is time an arm less soft
Than hers--a manly arm--supported her;
Like to the rainbow she, one might aver,
Shining on high between the cloud and rain,
Or like the ewe that gambols on the plain
Between the bear and tiger; innocent,
She has two neighbors of most foul intent:
For foes the Beauty has, in life's pure spring,
The German Emp'ror and the Polish King.

VI.

THE TWO NEIGHBORS.

The difference this betwixt the evil pair,

Faithless to God--for laws without a care--
One was the claw, the other one the will
Controlling. Yet to mass they both went still,
And on the rosary told their beads each day.
But none the less the world believed that they
Unto the powers of hell their souls had sold.
Even in whispers men each other told
The details of the pact which they had signed
With that dark power, the foe of human kind;
In whispers, for the crowd had mortal dread
Of them so high, and woes that they had spread.
One might be vengeance and the other hate,
Yet lived they side by side, in powerful state
And close alliance. All the people near
From red horizon dwelt in abject fear,
Mastered by them; their figures darkly grand
Had ruddy reflex from the wasted land,
And fires, and towns they sacked. Besides the one,
Like David, poet was, the other shone
As fine musician--rumor spread their fame,
Declaring them divine, until each name
In Italy's fine sonnets met with praise.
The ancient hierarch in those old days
Had custom strange, a now forgotten thing,
It was a European plan that King
Of France was marquis, and th' imperial head

Of Germany was duke; there was no need
To class the other kings, but barons they,
Obedient vassals unto Rome, their stay.
The King of Poland was but simple knight,
Yet now, for once, had strange unwonted right,
And, as exception to the common state,
This one Sarmatian King was held as great
As German Emperor; and each knew how
His evil part to play, nor mercy show.
The German had one aim, it was to take
All land he could, and it his own to make.
The Pole already having Baltic shore,
Seized Celtic ports, still needing more and more.
On all the Northern Sea his crafts roused fear:
Iceland beheld his demon navy near.
Antwerp the German burnt; and Prussias twain
Bowed to the yoke. The Polish King was fain
To help the Russian Spotocus--his aid
Was like the help that in their common trade
A sturdy butcher gives a weaker one.
The King it is who seizes, and this done,
The Emp'ror pillages, usurping right
In war Teutonic, settled but by might.
The King in Jutland cynic footing gains,
The weak coerced, the while with cunning pains
The strong are duped. But 'tis a law they make

That their accord themselves should never break.
From Arctic seas to cities Transalpine,
Their hideous talons, curved for sure rapine,
Scrape o'er and o'er the mournful continent,
Their plans succeed, and each is well content.
Thus under Satan's all paternal care
They brothers are, this royal bandit pair.
Oh, noxious conquerors! with transient rule
Chimera heads--ambition can but fool.
Their misty minds but harbor rottenness
Loathsome and fetid, and all barrenness--
Their deeds to ashes turn, and, hydra-bred,
The mystic skeleton is theirs to dread.
The daring German and the cunning Pole
Noted to-day a woman had control
Of lands, and watched Mahaud like evil spies;
And from the Emp'ror's cruel mouth--with dyes
Of wrath empurpled--came these words of late:
"The empire wearies of the wallet weight
Hung at its back--this High and Low Lusace,
Whose hateful load grows heavier apace,
That now a woman holds its ruler's place."
Threatening, and blood suggesting, every word;
The watchful Pole was silent--but he heard.

Two monstrous dangers; but the heedless one

Babbles and smiles, and bids all care begone--
Likes lively speech--while all the poor she makes
To love her, and the taxes off she takes.
A life of dance and pleasure she has known--
A woman always; in her jewelled crown
It is the pearl she loves--not cutting gems,
For these can wound, and mark men's diadems.
She pays the hire of Homer's copyists,
And in the Courts of Love presiding, lists.

Quite recently unto her Court have come
Two men--unknown their names or native home,
Their rank or race; but one plays well the lute,
The other is a troubadour; both suit
The taste of Mahaud, when on summer eve,
'Neath opened windows, they obtain her leave
To sing upon the terrace, and relate
The charming tales that do with music mate.
In August the Moravians have their fête,
But it is radiant June in which Lusace
Must consecrate her noble Margrave race.
Thus in the weird and old ancestral tower
For Mahaud now has come the fateful hour,
The lonely supper which her state decrees.
What matters this to flowers, and birds, and trees,
And clouds and fountains? That the people may

Still bear their yoke--have kings to rule alway?
The water flows, the wind in passing by
In murmuring tones takes up the questioning cry.

VII.

THE BANQUET HALL.

The old stupendous hall has but one door,
And in the dusk it seems that more and more
The walls recede in space unlimited.
At the far end there is a table spread
That in the dreary void with splendor shines;
For ceiling we behold but rafter lines.
The table is arranged for one sole guest,
A solitary chair doth near it rest,
Throne-like, 'neath canopy that droopeth down
From the black beams; upon the walls are shown
The painted histories of the olden might,
The King of the Wends Thassilo's stern fight
On land with Nimrod, and on ocean wide
With Neptune. Rivers too personified
Appear--the Rhine as by the Meuse betrayed,
And fading groups of Odin in the shade,
And the wolf Fenrir and the Asgard snake.
One might the place for dragons' stable take.

The only lights that in the shed appear
Spring from the table's giant chandelier
With seven iron branches--brought from hell
By Attila Archangel, people tell,
When he had conquered Mammon--and they say
That seven souls were the first flames that day.
This banquet hall looks an abyss outlined
With shadowy vagueness, though indeed we find
In the far depth upon the table spread
A sudden, strong, and glaring light is shed,
Striking upon the goldsmith's burnished works,
And on the pheasants killed by traitor hawks.
Loaded the table is with viands cold,
Ewers and flagons, all enough of old
To make a love feast. All the napery
Was Friesland's famous make; and fair to see
The dishes, silver-gilt and bordered round
With flowers; for fruit, here strawberries were found
And citrons, apples too, and nectarines.
The wooden bowls were carved in cunning lines
By peasants of the Murg, whose skilful hands
With patient toil reclaim the barren lands
And make their gardens flourish on a rock,
Or mountain where we see the hunters flock.
Gold fountain-cup, with handles Florentine,
Shows Acteons horned, though armed and booted fine,

Who fight with sword in hand against the hounds.
Roses and gladioles make up bright mounds
Of flowers, with juniper and aniseed;
While sage, all newly cut for this great need,
Covers the Persian carpet that is spread
Beneath the table, and so helps to shed
Around a perfume of the balmy spring.
Beyond is desolation withering.
One hears within the hollow dreary space
Across the grove, made fresh by summer's grace,
The wind that ever is with mystic might
A spirit ripple of the Infinite.
The glass restored to frames to creak is made
By blustering wind that comes from neighboring glade.
Strange in this dream-like place, so drear and lone,
The guest expected should be living one!
The seven lights from seven arms make glow
Almost with life the staring eyes that show
On the dim frescoes--and along the walls
Is here and there a stool, or the light falls
O'er some long chest, with likeness to a tomb.
Yet was displayed amid the mournful gloom
Some copper vessels, and some crockery ware.
The door--as if it must, yet scarcely dare--
Had opened widely to the night's fresh air.

No voice is heard, for man has fled the place;
But Terror crouches in the corners' space,
And waits the coming guest. This banquet hall
Of Titans is so high, that he who shall
With wandering eye look up from beam to beam
Of the confused wild roof will haply seem
To wonder that the stars he sees not there.
Giants the spiders are, that weave with care
Their hideous webs, which float the joists amid,
Joists whose dark ends in griffins' jaws are hid.
The light is lurid, and the air like death,
And dark and foul. Even Night holds its breath
Awhile. One might suppose the door had fear
To move its double leaves--their noise to hear.

VIII.

WHAT MORE WAS TO BE SEEN.

But the great hall of generations dead
Has something more sepulchral and more dread
Than lurid glare from seven-branched chandelier
Or table lone with stately daïs near--
Two rows of arches o'er a colonnade
With knights on horseback all in mail arrayed,
Each one disposed with pillar at his back

And to another vis-à-vis. Nor lack
The fittings all complete; in each right hand
A lance is seen; the armored horses stand
With chamfrons laced, and harness buckled sure;
The cuissarts' studs are by their clamps secure;
The dirks stand out upon the saddle-bow;
Even unto the horses' feet do flow
Caparisons,--the leather all well clasped,
The gorget and the spurs with bronze tongues hasped,
The shining long sword from the saddle hung,
The battle-axe across the back was flung.
Under the arm a trusty dagger rests,
Each spiked knee-piece its murderous power attests.
Feet press the stirrups--hands on bridle shown
Proclaim all ready, with the visors down,
And yet they stir not, nor is audible
A sound to make the sight less terrible.

Each monstrous horse a frontal horn doth bear,
If e'er the Prince of Darkness herdsman were,
These cattle black were his by surest right,
Like things but seen in horrid dreams of night.
The steeds are swathed in trappings manifold,
The armed knights are grave, and stern, and cold,
Terrific too; the clench'd fists seem to hold
Some frightful missive, which the phantom hands

Would show, if opened out at hell's commands.

The dusk exaggerates their giant size,

The shade is awed--the pillars coldly rise.

Oh, Night! why are these awful warriors here?

Horses and horsemen that make gazers fear

Are only empty armor. But erect

And haughty mien they all affect

And threatening air--though shades of iron still.

Are they strange larvae--these their statues ill?

No. They are dreams of horror clothed in brass,

Which from profoundest depths of evil pass

With futile aim to dare the Infinite!

Souls tremble at the silent spectre sight,

As if in this mysterious cavalcade

They saw the weird and mystic halt was made

Of them who at the coming dawn of day

Would fade, and from their vision pass away.

A stranger looking in, these masks to see,

Might deem from Death some mandate there might be

At times to burst the tombs--the dead to wear

A human shape, and mustering ranks appear

Of phantoms, each confronting other shade.

Grave-clothes are not more grim and sombre made

Than are these helms; the deaf and sealed-up graves

Are not more icy than these arms; the staves
Of hideous biers have not their joints more strong
Than are the joinings of these legs; the long
Scaled gauntlet fingers look like worms that shine,
And battle robes to shroud-like folds incline.
The heads are skull-like, and the stony feet
Seem for the charnel house but only meet.
The pikes have death's-heads carved, and seem to be
Too heavy; but the shapes defiantly
Sit proudly in the saddle--and perforce
The rider looks united to the horse!
The network of their mail doth clearly cross.
The Marquis' mortar beams near Ducal wreath,
And on the helm and gleaming shield beneath
Alternate triple pearls with leaves displayed
Of parsley, and the royal robes are made
So large that with the knightly harness they
Seem to o'er-master palfreys every way.
To Rome the oldest armor might be traced,
And men and horses' armor interlaced
Blent horribly; the man and steed we feel
Made but one hydra with its scales of steel.
Yet is there history here. Each coat of mail
Is representant of some stirring tale.
Each delta-shaped escutcheon shines to show
A vision of the chief by it we know.

Here are the blood-stained Dukes' and Marquis' line,
Barbaric lords, who amid war's rapine
Bore gilded saints upon their banners still
Painted on fishes' skin with cunning skill.
Here Geth, who to the Slaves cried "Onward go,"
And Mundiaque and Ottocar--Plato
And Ladisläus Kunne; and Welf who bore
These words upon his shield his foes before;
"Nothing there is I fear." Otho blear-eyed,
Zultan and Nazamustus, and beside
The later Spignus, e'en to Spartibor
Of triple vision, and yet more and more
As if a pause at every age were made,
And Antaeus' fearful dynasty portrayed.

What do they here so rigid and erect?
What wait they for--and what do they expect?
Blindness fills up the helm 'neath iron brows;
Like sapless tree no soul the hero knows.
Darkness is now where eyes with flame were fraught,
And thrice-bored visor serves for mask of naught.
Of empty void is spectral giant made,
And each of these all-powerful knights displayed
Is only rind of pride and murderous sin;
Themselves are held the icy grave within.
Rust eats the casques enamoured once so much

Of death and daring--which knew kiss-like touch
Of banner--mistress so august and dear--
But not an arm can stir its hinges here;
Behold how mute are they whose threats were heard
Like savage roar--whose gnashing teeth and word
Deadened the clarion's tones; the helmets dread
Have not a sound, and all the armor spread,
The hauberks, that strong breathing seemed to sway,
Are stranded now in helplessness alway
To see the shadows, still prolonged, that seem
To take at night the image of a dream.

These two great files reach from the door afar
To where the table and the daïs are,
Leaving between their fronts a narrow lane.
On the left side the Marquises maintain
Their place, but the right side the Dukes retain,
And till the roof, embattled by Spignus,
But worn by time that even that subdues,
Shall fall upon their heads, these forms will stand
The grades confronting--one on either hand.
While in advance beyond, with haughty head--
As if commander of this squadron dread--
All waiting signal of the Judgment Day,
In stone was seen in olden sculptors' way
Charlemagne the King, who on the earth had found

Only twelve knights to grace his Table Round.

The crests were an assembly of strange things,

Of horrors such as nightmare only brings.

Asps, and spread eagles without beak or feet,

Sirens and mermaids here and dragons meet,

And antlered stags and fabled unicorn,

And fearful things of monstrous fancy born.

Upon the rigid form of morion's sheen

Winged lions and the Cerberus are seen,

And serpents winged and finned; things made to fright

The timid foe, alone by sense of sight.

Some leaning forward and the others back,

They looked a growing forest that did lack

No form of terror; but these things of dread

That once on barons' helms the battle led

Beneath the giant banners, now are still,

As if they gaped and found the time but ill,

Wearied the ages passed so slowly by,

And that the gory dead no more did lie

Beneath their feet--pined for the battle-cry,

The trumpet's clash, the carnage and the strife,

Yawning to taste again their dreadful life.

Like tears upon the palfreys' muzzles were

The hard reflections of the metal there;

From out these spectres, ages past exhumed,
And as their shadows on the roof-beams loomed,
Cast by the trembling light, each figure wan
Seemed growing, and a monstrous shape to don,
So that the double range of horrors made
The darkened zenith clouds of blackest shade,
That shaped themselves to profiles terrible.

All motionless the coursers horrible,
That formed a legion lured by Death to war,
These men and horses masked, how dread they are!
Absorbed in shadows of the eternal shore,
Among the living all their tasks are o'er.
Silent, they seem all mystery to brave,
These sphinxes whom no beacon light can save
Upon the threshold of the gulf so near,
As if they faced the great enigma here;
Ready with hoofs, between the pillars blue
To strike out sparks, and combats to renew,
Choosing for battle-field the shades below,
Which they provoked by deeds we cannot know,
In that dark realm thought dares not to expound
False masks from heaven lowered to depths profound.

IX.

A NOISE ON THE FLOOR.

This is the scene on which now enters in
Eviradnus; and follows page Gasclin.

The outer walls were almost all decayed,
The door, for ancient Marquises once made--
Raised many steps above the courtyard near--
Commanded view of the horizon clear.
The forest looked a great gulf all around,
And on the rock of Corbus there were found
Secret and blood-stained precipices tall.
Duke Plato built the tower and banquet hall
Over great pits,--so was it Rumor said.
The flooring sounds 'neath Eviradnus' tread
Above abysses many.

"Page," said he,

"Come here, your eyes than mine can better see,
For sight is woman-like and shuns the old;
Ah! he can see enough, when years are told,
Who backwards looks. But, boy, turn towards the glade
And tell me what you see."

The boy obeyed,

And leaned across the threshold, while the bright,
Full moon shed o'er the glade its white, pure light.

"I see a horse and woman on it now,"
Said Gasclin, "and companions also show."
"Who are they?" asked the seeker of sublime
Adventures. "Sir, I now can hear like chime
The sound of voices, and men's voices too,
Laughter and talk; two men there are in view,
Across the road the shadows clear I mark
Of horses three."

 "Enough. Now, Gasclin, hark!"
Exclaimed the knight, "you must at once return
By other path than that which you discern,
So that you be not seen. At break of day
Bring back our horses fresh, and every way
Caparisoned; now leave me, boy, I say."
The page looked at his master like a son,
And said, "Oh! if I might stay on,
For they are two."

 "Go--I suffice alone!"

X.

EVIRADNUS MOTIONLESS.

And lone the hero is within the hall,
And nears the table where the glasses all

Show in profusion; all the vessels there,
Goblets and glasses gilt, or painted fair,
Are ranged for different wines with practised care.
He thirsts; the flagons tempt; but there must stay
One drop in emptied glass, and 'twould betray
The fact that some one living had been here.
Straight to the horses goes he, pauses near
That which is next the table shining bright,
Seizes the rider--plucks the phantom knight
To pieces--all in vain its panoply
And pallid shining to his practised eye;
Then he conveys the severed iron remains
To corner of the hall where darkness reigns;
Against the wall he lays the armor low
In dust and gloom like hero vanquished now--
But keeping pond'rous lance and shield so old,
Mounts to the empty saddle, and behold!
A statue Eviradnus has become,
Like to the others in their frigid home.
With visor down scarce breathing seemed maintained
Throughout the hall a death-like silence reigned.

XI.

A LITTLE MUSIC.

Listen! like hum froth unseen nests we hear
A mirthful buzz of voices coming near,
Of footsteps--laughter--from the trembling trees.
And now the thick-set forest all receives
A flood of moonlight--and there gently floats
The sound of a guitar of Inspruck; notes
Which blend with chimes--vibrating to the hand--
Of tiny bell--where sounds a grain of sand.
A man's voice mixes with the melody,
And vaguely melts to song in harmony.

"If you like we'll dream a dream.

Let us mount on palfreys two;
Birds are singing,--let it seem
You lure me--and I take you.

"Let us start--'tis eve, you see,
I'm thy master and thy prey.
My bright steed shall pleasure be;
Yours, it shall be love, I say.

"Journeying leisurely we go,
We will make our steeds touch heads,
Kiss for fodder,--and we so
Satisfy our horses' needs.

"Come! the two delusive things
Stamp impatiently it seems,
Yours has heavenward soaring wings,
Mine is of the land of dreams.

"What's our baggage? only vows,
Happiness, and all our care,
And the flower that sweetly shows
Nestling lightly in your hair.

"Come, the oaks all dark appear,
Twilight now will soon depart,
Railing sparrows laugh to hear
Chains thou putttest round my heart.

"Not my fault 'twill surely be
If the hills should vocal prove,
And the trees when us they see,
All should murmur--let us love!

"Oh, be gentle!--I am dazed,
See the dew is on the grass,
Wakened butterflies amazed
Follow thee as on we pass.

"Envious night-birds open wide

Their round eyes to gaze awhile,
Nymphs that lean their urns beside
From their grottoes softly smile,

"And exclaim, by fancy stirred,
'Hero and Leander they;
We in listening for a word
Let our water fall away.'

"Let us journey Austrian way,
With the daybreak on our brow;
I be great, and you I say
Rich, because we love shall know.

"Let us over countries rove,
On our charming steeds content,
In the azure light of love,
And its sweet bewilderment.

"For the charges at our inn,
You with maiden smiles shall pay;
I the landlord's heart will win
In a scholar's pleasant way.

"You, great lady--and I, Count--
Come, my heart has opened quite,

We this tale will still recount,
To the stars that shine at night."

The melody went on some moments more
Among the trees the calm moon glistened o'er,
Then trembled and was hushed; the voice's thrill
Stopped like alighting birds, and all was still.

XII.

GREAT JOSS AND LITTLE ZENO.

Quite suddenly there showed across the door,
Three heads which all a festive aspect wore.
Two men were there; and, dressed in cloth of gold,
A woman. Of the men one might have told
Some thirty years, the other younger seemed,
Was tall and fair, and from his shoulder gleamed
A gay guitar with ivy leaves enlaced.
The other man was dark, but pallid-faced
And small. At the first glance they seemed to be
But made of perfume and frivolity.
Handsome they were, but through their comely mien
A grinning demon might be clearly seen.
April has flowers where lurk the slugs between.

"Big Joss and little Zeno, pray come here;
Look now--how dreadful! can I help but fear!"
Madame Mahaud was speaker. Moonlight there
Caressingly enhanced her beauty rare,
Making it shine and tremble, as if she
So soft and gentle were of things that be
Of air created, and are brought and ta'en
By heavenly flashes. Now, she spoke again

"Certes, 'tis heavy purchase of a throne,
To pass the night here utterly alone.
Had you not slyly come to guard me now,
I should have died of fright outright I know."
The moonbeams through the open door did fall,
And shine upon the figure next the wall.

Said Zeno, "If I played the Marquis part,
I'd send this rubbish to the auction mart;
Out of the heap should come the finest wine,
Pleasure and gala-fêtes, were it all mine."
And then with scornful hand he touched the thing,
And made the metal like a soul's cry ring.
He laughed--the gauntlet trembled at his stroke.
"Let rest my ancestors"--'twas Mahaud spoke;
Then murmuring added she, "For you are much
Too small their noble armor here to touch."

And Zeno paled, but Joss with laugh exclaimed,
"Why, all these good black men so grandly named
Are only nests for mice. By Jove, although
They lifelike look and terrible, we know
What is within; just listen, and you'll hear
The vermins' gnawing teeth, yet 'twould appear
These figures once were proudly named Otho,
And Ottocar, and Bela, and Plato.
Alas! the end's not pleasant--puts one out;
To have been kings and dukes--made mighty rout--
Colossal heroes filling tombs with slain,
And, Madame, this to only now remain;
A peaceful nibbling rat to calmly pierce
A prince's noble armor proud and fierce."

"Sing, if you will--but do not speak so loud;
Besides, such things as these," said fair Mahaud,
"In your condition are not understood."
"Well said," made answer Zeno, "'tis a place
Of wonders--I see serpents, and can trace
Vampires, and monsters swarming, that arise
In mist, through chinks, to meet the gazer's eyes."

Then Mahaud shuddered, and she said: "The wine
The Abbé made me drink as task of mine,

Will soon enwrap me in the soundest sleep--
Swear not to leave me--that you here will keep."
"I swear," cried Joss, and Zeno, "I also;
But now at once to supper let us go."

XIII.

THEY SUP.

With laugh and song they to the table went.
Said Mahaud gayly: "It is my intent
To make Joss chamberlain. Zeno shall be
A constable supreme of high degree."
All three were joyous, and were fair to see.
Joss ate--and Zeno drank; on stools the pair,
With Mahaud musing in the regal chair.
The sound of separate leaf we do not note--
And so their babble seemed to idly float,
And leave no thought behind. Now and again
Joss his guitar made trill with plaintive strain
Or Tyrolean air; and lively tales they told
Mingled with mirth all free, and frank, and bold.
Said Mahaud: "Do you know how fortunate
You are?" "Yes, we are young at any rate--
Lovers half crazy--this is truth at least."
"And more, for you know Latin like a priest,

And Joss sings well."

"Ah, yes, our master true,
Yields us these gifts beyond the measure due."
"Your master!--who is he?" Mahaud exclaimed.
"Satan, we say--but Sin you'd think him named,"
Said Zeno, veiling words in raillery.
"Do not laugh thus," she said with dignity;
"Peace, Zeno. Joss, you speak, my chamberlain."
"Madame, Viridis, Countess of Milan,
Was deemed superb; Diana on the mount
Dazzled the shepherd boy; ever we count
The Isabel of Saxony so fair,
And Cleopatra's beauty all so rare--
Aspasia's, too, that must with theirs compare--
That praise of them no fitting language hath.
Divine was Rhodope--and Venus' wrath
Was such at Erylesis' perfect throat,
She dragged her to the forge where Vulcan smote
Her beauty on his anvil. Well, as much
As star transcends a sequin, and just such
As temple is to rubbish-heap, I say,
You do eclipse their beauty every way.
Those airy sprites that from the azure smile,
Peris and elfs the while they men beguile,
Have brows less youthful pure than yours; besides
Dishevelled they whose shaded beauty hides

In clouds."

"Flatt'rer," said Mahaud, "you but sing
Too well."

Then Joss more homage sought to bring;
"If I were angel under heav'n," said he,
"Or girl or demon, I would seek to be
By you instructed in all art and grace,
And as in school but take a scholar's place.
Highness, you are a fairy bright, whose hand
For sceptre vile gave up your proper wand."
Fair Mahaud mused--then said, "Be silent now;
You seem to watch me; little 'tis I know,
Only that from Bohemia Joss doth come,
And that in Poland Zeno hath his home.
But you amuse me; I am rich, you poor--
What boon shall I confer and make secure?
What gift? ask of me, poets, what you will
And I will grant it--promise to fulfil."
"A kiss," said Joss.

"A kiss!" and anger fraught
Amazed at minstrel having such a thought--
While flush of indignation warmed her cheek.
"You do forget to whom it is you speak,"
She cried.

"Had I not known your high degree,
Should I have asked this royal boon," said he,

"Obtained or given, a kiss must ever be.
No gift like king's--no kiss like that of queen!"
Queen! And on Mahaud's face a smile was seen.

XIV.

AFTER SUPPER.

But now the potion proved its subtle power,
And Mahaud's heavy eyelids 'gan to lower.
Zeno, with finger on his lip, looked on--
Her head next drooped, and consciousness was gone.
Smiling she slept, serene and very fair,
He took her hand, which fell all unaware.

"She sleeps," said Zeno, "now let chance or fate
Decide for us which has the marquise,
And which the girl."

Upon their faces now
A hungry tiger's look began to show.
"My brother, let us speak like men of sense,"
Said Joss; "while Mahaud dreams in innocence,
We grasp all here--and hold the foolish thing--
Our Friend below to us success will bring.
He keeps his word; 'tis thanks to him I say,

No awkward chance has marred our plans to-day.
All has succeeded--now no human power
Can take from us this woman and her dower.
Let us conclude. To wrangle and to fight
For just a yes or no, or to prove right
The Arian doctrines, all the time the Pope
Laughs in his sleeve at you--or with the hope
Some blue-eyed damsel with a tender skin
And milkwhite dainty hands by force to win--
This might be well in days when men bore loss
And fought for Latin or Byzantine Cross;
When Jack and Rudolf did like fools contend,
And for a simple wench their valor spend--
When Pepin held a synod at Leptine,
And times than now were much less wise and fine.
We do no longer heap up quarrels thus,
But better know how projects to discuss.
Have you the needful dice?"

"Yes, here they wait

For us."

"Who wins shall have the Marquisate;
Loser, the girl."

"Agreed."

"A noise I hear?"

"Only the wind that sounds like some one near--
Are you afraid?" said Zeno.

"Naught I fear

Save fasting--and that solid earth should gape.
Let's throw and fate decide--ere time escape."
Then rolled the dice.

"'Tis four."

'Twas Joss to throw.

"Six!--and I neatly win, you see; and lo!
At bottom of this box I've found Lusace,
And henceforth my orchestra will have place;
To it they'll dance. Taxes I'll raise, and they
In dread of rope and forfeit well will pay;
Brass trumpet-calls shall be my flutes that lead,
Where gibbets rise the imposts grow and spread."

Said Zeno, "I've the girl and so is best,"

"She's beautiful," said Joss.

"Yes, 'tis confess'd."

"What shall you do with her?" asked Joss.

"I know.

Make her a corpse," said Zeno; "marked you how
The jade insulted me just now! Too small
She called me--such the words her lips let fall.
I say, that moment ere the dice I threw
Had yawning Hell cried out, 'My son, for you
The chance is open still: take in a heap
The fair Lusace's seven towns, and reap
The corn, and wine, and oil of counties ten,
With all their people diligent, and then
Bohemia with its silver mines, and now
The lofty land whence mighty rivers flow
And not a brook returns; add to these counts
The Tyrol with its lovely azure mounts
And France with her historic fleurs-de-lis;
Come now, decide, what 'tis your choice must be?'
I should have answered, 'Vengeance! give to me
Rather than France, Bohemia, or the fair
Blue Tyrol, I my choice, O Hell! declare
For government of darkness and of death,
Of grave and worms.' Brother, this woman hath
As marchioness with absurdity set forth
To rule o'er frontier bulwarks of the north.
In any case to us a danger she,
And having stupidly insulted me

'Tis needful that she die. To blurt all out--
I know that you desire her; without doubt
The flame that rages in my heart warms yours;
To carry out these subtle plans of ours,
We have become as gypsies near this doll,
You as her page--I dotard to control--
Pretended gallants changed to lovers now.
So, brother, this being fact for us to know
Sooner or later, 'gainst our best intent
About her we should quarrel. Evident
Is it our compact would be broken through.
There is one only thing for us to do,
And that is, kill her."

"Logic very clear,"

Said musing Joss, "but what of blood shed here?"
Then Zeno stooped and lifted from the ground
An edge of carpet--groped until he found
A ring, which, pulled, an opening did disclose,
With deep abyss beneath; from it there rose
The odor rank of crime. Joss walked to see
While Zeno pointed to it silently.
But eyes met eyes, and Joss, well pleased, was fain
By nod of head to make approval plain.

XV.

THE OUBLIETTES.

If sulphurous light had shone from this vile well
One might have said it was a mouth of hell,
So large the trap that by some sudden blow
A man might backward fall and sink below.
Who looked could see a harrow's threatening teeth,
But lost in night was everything beneath.
Partitions blood-stained have a reddened smear,
And Terror unrelieved is master here.
One feels the place has secret histories
Replete with dreadful murderous mysteries,
And that this sepulchre, forgot to-day,
Is home of trailing ghosts that grope their way
Along the walls where spectre reptiles crawl.
"Our fathers fashioned for us after all
Some useful things," said Joss; then Zeno spoke:
"I know what Corbus hides beneath its cloak,
I and the osprey know the castle old,
And what in bygone times the justice bold."

"And are you sure that Mahaud will not wake?"
"Her eyes are closed as now my fist I make;
She is in mystic and unearthly sleep;
The potion still its power o'er her must keep."

"But she will surely wake at break of day?"

"In darkness."

"What will all the courtiers say
When in the place of her they find two men?"
"To them we will declare ourselves--and then
They at our feet will fall."

"Where leads this hole?"
"To where the crow makes feast and torrents roll
To desolation. Let us end it now."

These young and handsome men had seemed to grow
Deformed and hideous--so doth foul black heart
Disfigure man, till beauty all depart.
So to the hell within the human face
Transparent is. They nearer move apace;
And Mahaud soundly sleeps as in a bed.
"To work."

Joss seizes her and holds her head
Supporting her beneath her arms, in his;
And then he dared to plant a monstrous kiss
Upon her rosy lips,--while Zeno bent
Before the massive chair, and with intent
Her robe disordered as he raised her feet;

Her dainty ankles thus their gaze to meet.
And while the mystic sleep was all profound,
The pit gaped wide like grave in burial ground.

XVI.

WHAT THEY ATTEMPT BECOMES DIFFICULT.

Bearing the sleeping Mahaud they moved now
Silent and bent with heavy step and slow.
Zeno faced darkness--Joss turned towards the light--
So that the hall to Joss was quite in sight.
Sudden he stopped--and Zeno, "What now!" called,
But Joss replied not, though he seemed appalled,
And made a sign to Zeno, who with speed
Looked back. Then seemed they changed to stone indeed.
For both perceived that in the vaulted hall
One of the grand old knights ranged by the wall
Descended from his horse. Like phantom he
Moved with a horrible tranquillity.
Masked by his helm towards them he came; his tread
Made the floor tremble--and one might have said
A spirit of th' abyss was here; between
Them and the pit he came--a barrier seen;
Then said, with sword in hand and visor down,
In measured tones that had sepulchral grown

As tolling bell, "Stop, Sigismond, and you,
King Ladisläus;" at those words, though few,
They dropped the Marchioness, and in such a way
That at their feet like rigid corpse she lay.

The deep voice speaking from the visor's grate
Proceeded--while the two in abject state
Cowered low. Joss paled, by gloom and dread o'ercast,
And Zeno trembled like a yielding mast.
"You two who listen now must recollect
The compact all your fellow-men suspect.
'Tis this: 'I, Satan, god of darkened sphere,
The king of gloom and winds that bring things drear,
Alliance make with my two brothers dear,
The Emperor Sigismond and Polish King
Named Ladisläus. I to surely bring
Aid and protection to them both alway,
And never to absent myself or say
I'm weary. And yet more--I, being lord
Of sea and land, to Sigismond award
The earth; to Ladisläus all the sea.
With this condition that they yield to me
When I the forfeit claim--the King his head,
But shall the Emperor give his soul instead."

Said Joss, "Is't he?--Spectre with flashing eyes,

And art thou Satan come to us surprise?"
"Much less am I and yet much more.
Oh, kings of crimes and plots! your day is o'er,
But I your lives will only take to-day;
Beneath the talons black your souls let stay
To wrestle still."

The pair looked stupefied
And crushed. Exchanging looks 'twas Zeno cried,
Speaking to Joss, "Now who--who can it be?"
Joss stammered, "Yes, no refuge can I see;
The doom is on us. But oh, spectre! say
Who are you?"

"I'm the judge."

"Then mercy, pray."
The voice replied: "God guides His chosen hand
To be th' Avenger in your path to stand.
Your hour has sounded, nothing now indeed
Can change for you the destiny decreed,
Irrevocable quite. Yes, I looked on.
Ah! little did you think that any one
To this unwholesome gloom could knowledge bring
That Joss a kaiser was, and Zeno king.
You spoke just now--but why?--too late to plead.

The forfeit's due and hope should all be dead.
Incurables! For you I am the grave.
Oh, miserable men! that naught can save.
Yes, Sigismond a kaiser is, and you
A king, O Ladisläus!--it is true.
You thought of God but as a wheel to roll
Your chariot on; you who have king's control
O'er Poland and its many towns so strong.
You, Milan's Duke, to whom at once belong
The gold and iron crowns. You, Emperor made
By Rome, a son of Hercules 'tis said;
And you of Spartibor. And your two crowns
Are shining lights; and yet your shadow frowns
From every mountain land to trembling sea.
You are at giddy heights twin powers to be
A glory and a force for all that's great--
But 'neath the purple canopy of state,
Th' expanding and triumphant arch you prize,
'Neath royal power that sacred veils disguise,
Beneath your crowns of pearls and jewelled stars,
Beneath your exploits terrible and wars,
You, Sigismond, have but a monster been,
And, Ladisläus, you are scoundrel seen.
Oh, degradation of the sceptre's might
And swords--when Justice has a hand like night,
Foul and polluted; and before this thing,

This hydra, do the Temple's hinges swing--
The throne becomes the haunt of all things base
Oh, age of infamy and foul disgrace!
Oh, starry heavens looking on the shame,
No brow but reddens with resentful flame--
And yet the silent people do not stir!
Oh, million arms! what things do you deter--
Poor sheep, whom vermin-majesties devour,
Have you not nails with strong desiring power
To rend these royalties, that you so cower?
But two are taken,--such as will amaze
E'en hell itself, when it on them shall gaze.
Ah, Sigismond and Ladisläus, you
Were once triumphant, splendid to the view,
Stifling with your prosperity--but now
The hour of retribution lays you low.
Ah, do the vulture and the crocodile
Shed tears! At such a sight I fain must smile.
It seems to me 'tis very good sometimes
That princes, conquerors stained with bandits' crimes,
Sparkling with splendor, wearing crowns of gold,
Should know the deadly sweat endured of old,
That of Jehoshaphat; should sob and fear,
And after crime th' unclean be brought to bear.
'Tis well--God rules--and thus it is that I
These masters of the world can make to lie

In ashes at my feet. And this was he
Who reigned--and this a Caesar known to be!
In truth, my old heart aches with very shame
To see such cravens with such noble name.
But let us finish--what has just passed here
Demands thick shrouding, and the time is near.
Th' accursed dice that rolled at Calvary
You rolled a woman's murder to decree
It was a dark disastrous game to play;
But not for me a moral to essay.
This moment to the misty grave is due,
And far too vile and little human you
To see your evil ways. Your fingers lack
The human power your shocking deeds to track.
What use in darkness mirror to uphold?
What use your doings to be now retold?
Drink of the darkness--greedy of the ill
To which from habit you're attracted still,
Not recognizing in the draught you take
The stench that your atrocities must make.
I only tell you that this burdened age
Tires of your Highnesses, that soil its page,
And of your villanies--and this is why
You now must swell the stream that passes by
Of refuse filth. Oh, horrid scene to show
Of these young men and that young girl just now!

Oh! can you really be of human kind
Breathing pure air of heaven? Do we find
That you are men? Oh, no! for when you laid
Foul lips upon the mouth of sleeping maid,
You seemed but ghouls that had come furtively
From out the tombs; only a horrid lie
Your human shape; of some strange frightful beast
You have the soul. To darkness I at least
Remit you now. Oh, murderer Sigismond
And Ladisläus pirate, both beyond
Release--two demons that have broken ban!
Therefore 'tis time their empire over man
And converse with the living, should be o'er;
Tyrants, behold your tomb your eyes before;
Vampires and dogs, your sepulchre is here.
Enter."

He pointed to the gulf so near.
All terrified upon their knees they fell.
"Oh! take us not in your dread realm to dwell,"
Said Sigismond. "But, phantom! do us tell
What thou wouldst have from us--we will obey.
Oh, mercy!--'tis for mercy now we pray."
"Behold us at your feet, oh, spectre dread!"
And no old crone in feebler voice could plead
Than Ladisläus did.

But not a word

Said now the figure motionless, with sword
In hand. This sovereign soul seemed to commune
With self beneath his metal sheath; yet soon
And suddenly, with tranquil voice said he,
"Princes, your craven spirit wearies me.
No phantom--only man am I. Arise!
I like not to be dreaded otherwise
Than with the fear to which I'm used; know me,
For it is Eviradnus that you see!"

XVII.

THE CLUB.

As from the mist a noble pine we tell
Grown old upon the heights of Appenzel,
When morning freshness breathes round all the wood,
So Eviradnus now before them stood,
Opening his visor, which at once revealed
The snowy beard it had so well concealed.
Thin Sigismund was still as dog at gaze,
But Ladisläus leaped, and howl did raise,
And laughed and gnashed his teeth, till, like a cloud
That sudden bursts, his rage was all avowed.

"'Tis but an old man after all!" he cried.

Then the great knight, who looked at both, replied,

"Oh, kings! an old man of my time can cope

With two much younger ones of yours, I hope.

To mortal combat I defy you both

Singly; or, if you will, I'm nothing loth

With two together to contend; choose here

From out the heap what weapon shall appear

Most fit. As you no cuirass wear, I see,

I will take off my own, for all must be

In order perfect--e'en your punishment."

Then Eviradnus, true to his intent,

Stripped to his Utrecht jerkin; but the while

He calmly had disarmed--with dexterous guile

Had Ladisläus seized a knife that lay

Upon the damask cloth, and slipped away

His shoes; then barefoot, swiftly, silently

He crept behind the knight, with arm held high.

But Eviradnus was of all aware,

And turned upon the murderous weapon there,

And twisted it away; then in a trice

His strong colossal hand grasped like a vice

The neck of Ladisläus, who the blade

Now dropped; over his eyes a misty shade

Showed that the royal dwarf was near to death.

"Traitor!" said Eviradnus in his wrath,
"I rather should have hewn your limbs away,
And left you crawling on your stumps, I say,--
But now die fast."

Ghastly, with starting eyes,
The King without a cry or struggle dies.
One dead--but lo! the other stands bold-faced,
Defiant; for the knight, when he unlaced
His cuirass, had his trusty sword laid down,
And Sigismond now grasps it as his own.
The monster-youth laughed at the silv'ry beard,
And, sword in hand, a murderer glad appeared.
Crossing his arms, he cried, "'Tis my turn now!"
And the black mounted knights in solemn row
Were judges of the strife. Before them lay
The sleeping Mahaud--and not far away
The fatal pit, near which the champion knight
With evil Emperor must contend for right,
Though weaponless he was. And yawned the pit
Expectant which should be engulfed in it.

"Now we shall see for whom this ready grave,"
Said Sigismond, "you dog, whom naught can save!"

Aware was Eviradnus that if he
Turned for a blade unto the armory,
He would be instant pierced--what can he do?
The moment is for him supreme. But, lo!
He glances now at Ladislâus dead,
And with a smile triumphant and yet dread,
And air of lion caged to whom is shown
Some loophole of escape, he bends him down.

"Ha! ha! no other club than this I need!"

He cried, as seizing in his hands with speed
The dead King's heels, the body lifted high,
Then to the frightened Emperor he came nigh,
And made him shake with horror and with fear,
The weapon all so ghastly did appear.

The head became the stone to this strange sling,
Of which the body was the potent string;
And while 'twas brandished in a deadly way,
The dislocated arms made monstrous play
With hideous gestures, as now upside down
The bludgeon corpse a giant force had grown.

"'Tis well!" said Eviradnus, and he cried,

"Arrange between yourselves, you two allied;

If hell-fire were extinguished, surely it

By such a contest might be all relit;

From kindling spark struck out from dead King's brow,

Batt'ring to death a living Emperor now."

And Sigismond, thus met and horrified,
Recoiled to near the unseen opening wide;
The human club was raised, and struck again * * *
And Eviradnus did alone remain
All empty-handed--but he heard the sound
Of spectres two falling to depths profound;
Then, stooping o'er the pit, he gazed below,
And, as half-dreaming now, he murmured low,
"Tiger and jackal meet their portion here,
'Tis well together they should disappear!"

XVIII.

DAYBREAK.

Then lifts he Mahaud to the ducal chair,
And shuts the trap with noiseless, gentle care;
And puts in order everything around,
So that, on waking, naught should her astound.

"No drop of blood the thing has cost," mused he,
"And that is best indeed."

But suddenly

Some distant bells clang out. The mountains gray
Have scarlet tips, proclaiming dawning day;
The hamlets are astir, and crowds come out--
Bearing fresh branches of the broom--about
To seek their Lady, who herself awakes
Rosy as morn, just when the morning breaks;
Half-dreaming still, she ponders, can it be
Some mystic change has passed, for her to see
One old man in the place of two quite young!
Her wondering eyes search carefully and long.
It may be she regrets the change: meanwhile,
The valiant knight salutes her with a smile,
And then approaching her with friendly mien,
Says, "Madam, has your sleep all pleasant been?"

MRS. NEWTON CROSLAND.