



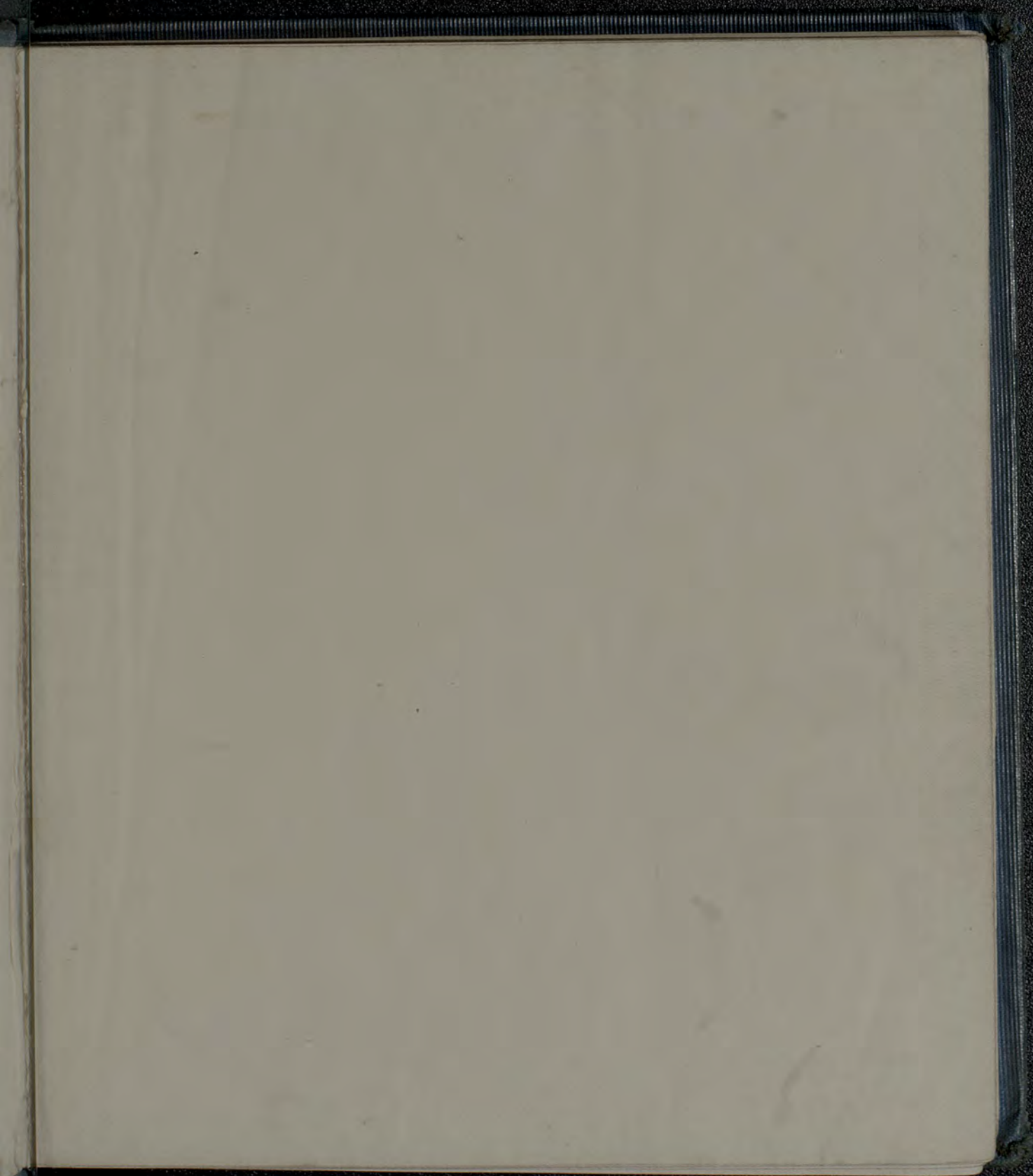
THE
HONEY STEW
A FAIRY TALE

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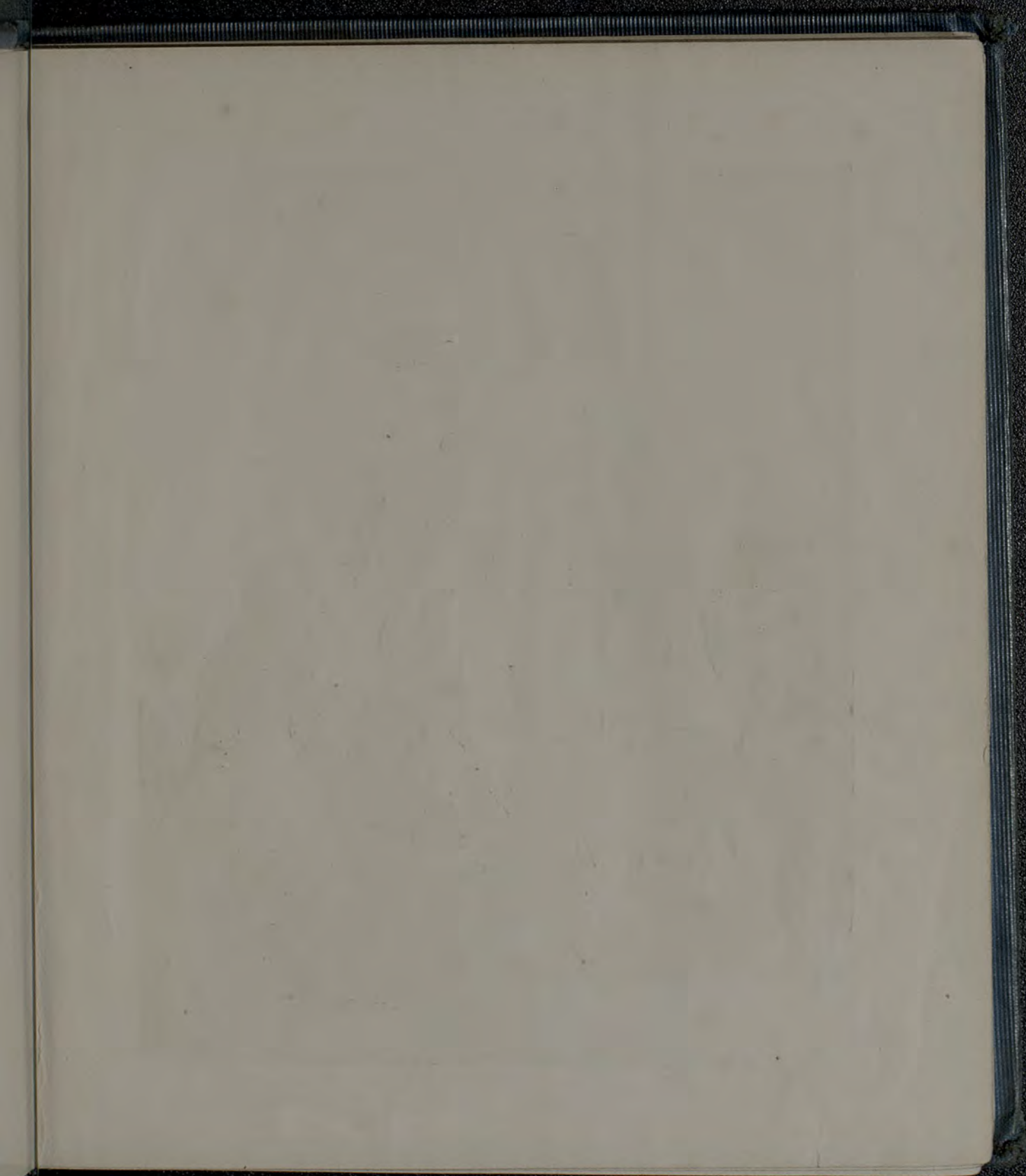


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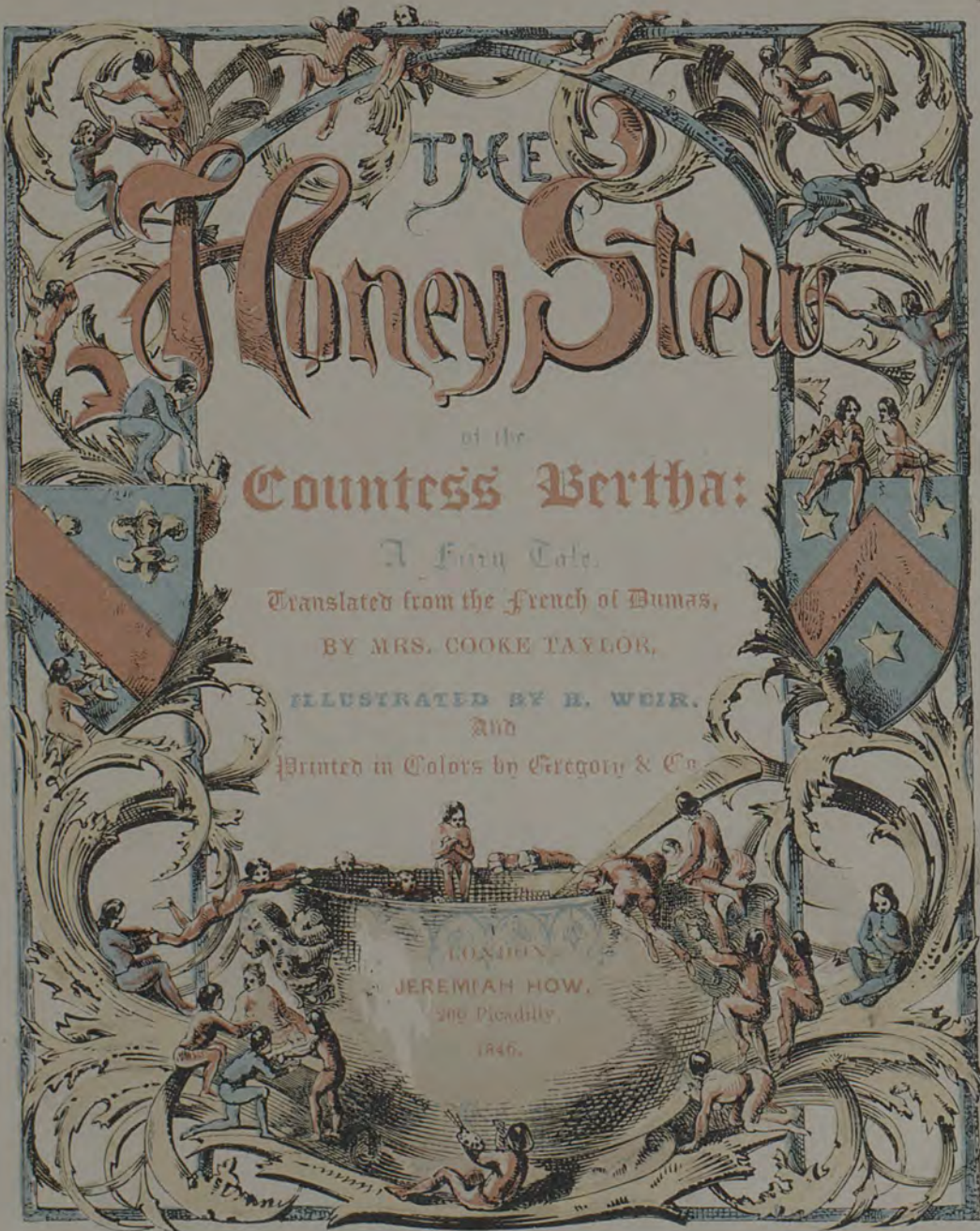


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THE
Honey Stew

of the
Countess Bertha:

A Fairy Tale.

Translated from the French of Dumas,

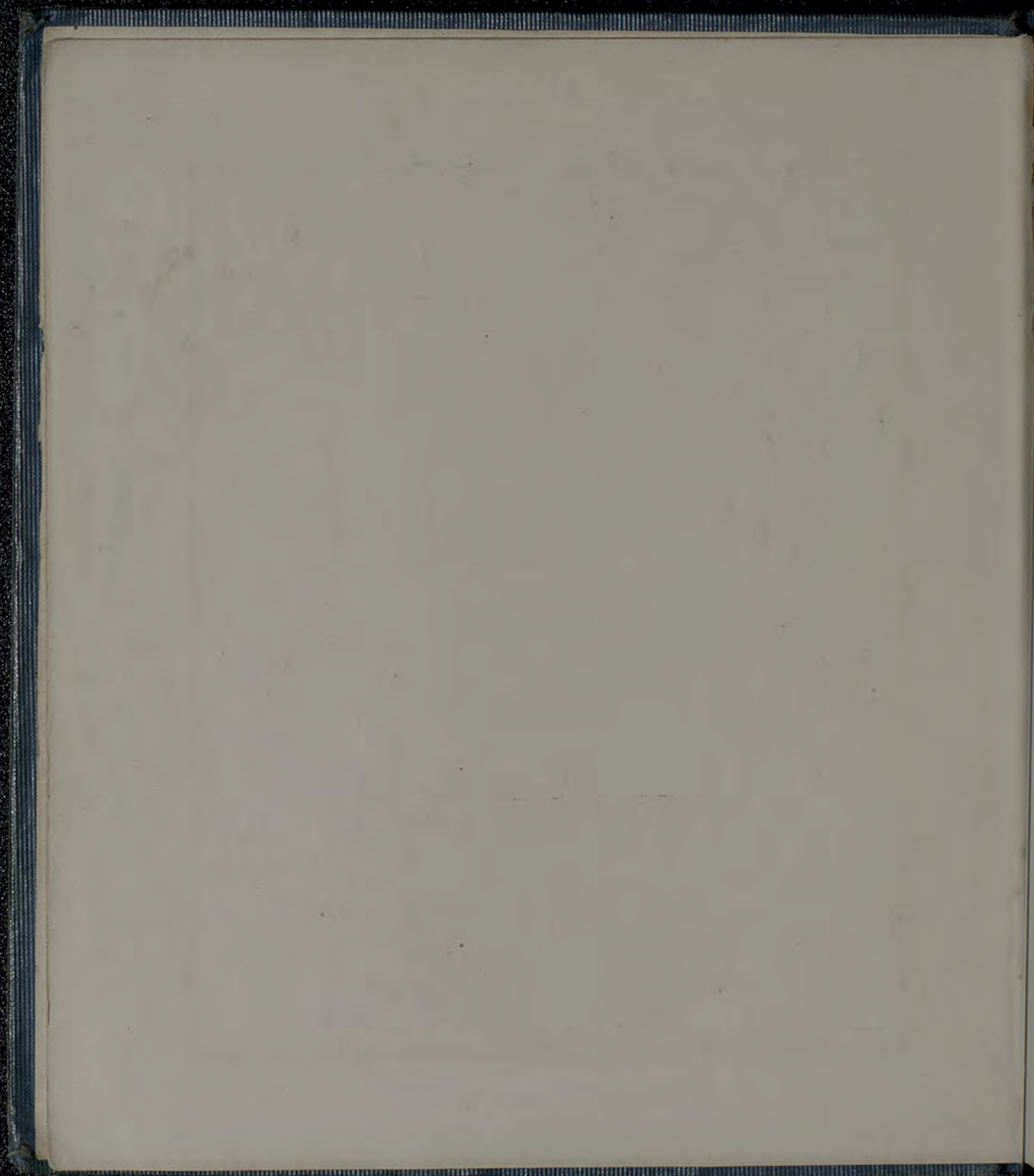
BY MRS. COOKE TAYLOR,

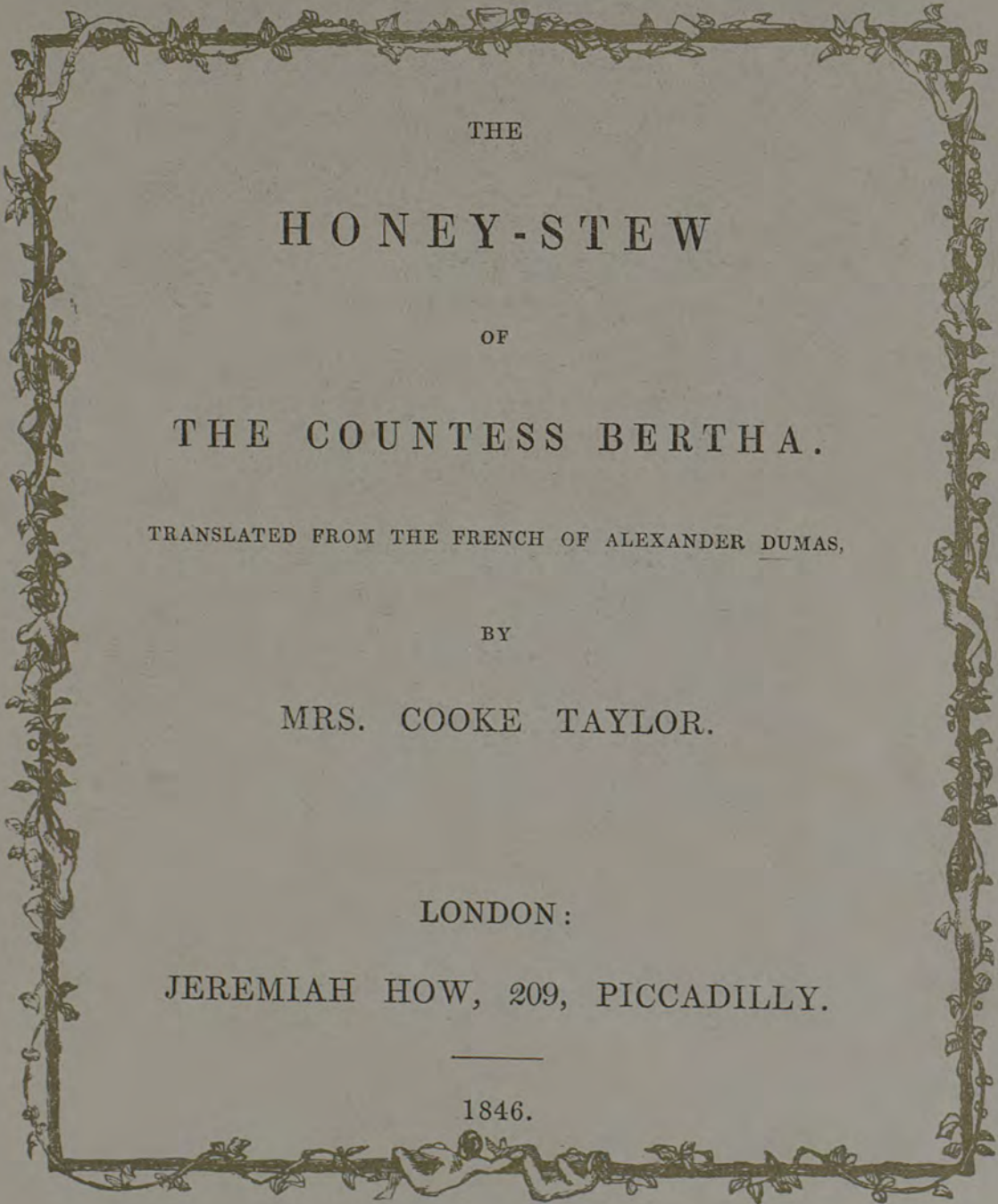
ILLUSTRATED BY H. WEIR,

AND

Printed in Colors by Gregory & Co.

LONDON,
JEREMIAH HOW,
209 Piccadilly,
1846.





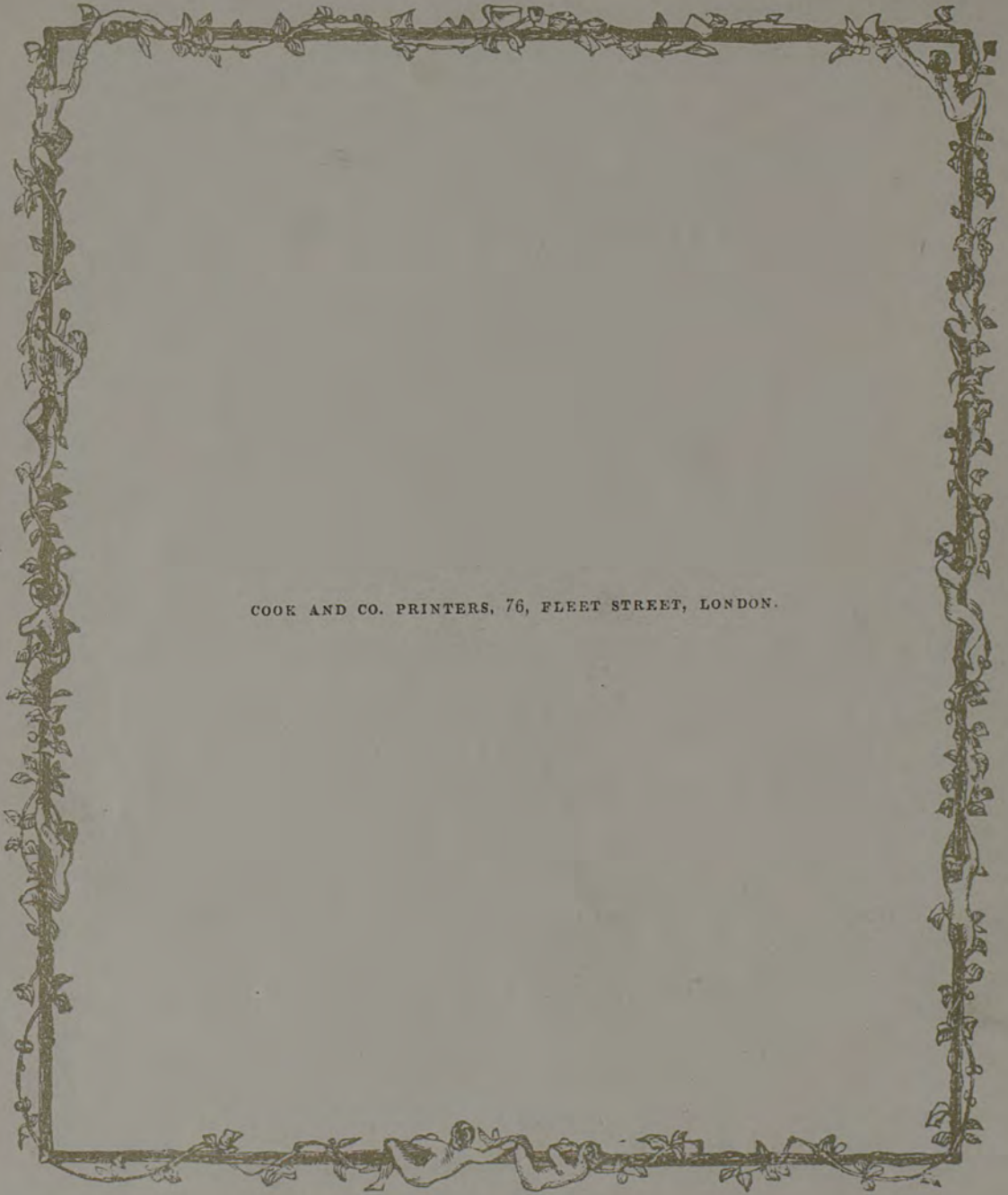
THE
HONEY-STEW
OF
THE COUNTESS BERTHA.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF ALEXANDER DUMAS,

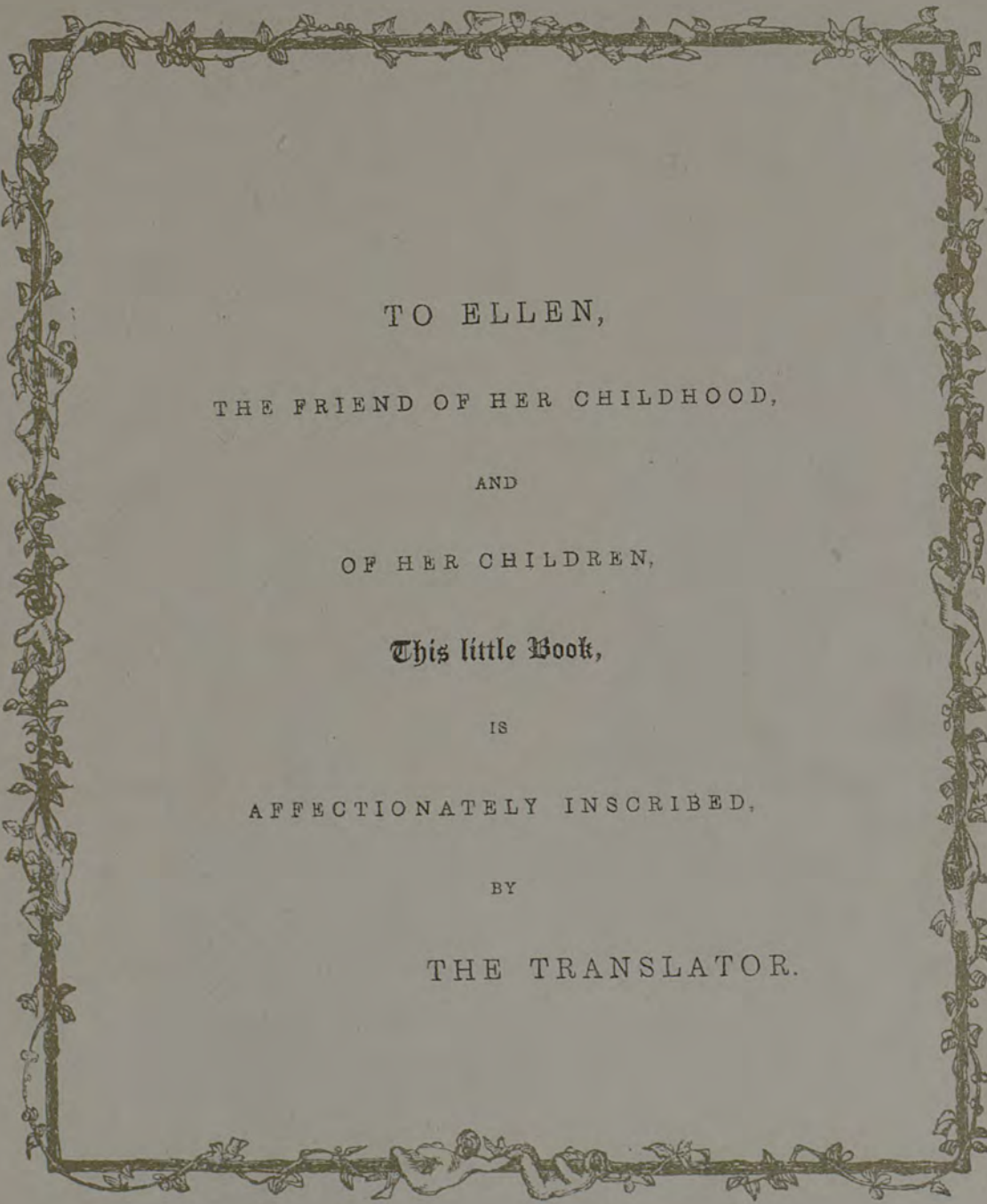
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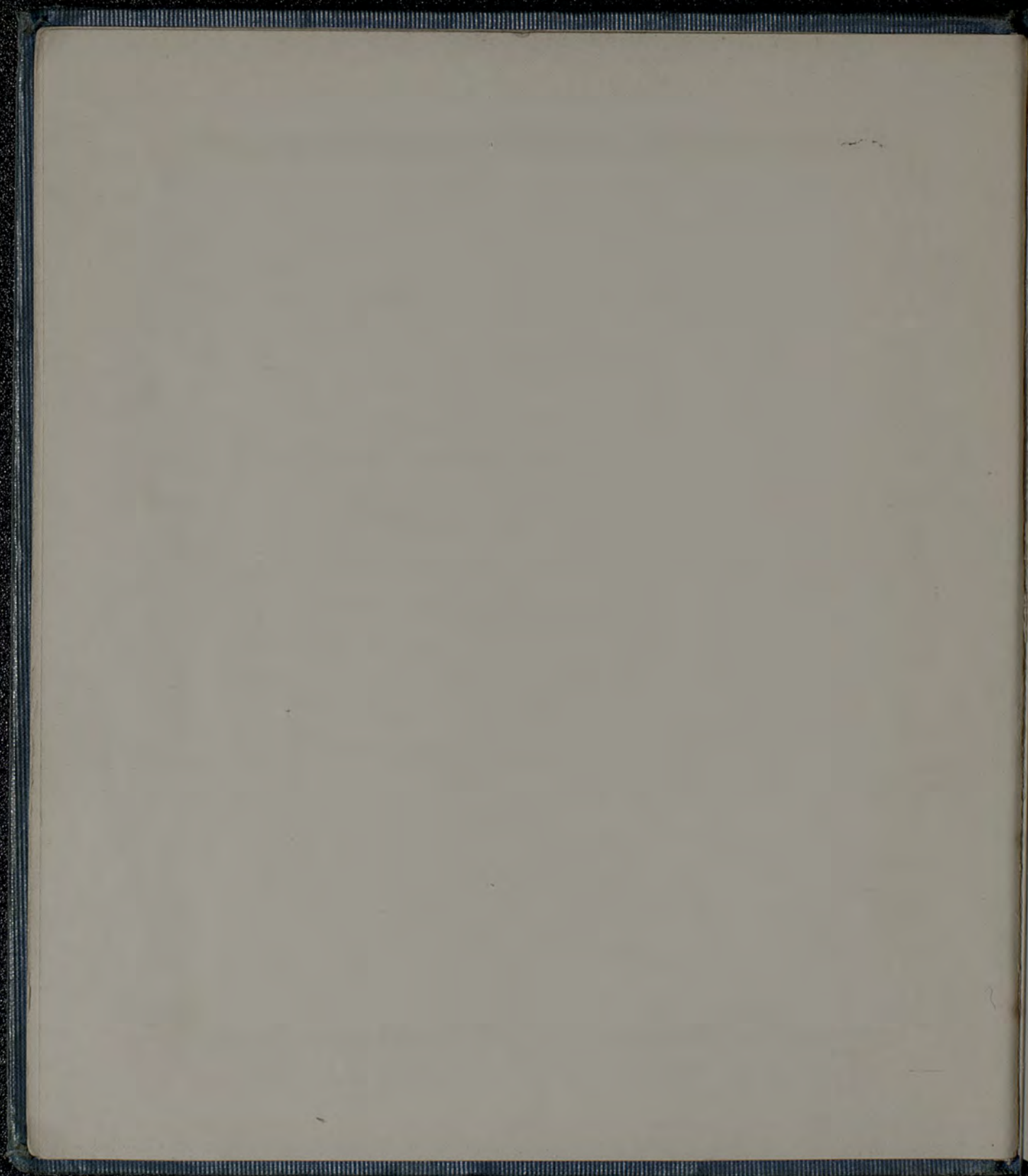
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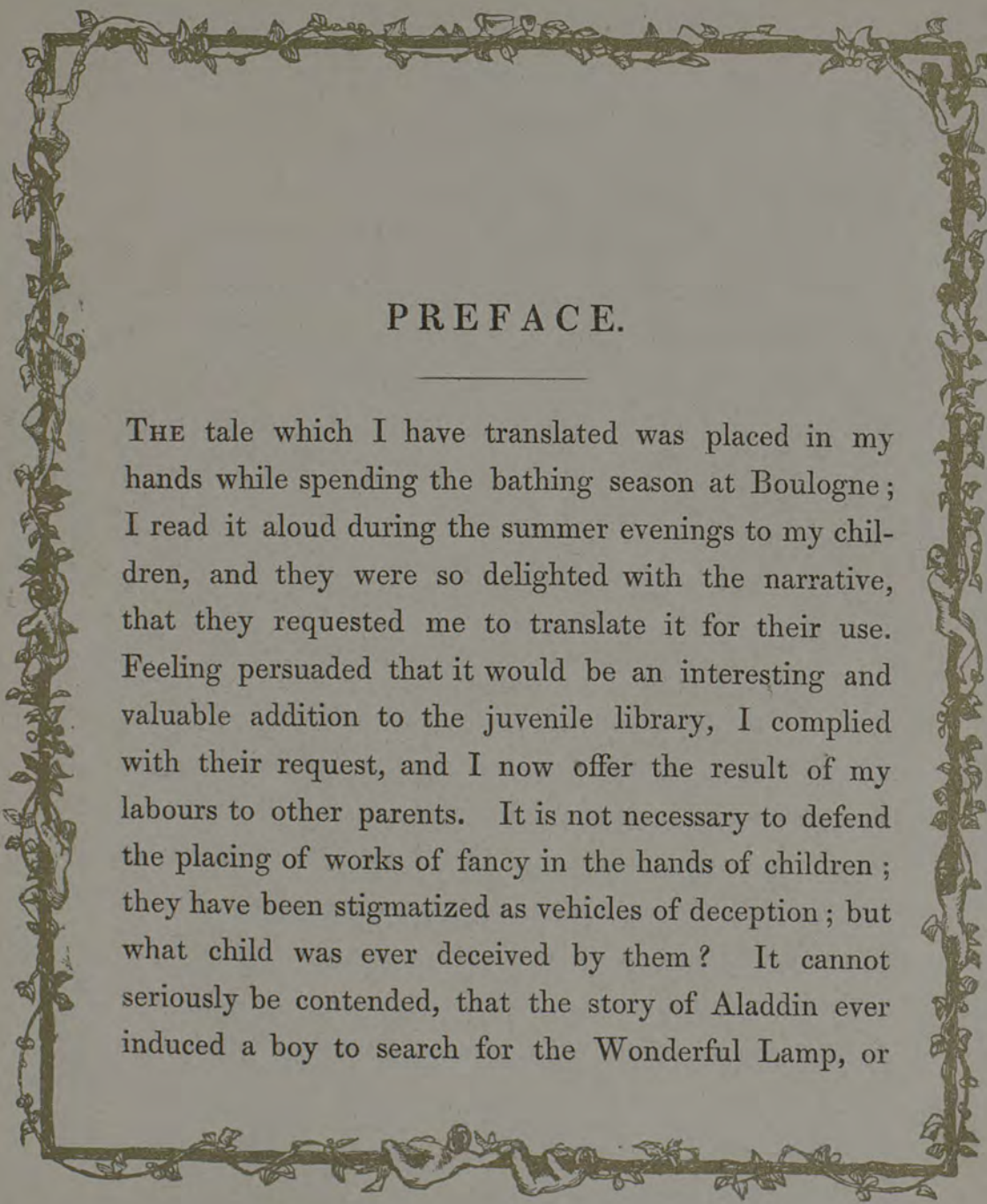


TO ELLEN,
THE FRIEND OF HER CHILDHOOD,
AND
OF HER CHILDREN,

This little Book,
IS
AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

BY
THE TRANSLATOR.





PREFACE.

THE tale which I have translated was placed in my hands while spending the bathing season at Boulogne; I read it aloud during the summer evenings to my children, and they were so delighted with the narrative, that they requested me to translate it for their use. Feeling persuaded that it would be an interesting and valuable addition to the juvenile library, I complied with their request, and I now offer the result of my labours to other parents. It is not necessary to defend the placing of works of fancy in the hands of children; they have been stigmatized as vehicles of deception; but what child was ever deceived by them? It cannot seriously be contended, that the story of Aladdin ever induced a boy to search for the Wonderful Lamp, or

that any girl was tempted to have her head cut off by the history of the White Cat. The moral influence of Beauty and the Beast, in its powerful manifestation of the domestic affections, is not weakened by the introduction of the Bear; nor is the influence of Cinderella's example of patient submission diminished by the incident of the glass slipper. It has been justly said by Cowper, that

“ Even the child who knows no better
Than to interpret by the letter
The story of a cock and bull,
Must have a most uncommon skull.”

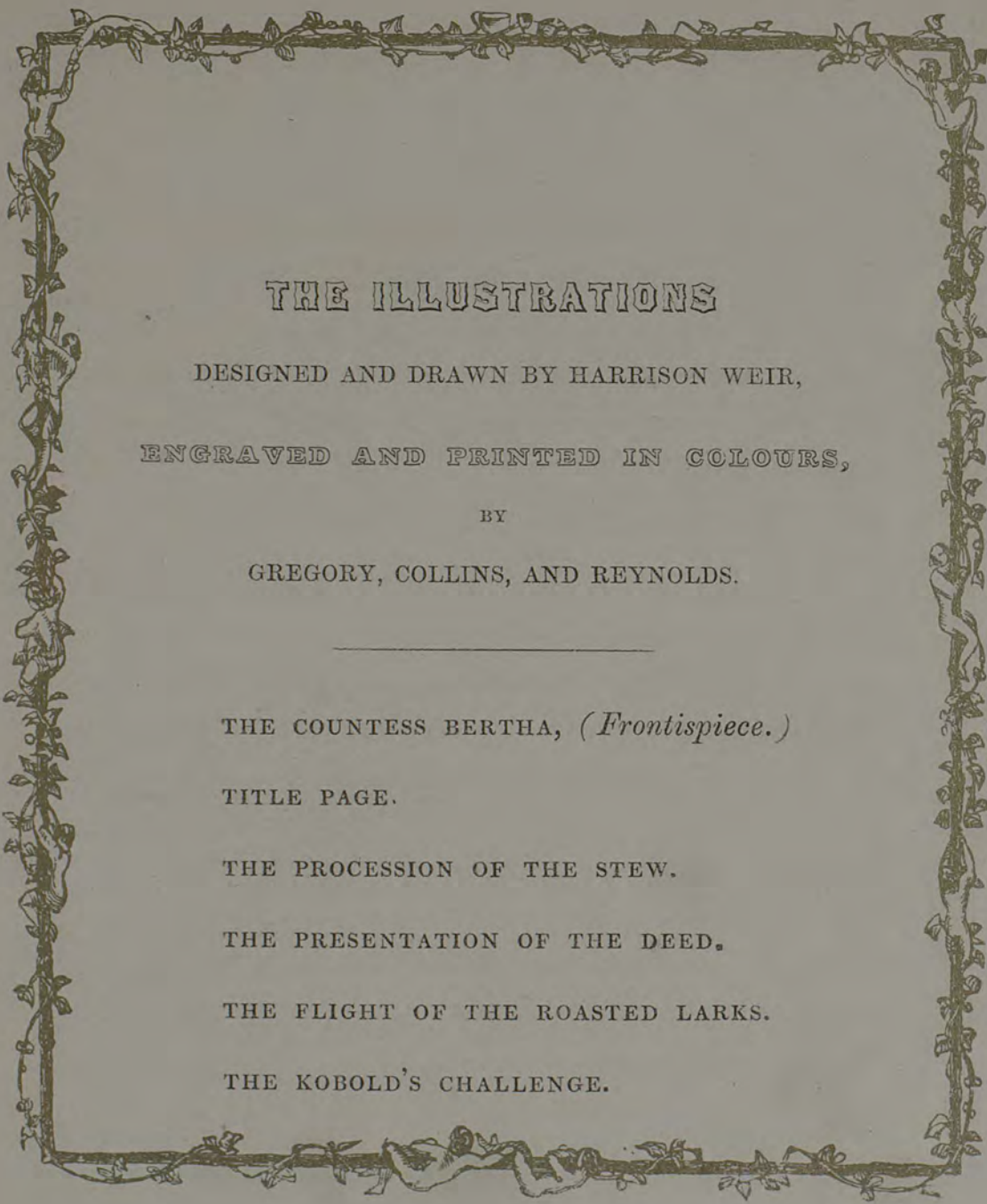
The story of the Countess Bertha has the merit of originality and novelty; I know of nothing like it in the whole range of literature of the nursery, and this is no small merit when we look upon the wearisome sameness of the dwarf novels which form the majority of modern tales for children. The characters even of the imaginary beings are sketched with great distinctness, and sup-

ported with that dramatic power for which the works of Dumas are so remarkable ; and if fiction be allowed to have its own laws for probability, the incidents must be recognized as perfectly natural. Above all, the work is written in a high tone of chivalrous morality, admirably calculated to seize the imagination of youth, and to develop the best sympathies of early life,—affection, generosity, charity, and genuine courage.

I have omitted some of the allusions in the original, which were unsuited to the English taste, or referred to passing fashions in Paris, which have not made their way to London ; in every other respect I may claim for my version the humble virtue of fidelity. Trusting that a little work which has given extensive pleasure to the children of France may be found an acceptable companion at the firesides of England, I leave it to win its way by its own merits.

Before parting from it, I cannot but express my gratification at the novel and beautiful form in which

the work is laid before the world by the Publisher. The style of decoration adopted is far superior to that in which the original has been brought out in Paris; and, could the Countess Bertha exercise a choice, a lady of her refined taste would assuredly prefer her English dress.



THE ILLUSTRATIONS

DESIGNED AND DRAWN BY HARRISON WEIR,

ENGRAVED AND PRINTED IN COLOURS,

BY

GREGORY, COLLINS, AND REYNOLDS.

THE COUNTESS BERTHA, (*Frontispiece.*)

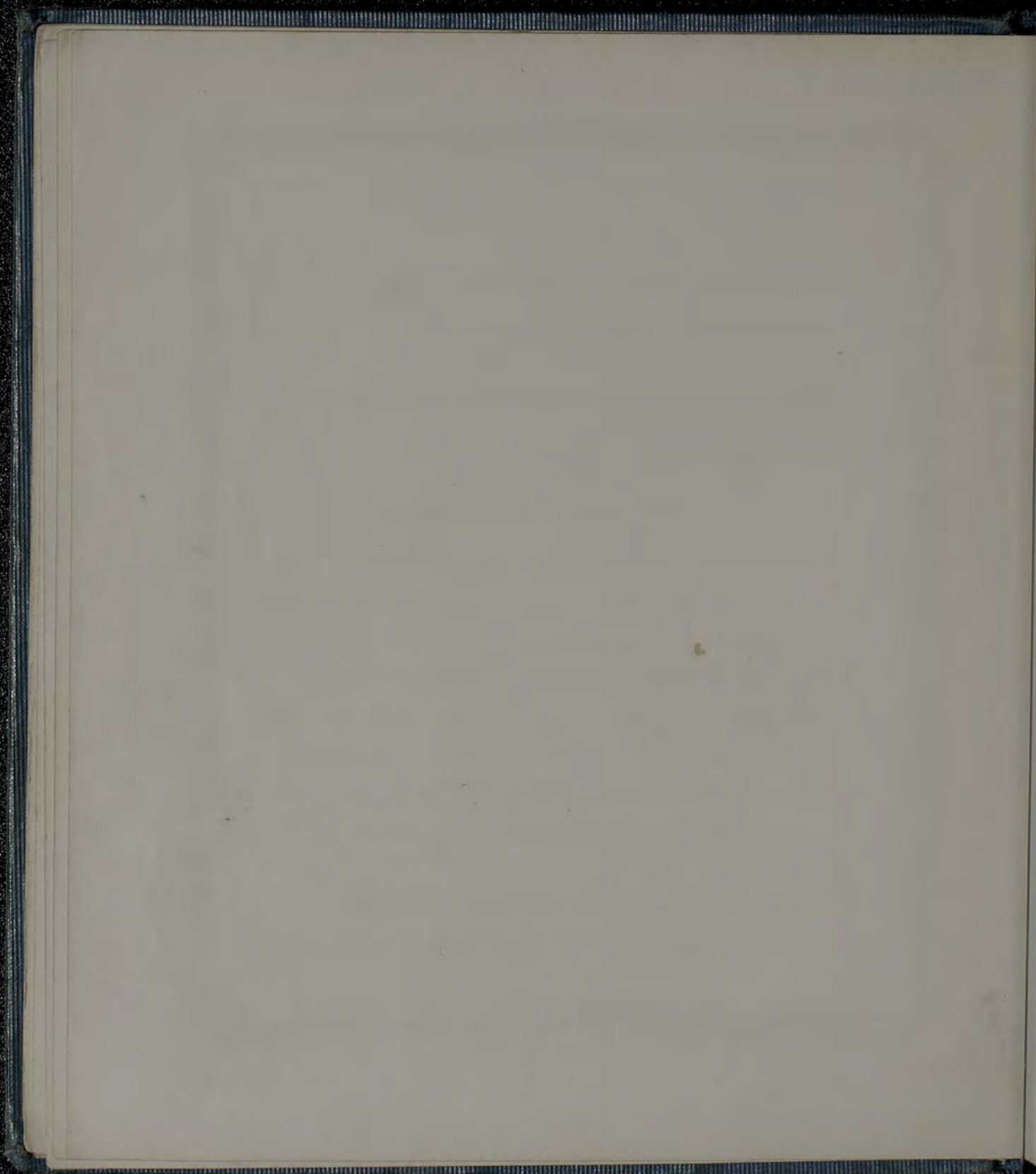
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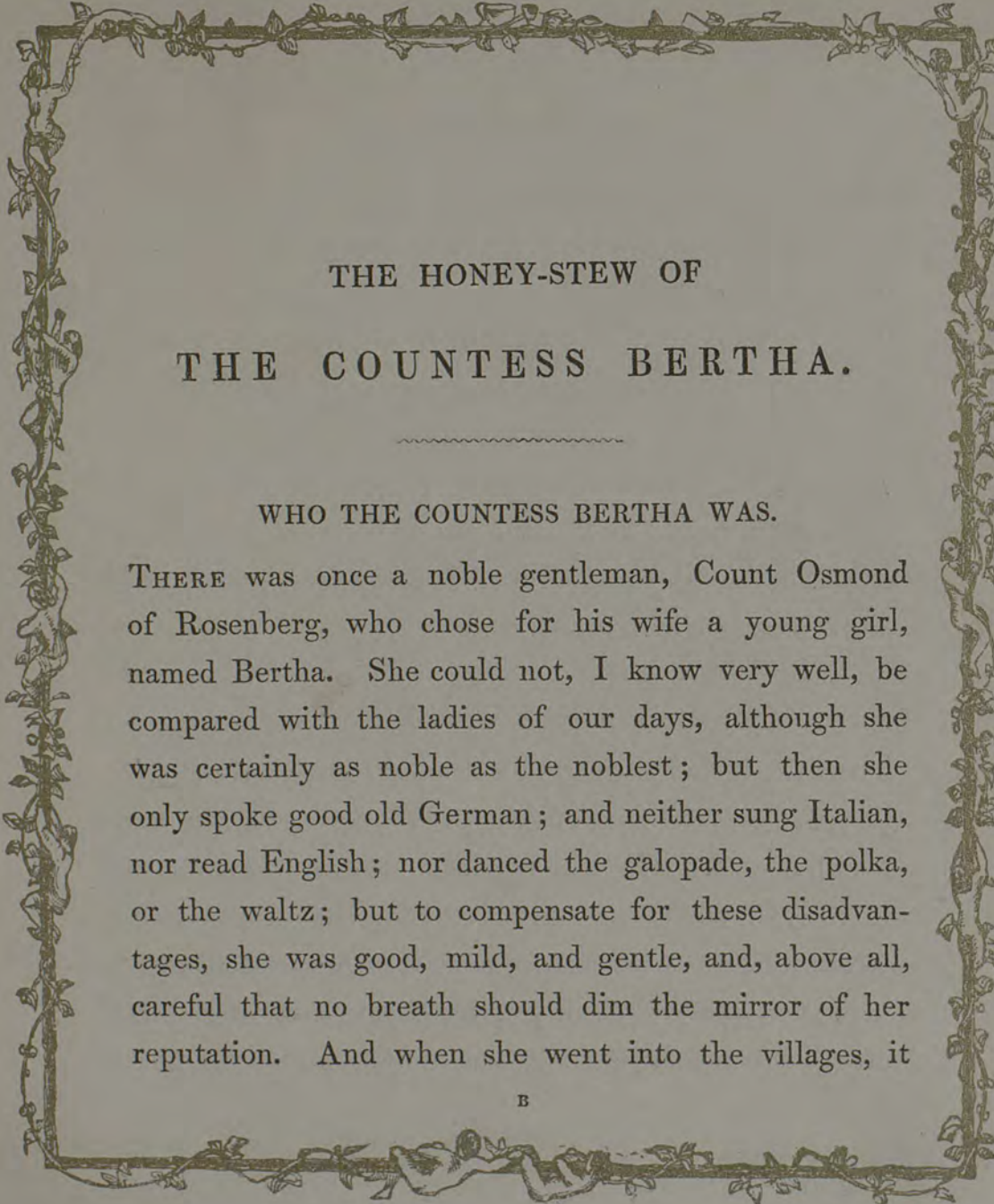
THE PROCESSION OF THE STEW.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE DEED.

THE FLIGHT OF THE ROASTED LARKS.

THE KOBOLD'S CHALLENGE.





THE HONEY-STEW OF
THE COUNTESS BERTHA.

WHO THE COUNTESS BERTHA WAS.

THERE was once a noble gentleman, Count Osmond of Rosenberg, who chose for his wife a young girl, named Bertha. She could not, I know very well, be compared with the ladies of our days, although she was certainly as noble as the noblest; but then she only spoke good old German; and neither sung Italian, nor read English; nor danced the galopade, the polka, or the waltz; but to compensate for these disadvantages, she was good, mild, and gentle, and, above all, careful that no breath should dim the mirror of her reputation. And when she went into the villages, it

was not in an open carriage, with a fashionable dog—of the true King Charles breed—on the seat before her, but on foot, with her store of alms in her hand, and the “God reward you!” from the poor old man, the widow, or the orphan, sounded sweeter in her ears, than the most melodious ballad of the most celebrated Minne-singer: a ballad, for which those very persons would pay in gold, who would refuse the smallest relief to a poor creature, though standing naked and hungry, petitioning hat in hand for charitable relief.

THE KOBOLDS.

THUS the blessings of the whole country were showered, like the dews of heaven, on the Countess Bertha and her husband. Golden harvests covered their fields, their clustered grapes made the trellises of the vines creak with their weight. And if any cloud charged with hail and lightning came near that castle, an invisible hand drove it immediately towards the resi-

dence of some wicked Castellan, over which it was permitted to spend all its fury.

Who turned aside the dark clouds, and preserved the domains of the Count Osmond, and the Countess Bertha, from the rain and hail? I am going to tell you. It was the work of the Kobolds or fairies of the castle.

I must tell you, my dear children, that there was formerly in Germany, a race of good little Genii, which, unfortunately, has now disappeared: the tallest among them was not higher than six inches, and they were called Kobolds. These good little Genii, as old as the world, were particularly fond of those castles whose owners were, as God designed men to be, good like themselves. They detested the wicked, and punished them by the various little plagues which fairies are accustomed to inflict, while on the contrary, they protected with their utmost power, which extended over all the elements, those whose good disposition

was not unlike their own; this was the reason why the little Kobolds had inhabited the castle of Wistgaw from time immemorial; after having known the father, grandfather, and all the ancestors of the Count Osmond, they felt particularly attached to him, as well as to the Countess Bertha, and with their breath drove far away from their domains, clouds, hail, and storms.

THE OLD CASTLE.

ONE day, Bertha came to her husband, and said to him, "My dear Lord, our castle is very old and threatens to fall into ruins; we can no longer remain in safety in this insecure house; I think, then, if you approve of it, that we ought to build another residence."

"I ask no better," replied the Count; "but one thing makes me uneasy."

"What?"

"Although you have never seen them, you must have

heard of those good Kobolds who inhabit the foundations of our castle. My father heard from his grandfather, who derived the story from his ancestors, that these little people were the blessing of the estate; perhaps they have formed a strong attachment to their residence in this old castle, and if we made them angry by disturbing them they might abandon us, and all our happiness go with them."

The Countess Bertha approved the wise and generous sentiments of her husband; she and the Count decided that it was better to live in the old castle, such as it was, than run the risk of offending the good little Genii.

THE EMBASSY.

THE following night, as the Countess Bertha and Count Osmond were in their grand state bed, they heard a noise, as if a multitude of little feet were approaching from the drawing-room. At the same moment, the bed-

room door was opened, and there came in an embassy of these little Kobolds of whom we have spoken. The Ambassador, who was at their head, was richly dressed in the fashion of the times, having on a furred mantle, a vest of velvet, pantaloons to match, and his little shoes extravagantly pointed. By his side was a sword of the finest steel, the handle of which was a single diamond. He held politely in his hand his little hat, ornamented with feathers, and, approaching the bed of the Count and Countess, who looked on with astonishment, he addressed these words to them:—

“ We have heard a report, noble lady and lord,
That you wish to erect a new dwelling,
As this castle no longer can shelter afford,
When tempests around it are swelling.

“ We approvè the design—for these ivy-clad walls,
And the weeds that each buttress have studded,
Seem no better than spouts for the rain when it falls,
So that every apartment is flooded.

“ Pull the old castle down—let a new one appear—
And the Kobolds will grant you protection,
If the virtue and truth, which made this one so dear,
Shall reign their in equal perfection.”

Count Osmond was too much astonished at what happened, to reply to these words, otherwise than by a friendly gesture; but the Ambassador seemed quite satisfied with this politeness, and retired, after having ceremoniously saluted the wedded pair.

The next morning, the Count and Countess got up, very glad that the grand difficulty had been removed, in consequence of the consent of their good little friends. Osmond sent for a clever architect, who the same day condemned the old castle to be demolished, and sent a party of men to begin the work, whilst others were directed to draw new stones from the quarries, and to cut down the great oaks for the beams, and pines for the floors of the new edifices.

In less than a month, the old mansion was rased to the level of the mountain; and as the architect himself said that the new castle would take three years to complete, the Count and Countess, awaiting that event, went to live in a little farm-house which they had on the out-skirts of their delightful domain.

THE HONEY-STEW.

IN the mean time the castle advanced rapidly; for the masons worked at it by day, and the little Kobolds worked at it by night. At first the masons were much astonished at finding every morning on returning to their work, that layers of stones had been added to the walls during the night. They told it to the architect, who spoke to the Count, and he declared to him, without however being completely sure of it, that he believed it to be the work of his good little friends, who, knowing how anxious he was to have his new castle finished, devoted themselves to those nocturnal labours.

At length, one day, a mason found, on the scaffolding, a little wheel-barrow, not as big as his hand, but so beautifully made of the best rose-wood, bound with silver, that it seemed only fit to be a plaything for a king's son. The mason who had discovered the wheel-barrow showed it to his companions, and in the evening took it home to give to his little boy; but the instant that the child was about to take hold of it, the wheel-barrow began to roll away of itself, and ran out of doors with such rapidity, that though the poor mason ran after it as fast as his legs could carry him, it disappeared in a second. At the same time, he heard several shrill peals of laughter, loud and prolonged, as if the Kobolds were making game of him.

Indeed, it was very fortunate that the little people worked so hard; for if they had not done their part, the end of six years would not have seen the castle finished. It is certain that they made the architects' agreement true; for these honourable fixers of stones

have the habit (Heaven preserve you, my dear little friends, from learning it one day to your cost) of giving but half the true estimate, either of time or money.

At the end, then, of the third year, when the swallows quitting their nests in our eaves, bid also farewell to our climates, and when the other birds, doomed to remain in our cold northern regions, become more sad, and more scarce, the new castle, though still far from being completed, began to make something of a figure: Bertha noticing this, as she one day presided over the labours of the workmen, addressed them in these words, with her bland and melodious voice:—

“ Well, my good masons and labourers, do the works advance as quickly as you can make them? Winter is knocking at the door, and the Count and I are so badly lodged in our little farm-house, that we are very anxious to leave it, to live in the fine castle which you are building. Listen, my children, if you

will enable us to enter in a month, I promise you, on the day when you have placed the coping stone on the highest tower, to regale you with a honey-stew; the like of which you have never tasted. And more than that, I swear, that on the anniversary of this great day, your children and grandchildren shall receive the same treat from me, while I live, and afterwards from my children and grandchildren."

The invitation to partake of a honey-stew—trifling as such a matter seems in modern times—was not to be despised in the middle ages; for it was the form used in asking you to a good and plentiful dinner. People said then, come and take your honey-stew with me to-morrow, as they now say, come and take your soup with me to-morrow; in both cases, the dinner was tacitly understood, with merely this difference, that the honey-stew was eaten at the end of the repast, but soup is eaten at the beginning.

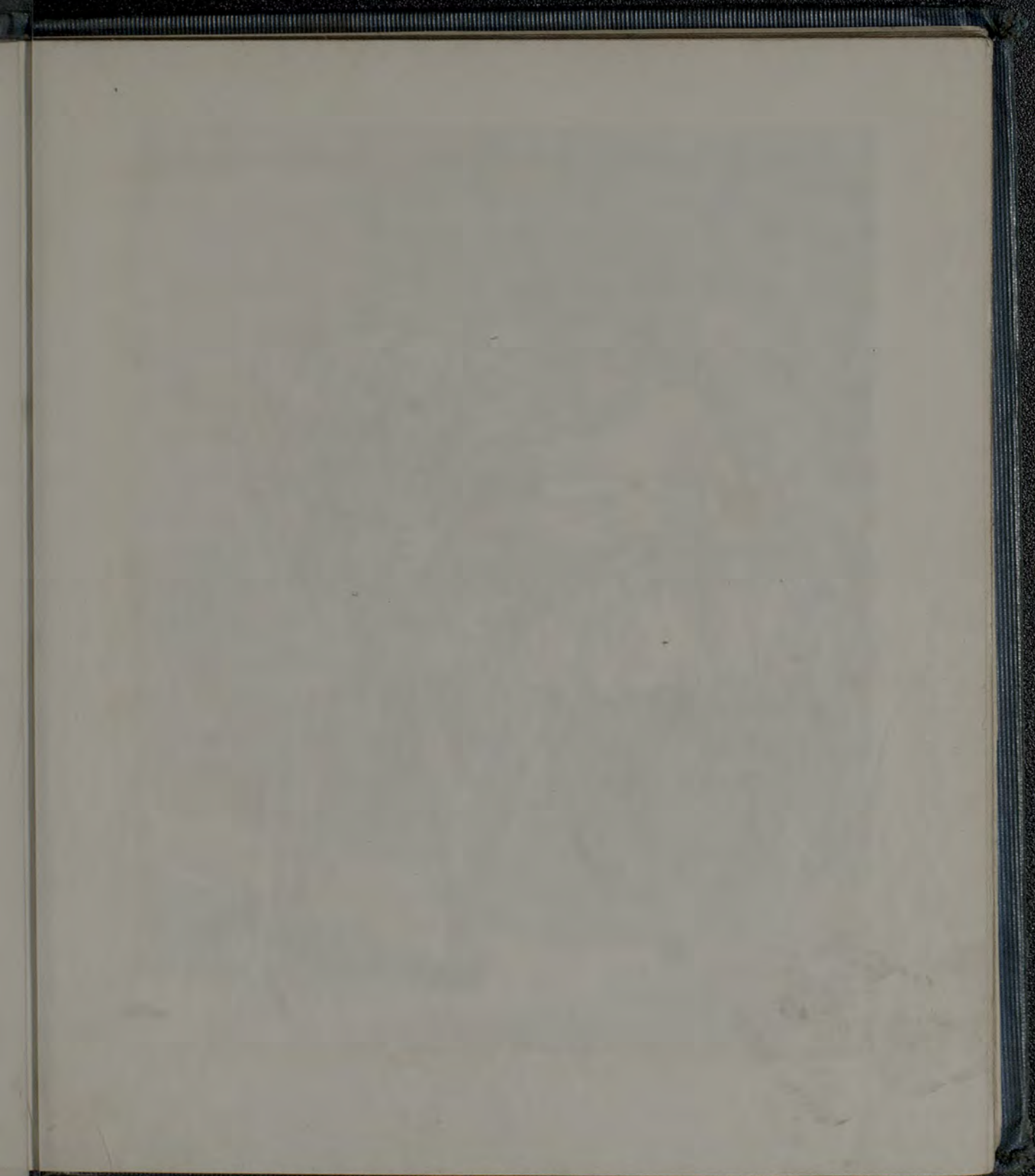
At this promise, the mouths of the workmen

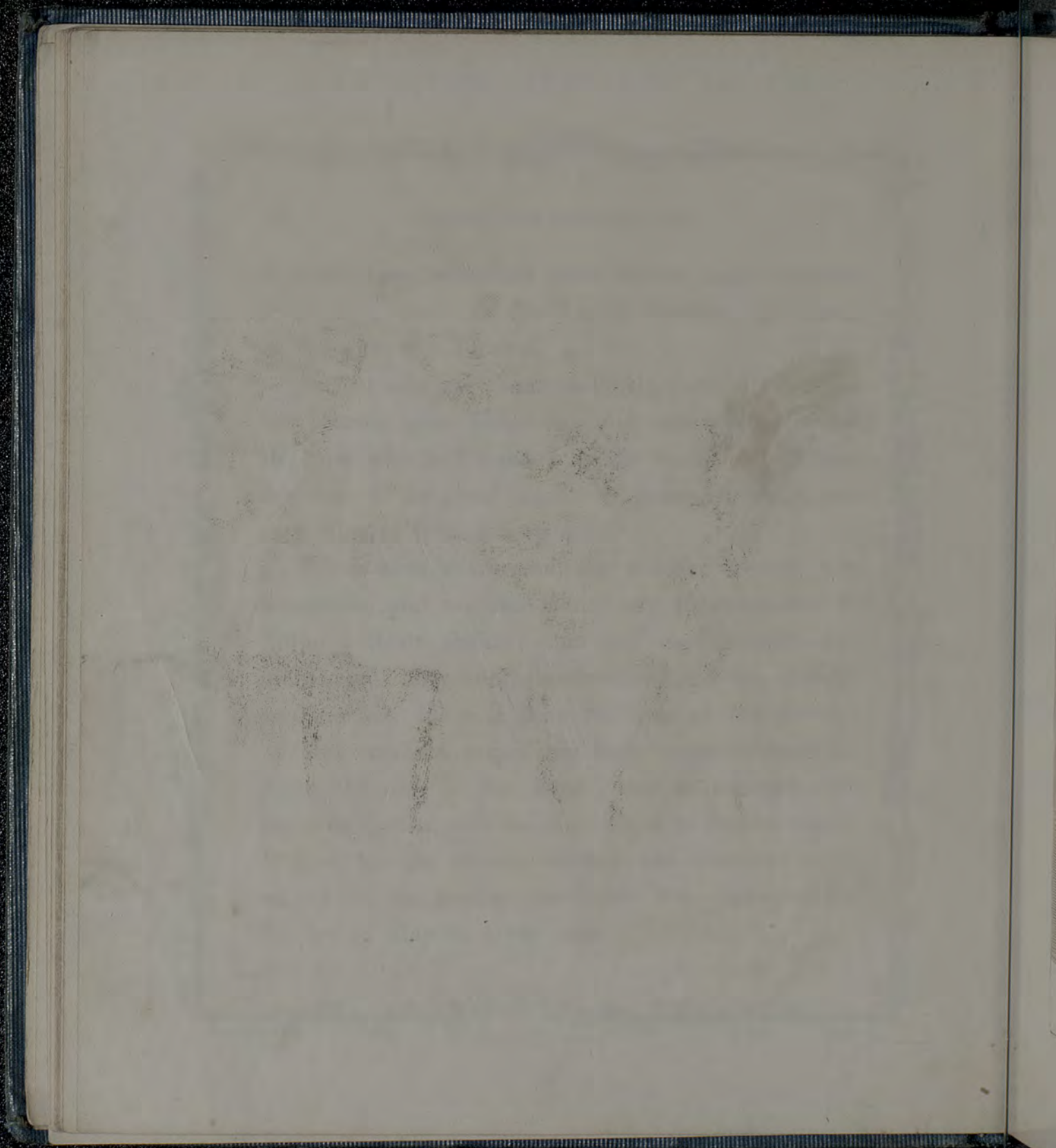
watered, they redoubled their efforts, and advanced so rapidly, that on the 1st of October, the castle of Wistgaw was finished.

On her side, the Countess Bertha faithfully fulfilled her promise; she had a splendid repast prepared for all those who had assisted at the work; and in consequence of the great number of guests, it was necessary to serve it in the open air.

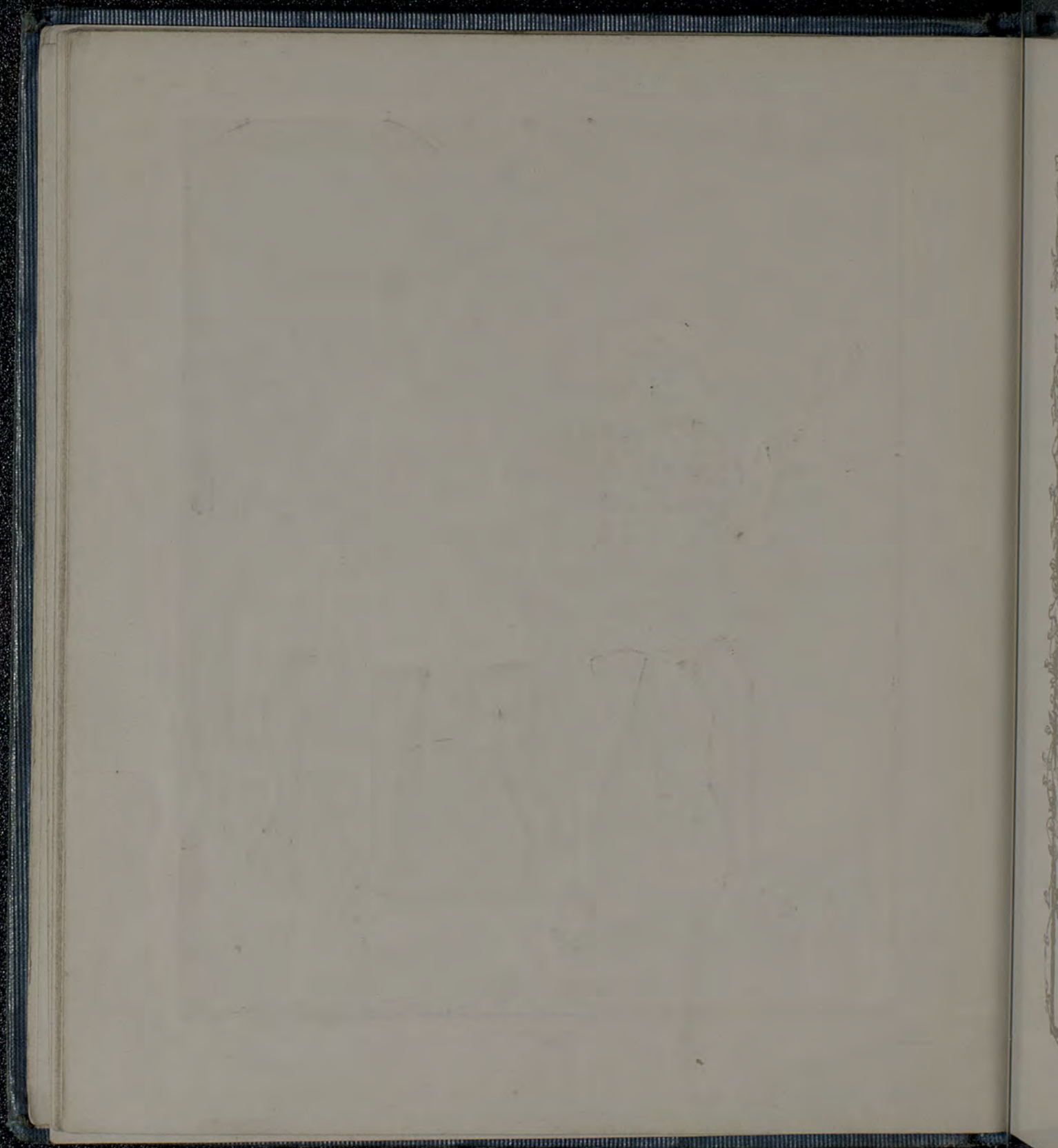
When soup was served, the weather seemed very favourable, and no one found any inconvenience in dining without shelter; but just as the cooks appeared, with fifty enormous bowls of the honey-stew, smoking hot, flakes of snow fell into all the plates.

This accident caused no little inconvenience towards the end of the dinner, and so annoyed the Countess Bertha, that she determined to fix the month of roses for the fête in future; and thus the anniversary for the famous honey-stew was appointed for the 1st of May in every year.









Bertha completed the foundation of this pious solemnity, by a formal deed, regularly signed and sealed, in which she obliged herself, her descendants and successors, by whatever title they came to the estates, to give at this same epoch of the 1st of May in every year a honey-stew to their vassals, declaring that she would not rest in her grave, if this religious institution was not punctually observed.

This deed, written by a notary, upon parchment, was signed by Bertha, sealed with the arms of the Count, and deposited in the archives of the family.

THE APPARITION.

DURING twenty years Bertha presided, with the same kindness and magnificence, at the repast which she had founded; but at last, at the end of the twenty-first year, she died in the odour of sanctity, and was carried to the tomb of her ancestors amidst the tears of her husband and the regrets of the whole country.

Two years after, Count Osmond himself, after having piously observed the custom founded by his wife, died in his turn, and was succeeded by his only son, Count Ulrick of Rosenberg, who, inheriting the courage of Osmond with the virtues of Bertha, far from increasing the burdens of the peasants, did everything in his power to ameliorate their condition.

But in time a great war was declared, and numerous enemies coming up the Rhine took possession of the castles built on the river; they came from Lower Germany, the Emperor of which made war on the Burg-raves, as the lords of the castles of the Rhine were designated.

Ulrick was not strong enough to resist; but, as he was a very brave knight, he would willingly have died amid the ruins of his castle, if he had not thought of the misfortunes which such desperate resistance would bring upon the country. For the sake of his vassals, he retired to Alsace, leaving old Fritz, the

steward, to take care of the estates and lands, which were about to fall into the hands of the enemy.

The General who commanded the troops in the neighbourhood was called Dominick; he lived at the castle, which he found very convenient, and lodged his troops in the neighbouring hamlet.

This General was a man of low birth, who had begun life as a common soldier, and whom the favour of his Prince, more than his own courage or merit, had raised to the rank of General.

I tell you this, my dear children, that you should not suppose me guilty of despising those who from nothing have become something; on the contrary, there are none whom I respect more than such men, when they owe this change of fortune to their own merits. But there are two kinds of soldiers of fortune, those who raise themselves, and those who rise by accident.

Now this General was nothing but a gross and brutal upstart, accustomed to the coarse bread of the

camp, and water of the spring;—as if he had determined to make up for lost time, he now had his table served with a profusion of the most delicious meats and exquisite wines, and, after gorging himself, he gave the fragments to his dogs, instead of distributing them to the needy in the neighbourhood. On the first day of his arrival at the castle, he sent for old Fritz, to give him a list of the contributions to be levied on the country—a list so enormous that the steward fell at his feet and entreated him not to press too hardly on the poor peasants. But the General's only reply was, that as he very much disliked being troubled with people grumbling, he would, on the first complaint that came to his ears, double his demands. The General was the stronger—he had the conqueror's right—it was necessary to obey.

Now that we know something of Dominick's character, we can easily believe that Fritz was very badly received when he came to speak to him of the pious

foundation of the Countess Bertha. The General laughed at him disdainfully, and replied that it was vassals who were made to provide support for their lords, and not lords to furnish entertainments to their vassals; that, consequently, he invited those who had usually been the guests of the Countess Bertha, to dine where they pleased on the 1st of May; but that in no case should their dinner be at his expense.

This solemn anniversary, for the first time during twenty-five years, passed away without having seen the joyous vassals of the domain of Rosenberg assemble round its hospitable table; but the terror that Dominick inspired was so great that no one dared to utter a word of complaint. Besides, Fritz had obeyed the orders he had received, and the peasants knew that it was not the intention of their new master to keep up old customs.

As to Dominick, he supped with his habitual intemperance, and retiring to his chamber after having,

as usual, placed sentinels in the corridors and at the gates of the castle. He went to bed and slept. Contrary to custom, the General awoke in the middle of the night; he was so much in the habit of taking but one long sleep, that at first he thought it must be morning; but he was mistaken, it was still far from day, and on looking through the curtains he saw the stars shining in the heavens.

Besides, some extraordinary agitation seemed to be passing in his mind: it was like a vague terror, a presentiment as if something supernatural was going to happen. It appeared as if the air around him quivered, and had been disturbed by the wings of spirits of the night; his favourite dog, which was chained in the court just underneath his window, howled mournfully, and, on hearing this plaintive cry, the new proprietor of the castle felt the cold sweat stand on his forehead. At this moment the castle clock began slowly and heavily to strike the hour of midnight, and at each stroke

the terror of this man, usually considered so brave, became so great, that at the tenth stroke, no longer able to endure the agony that had seized him, he raised himself in bed, intending to open the door and call the sentinel; but, at the last stroke, and as his foot was touching the ground, he heard the door, which he perfectly remembered having locked inside, open of itself and grate upon its hinges, as if it had neither locks or bolts; then a pale light appeared in the room, and a gentle step, but which, nevertheless, made the very marrow thrill in his bones, appeared slowly to approach. He then beheld a woman, wrapped in a great white shroud, holding in one hand a lamp, such as we see in tombs, and in the other a parchment, written, signed, and sealed. She approached slowly, her eyes fixed, her features immoveable, her long hair hanging on her shoulders, and when she came near Dominick she held the lamp to the parchment, so that the whole light fell full on it.

“Perform what is written there,” said she.

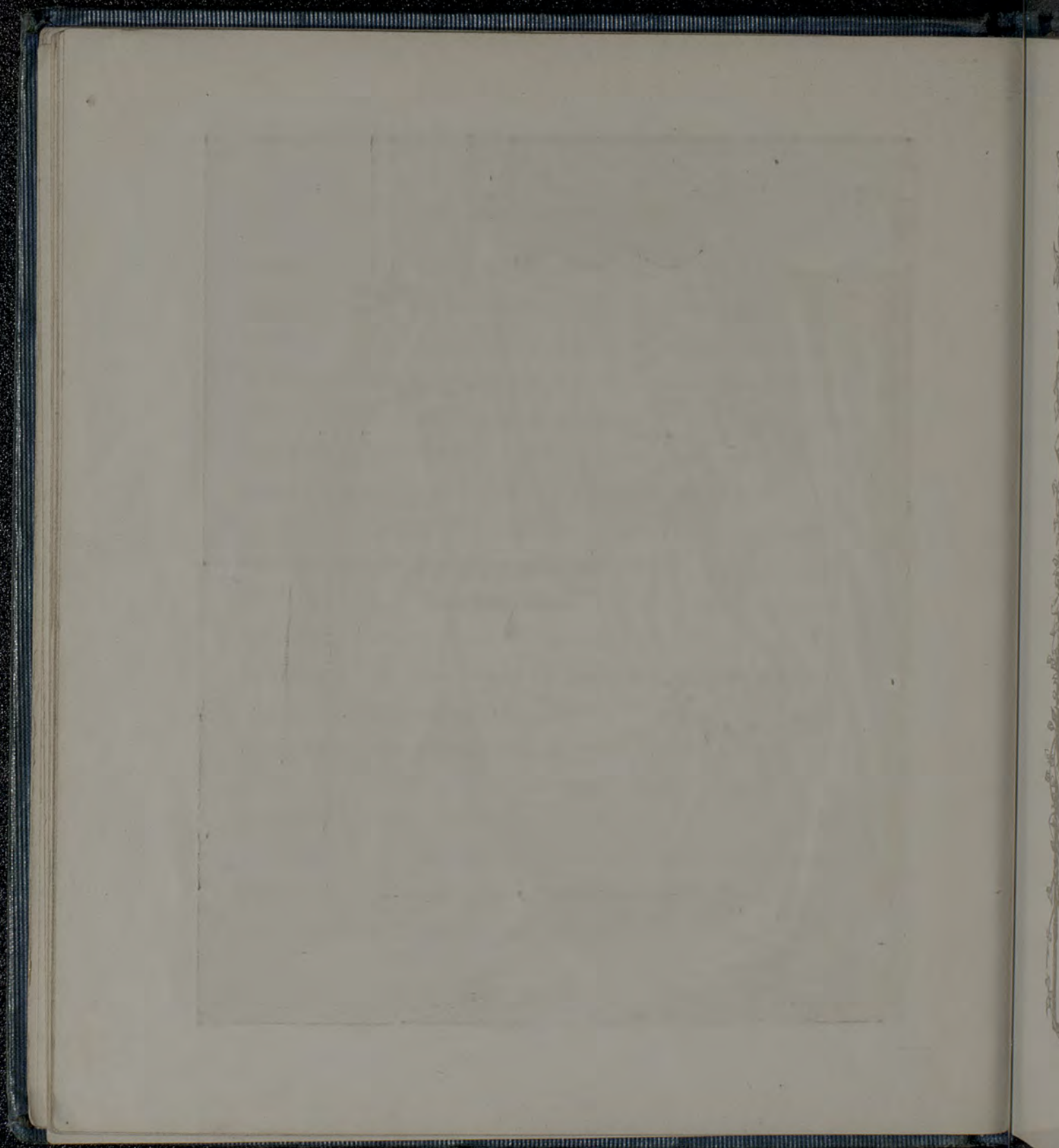
She held the lamp all the time necessary for the haggard eyes of Dominick to read the deed, which had, in an irrefragable manner, fixed the foundation to which he had refused submission.

Then, when this terrible reading was over, the phantom, gloomy, silent, and cold, glided away as she had entered; the door closed, the light disappeared, and the rebellious successor of Count Osmond fell upon his bed, where he remained until the next morning in an agony of terror, of which he was ashamed, but which he, nevertheless, vainly endeavoured to conquer.

THE AMMUNITION-BREAD AND THE SPRING
WATER.

BUT, at the first rays of light, the charm vanished; Dominick sprang from his bed, and furious that he could not dissemble the terror into which he had been





thrown, ordered the sentinels who had been on guard the night before to be summoned to his presence. They appeared before him trembling, for on the previous night, exactly at midnight, an unconquerable sleep had seized them, and when they awoke, they could not calculate for how long a time they had slept. However, as they found all quiet, they agreed among themselves to declare that they had kept good watch, and, as they were quite awake when the guard was relieved, they hoped that no one had perceived their neglect of discipline. To all their General's questions, they answered that they had not seen the woman of whom he spoke, or indeed any person or thing; but the steward, who assisted at the questioning, whispered to Dominick, that it was not a woman, but a spirit, had come to visit him, and that this must have been the spirit of the Countess Bertha.

Dominick frowned; but, nevertheless, struck at what Fritz said, desired to be left alone with him, and,

having learnt that this custom had been rendered obligatory by the Countess Bertha, on her successors, and the proprietors of the property, whoever they were, by a deed drawn up by a lawyer, and that this deed was in the archives, he ordered Fritz to bring the document, and at once recognised the parchment that the spirit had shown him. Although the deed was so positive, and he had read it so attentively that there could be no mistake about it, yet, his first terror being over, Dominick resolved to take no farther notice of what had passed, and that day invited all his officers to a more than usually splendid banquet; indeed, the terror inspired by Dominick was so great, that at the appointed hour, although the orders had only been given in the morning, the table was served with wonderful splendour. The delicious meats, and excellent wines from the Rhine, France, and Hungary, drew forth repeated exclamations of praise from the guests on the liberality and magnificence of their General;

who, however, on taking his place turned pale with rage, calling out, with a frightful oath, "What wretch has dared to put this ammunition-bread before me?"

Indeed the bread placed for the General, was the same as that distributed to the common soldiers, and such as Dominick had eaten in his youth.

Every one looked to his neighbour with astonishment, unable to comprehend how any one could be bold enough to play such a trick on a man known to be so fierce, haughty, and vindictive as the General.

"Come, here fellow," said Dominick to the servant, who was behind a chair, "and take away this bread."

The servant obeyed with all the eagerness which fear inspired; but vain were all his exertions to remove the loaf from the table.

"My Lord," said he, after several useless efforts; "this bread is so glued to the place, that I cannot get it away."

Then the General, whose strength was acknowledged

to be equal to that of four men, took the bread in both hands, and in his turn, endeavoured to lift it; but he raised the table, not the bread, and after a violent exertion of five or six minutes, he fell back in his chair, exhausted with fatigue and covered with perspiration.

“A drink! a drink! fellow, and of the best,” said he, in an irritated voice, holding out his glass; “but be assured, I shall not fail to find out who has played this singular trick on me, and he shall be rewarded as he deserves. Dine, gentlemen, dine; I drink to your good appetite.”

He raised the glass to his lips, but immediately rejected what he had taken, exclaiming, “What wretch has given me this infamous beverage?”

“It was I, my lord,” said the trembling servant, still holding the bottle in his hand.

“What is in that bottle?”

“Tokay, my lord.”

“Liar! you have poured me out water.”

“ It must have changed into water since it came into your glass, my lord, for I have poured out from the same bottle for the two gentlemen sitting next, my lord, and they both declare that it is excellent Tokay.”

The General turned to his two neighbours, who confirmed what the servant had said.

Then Dominick, frowning, began to comprehend that the jugglery was more terrible than he had at first supposed; for he had imagined it to be a trick played on him by the living, while, according to every probability, it came from the dead.

Wishing, then, to ascertain the truth, he took the bottle from the servant's hand, and poured out a glass of Tokay to each of his neighbours. The wine had its usual colour, and appeared a liquid topaz; then, from the same bottle, he poured some into his own glass; but no sooner did the wine fall there, than it took the colour, transparency, and taste of water.

Dominick smiled bitterly at this double allusion to the lowness of his birth, and not wishing to remain near the black bread, which seemed placed there to humiliate him, he requested his aid-de-camp, who was a young nobleman of one of the first families in Germany, to change places with him. The young man obeyed, and the General went to sit at the other side of the table.

But he was no better off now than he had been before; whilst under the aid-de-camp's hand the bread detached itself from the table, without difficulty, and became like the other bread: every bit that Dominick took immediately changed into ammunition bread, and the wine,

turned into water.

Dominick, out of all patience, wished to eat something, and drew a large dish of roast larks near to him; but no sooner had his hands touched the dish than the larks took wing, flew away, and fell into the

mouths of the peasants, who, from a distance, were beholding this magnificent banquet.

You may easily suppose that their astonishment was very great, when so strange a boon was unexpectedly presented. As such a miracle was of very rare occurrence, it made a great noise in the world, so that it is still a proverb applied to a person who indulges in extravagant expectations, "*He believed that he has only to open his mouth to catch larks ready roasted.*" Dominick, who had the honour to give birth to this proverb, was perfectly furious, but as he knew that it would be vain to struggle against a supernatural power, he declared that he was neither hungry nor thirsty, but that he was anxious to do the honours of the banquet. The feast, though very splendid, went off heavily, for none of the guests knew what to say or do.

The same evening, Dominick announced that he had received a letter from the Emperor, in which he

was ordered to remove his troops to other quarters, and that, as this letter was very pressing, he would start immediately.

I need not tell you, my dear children, that the Emperor's letter was a pretence, and that this illustrious conqueror decamped in such haste, not out of respect to his Majesty orders, but through fear not only of receiving a second visit from the Countess Bertha, but also of being condemned to eat ammunition bread, and drink pure water during his stay in this haunted castle.

He had hardly set out, when the steward found a very heavy bag of money in his cabinet, upon which was a paper containing the following words :

“FOR THE HONEY-STEW.”

THE old man was at first frightened, but recognizing the hand-writing of the Countess Bertha, he immediately set about arranging the annual dinner,

which, though some days late, was quite as magnificent as any of the preceding feasts.

From this time money was always furnished by the Countess Bertha for the festival of the first of May, during the time that the soldiers of the empire occupied the castle. After they had finally quitted it, Waldemar of Rosenberg, the son of Ulrich, came to inhabit the castle of his ancestors, twenty-five years after his father had left it.

WALDEMAR OF ROSENBERG.

THE Count Waldemar had not inherited the amiable feelings of his ancestors—perhaps a long exile on strange soil had soured his temper; fortunately, however, he had a sweet and amiable wife, whose kindness softened his harsh and unamiable disposition; so that the poor peasants, worn out by a war of five-and-twenty years' duration, looked upon the return of the grandson of Count Osmond as a great and certain source of happiness.

Notwithstanding the long exile of the family, the tradition of the Countess Bertha's vow was well known in the family, and when the first of May arrived, a time to which the peasants always looked forward with impatience, the Countess Wilhelmina obtained her husband's permission to direct the entire *fête*. And as she was a charming person, everything went off well, and the peasants thought that the golden age of Count Osmond and the Countess Bertha, of which they had heard their parents so often speak, had returned.

The following year the festival took place as usual; but this time Count Waldemar did not appear, saying that he considered it a degrading condescension for a gentleman to sit at the same table with his vassals. Wilhelmina alone did the honours of the honey-stew; and we must acknowledge that the absence of the illustrious proprietor of the castle did not render them sad, for the peasants had already perceived that it was to the good heart of the Countess, and the influence

which she possessed over her husband, that they owed the happiness which they enjoyed.

Two or three years passed thus, during which the peasants saw more and more that it required all the pious kindness of Wilhelmina to soften the hard heart of her husband. Her energetic kindness was constantly placed as a shield between him and his vassals; but, unfortunately for them, Heaven soon took away their protectress; she died giving birth to a charming little boy, who received the name of Hermann.

One must have had a heart of stone not to have regretted this angelic Countess; and Count Waldemar was for many days inconsolable. But the Count's heart was not accustomed to tender feelings, and when by accident he experienced them, they did not continue long.

Forgetfulness grows over the grave, and hides its form quicker than the grass on the mound that marks the spot; at the end of six months Count Waldemar had forgotten Wilhelmina and taken another wife.

But who was the victim of this second marriage? Alas! it was the poor little Hermann! Sorrow and mourning had marked his entrance into the world, and before he could understand what a mother was, he learned by bitter experience what it was to be an orphan. His step-mother, shrinking from the cares necessary for a child not her own, and who besides, as the eldest, was heir to the family property, placed him in the hands of a negligent nurse; and this careless servant left the infant alone, weeping in his cradle for several hours, while she went flaunting about at feasts, balls, or other village amusements.

THE NURSE.

ONE evening, probably without recollecting how late it was, the Nurse remained in the garden, walking arm-in-arm with the gardener, when she heard the clock strike the hour of midnight; and, remembering that it was some hours since she had left little Hermann, she ran

quickly away, hoping, as it was so dark, to get into the castle unseen. She passed the courts, ascended the staircase, looked with intense anxiety about her, treading softly and holding her breath, for her conscience told her, that though the careless Countess might not scold, yet her neglect had been frightful. Still she encouraged herself, because as she approached the door of the room she did not hear the child crying. Doubtless, she thought that the poor infant had wept himself to sleep; so, taking with greater tranquillity the key out of her pocket, she cautiously inserted it into the lock, and turning it as gently as possible, entered. But scarcely had the wicked Nurse passed the threshold, than she became pale and trembling, for she saw an incomprehensible sight. Although, as I have told you, she had kept the key in her pocket, and she knew there was but the one, a female had entered the room during her absence. This woman, pale, stern, and sorrowful, was leaning over the little Hermann, gently rocking his

cradle, while from her white lips proceeded a soft, but unearthly song.

The Nurse, who had at first thought that it was a human being, was terrified at seeing that this figure did not seem to notice her, but remained motionless, continuing her strange, monotonous, and terrible modulation.

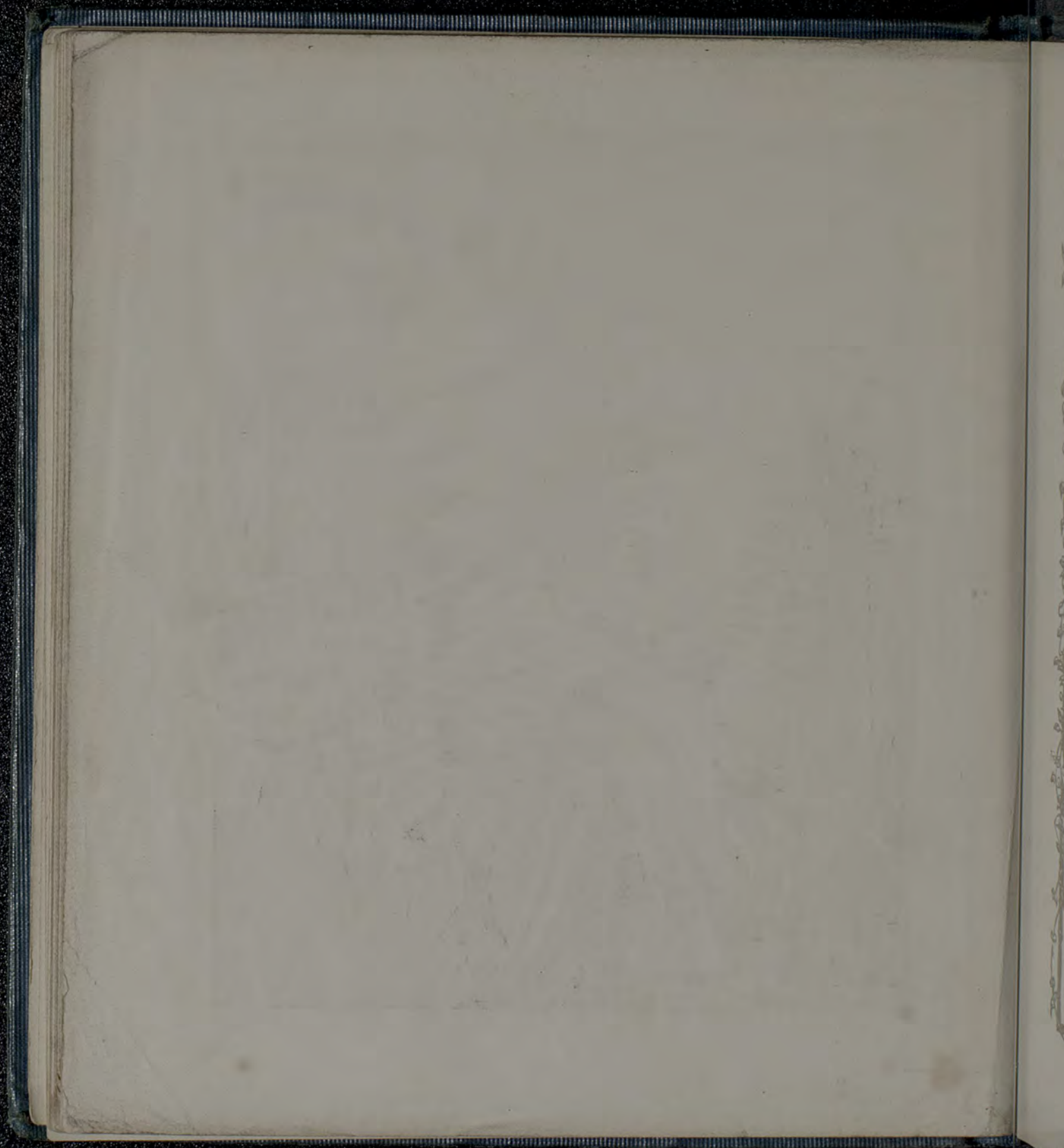
“Who are you?” asked the Nurse; “where do you come from? and how have you entered into this room, of which I have the key in my pocket?”

Then the unknown solemnly extended her arms and replied:—

“ I am one of those to whom nothing is closed ;—
In the grave where for fifty years I've reposed,
The cries of this child have resounded so dread,
That they broke the sleep of the mouldering dead,
Love and life in my heart grew strong.

“ Oh! hapless child ! of a mother bereft,
By a reckless sire to menials thou'rt left,
Who have left thee alone to wail and to weep
Until, like a bird, thou hast sunk into sleep,
Lull'd off by thine own sad song.





“ And here, once more, thou shalt sleep to-night,
But soon as the dawn decks the sky with light,
Shall angels descend from their heavenly sphere,
And bear on their wings this infant so dear,
With me in secret to dwell.

“ No more with those who wound when they touch,—
And ever the envious and careless are such,—
Shalt thou endure a hard lot, my boy,
But a safe abode in calm realms of joy,
Is obtained by my potent spell.”

At these words the shade of the grandmother, for it was she, stooped over the cradle, and embraced the child with the greatest tenderness. The infant had gone to sleep with a smile on his lips, and the rose on his cheeks; but the first rays of morning that penetrated the latticed window, fell on a pale and lifeless corpse. The following day he was borne to the burial place of his ancestors, and interred near the Countess Bertha.

But be not distressed, my dear little children, the poor Hermann was not dead; on the following night

the shade of the Countess took him from his grave, and bore him to the king of the Kobolds, a brave and well instructed genius, who inhabited a cavern extending beneath the Rhine, and who, at the request of the Countess Bertha, undertook the charge of Hermann's education.

WILBOLD, OF EISENFELD.

THE stepmother's joy was great at the death of the sole heir of the family of Rosenberg; but she was deceived in her hopes, for she had neither son or daughter, and she herself died at the end of three years.

Waldemar followed her in three or four years more: he was killed hunting, some said by a wild boar that he had wounded; others by a peasant, whom he had caused to be beaten with rods.

The castle of Wistgaw, and the surrounding property, then fell into the hands of a distant relation,

called Wilbold, of Eisenfeld. He was not a bad man, he was far from that; but he was careless and indolent, and always thought that the last speaker was in the right. Brave himself, and valuing bravery in others, he, nevertheless, often allowed himself to be taken in by the mere appearance of valour, as easily as by the outward show of wit and virtue.

When Baron Wilbold came to inhabit the castle of Count Osmond and the Countess Bertha, he brought with him a charming little daughter in the cradle, named Hilda! The first care of the steward was to inform his new lord of the revenues of the estate, and the charges attached to it, among the number of the latter was the honey-stew, the observance of which, with more or less ceremony, still continued to exist.

Several years passed, and the Baron gave each year so copious and bountiful a honey-stew, that the peasants, delighted with his obedience to the commands

of the Countess Bertha, passed over all his other faults, although they were pretty numerous. More than this, several other noblemen, either from kindness or interest, adopted the custom of the castle of Wistgaw, and gave, either on their fête, or birthdays, honey-stews more or less sugared, according to the generosity of the donor. But amongst these lords there was one who not only did not follow the good example himself, but endeavoured to prevent others from adopting it. This man was one of the Baron's most intimate friends, his habitual guest, and most influential counsellor, his name was Sir Hans of Warburg.

SIR HANS OF WARBURG.

SIR HANS, of Warburg, was in appearance almost a giant, he was immensely strong, and was armed at one side with a great sword, which he continually struck with his hand, and at the other side with a poignard, which he unsheathed at every moment as a kind of

accompaniment to his words. In reality, he was the greatest coward that the earth ever bore; when the geese on his domain ran after him, he would scamper off as if the Devil was at his heels.

Now, as we have already said, not only did Sir Hans refuse himself to adopt the custom of the honey-stew, but he also prevented several of his neighbours, over whom he had influence, from doing so. More than this, delighted with his success in other quarters, he undertook to make Wilbold renounce this ancient and respectable usage.

“Indeed, my dear Wilbold,” said he to him, “it is surprising that you spend your good money on feasting fools, who laugh at you, even before they have digested the dinner which you give them.”

“My dear Hans,” replied Wilbold, “I have often thought the same, for although this repast comes but once a year, yet it costs as much as fifty ordinary banquets! But what can I do? It is a custom,

they tell me, on which the happiness of the house is founded."

"Who tells you such fooleries, my dear Wilbold? Who besides the old steward, who pockets ten crowns from each festival, and whose interest, of course, it is to have them perpetuated?"

"But," said the Baron, "there is something more."

"What is it?"

"The threats of the Countess."

"What Countess?"

"The Countess Bertha."

"Then you believe all these grandmother's tales, do you?"

"Indeed, they are very strongly asserted; besides, they are confirmed by certain parchments in the archives."

"Then you are afraid of an old woman?"

"My dear Hans," said the Baron, "I am not afraid of any living creature, neither of you, nor of any one

else, but I own to having great fear 'of creatures who have neither flesh nor blood, and who give themselves the trouble of leaving the other world expressly to visit us.'"

Hans burst out laughing.

"Then would *you* not be afraid," said the Baron.

"I fear neither God, nor Devil," said Hans, drawing himself up to his full height.

"Well," said the Baron, at the approaching anniversary, which is not far off, for the 1st of May will be fifteen days hence, I will make an effort."

But as the Baron had an interview with his steward before the 1st of May, he resumed his first intention, which was, instead of the usual splendid banquet, to give a very plain dinner. The peasants seeing this unusual parsimony were astonished, but did not complain, they thought that their lord, usually so generous, had this year some strong reasons for being so economical.

But this was not the opinion of the little people who presided over the destinies of the castle of Wistgaw; they made on the night that followed this meagre repast such a noise, that no person in the castle could sleep, and the whole night was passed in opening the doors and windows, to see who knocked at the one and struck at the other; but no one saw anything, not even the Baron. It is true that the Baron drew the sheets over his head, as you have done, my dear children, when frightened, and kept himself close covered up in his bed.

HILDA.

WILBOLD, like all weak characters, was easy to manage on certain points, and, indeed, we must own that he had been encouraged by impunity, for it was not a great punishment to be prevented from sleeping for one night, and as he saved a thousand florins on the occasion, it was, on the whole, what people might call no bad bargain.

Encouraged by the exhortations of Hans, and not wishing to have the appearance of destroying so ancient a custom all at once, the following 1st of May he invited the peasants as usual ; but this time, keeping strictly to the terms of the contract, which mentioned only the honey-stew, and said nothing of the dinner to precede it, he had a simple honey-stew served, without any accompanying meats, or wine ; and some of more delicate palate remarked, that it was less sweet than it had been the year before.

Thus, on this occasion, the Baron Wilbold not only suppressed all the accessories to the feast, but even economised the honey. This time, however, the nocturnal visitors were very angry ; not only during the whole night did the house resound with the most frightful noises, but the next morning all the glass, the lustres, and the china, were found broken.

The steward made an exact account of the mischief done, and found that it amounted precisely to the sum

which the lords of Wistgaw had been in the habit of disbursing for the feast of the 1st of May.

The steward understood the allusion, and did not fail, when presenting his account, to make Wilbold understand that the balance was equal.

Wilbold, at this result, was thoroughly exasperated; besides, although, he had heard dreadful noises which kept the castle in an uproar for the whole night, he had not, however, seen any body. He hoped, therefore, that the Countess, who had not reappeared since the night she had nursed the little Hermann, was now long enough dead to remain quietly in the tomb; and, since it was necessary to spend a fixed sum every year, he preferred renewing his furniture to giving feasts to his peasants.

The following year, he resolved not to give anything whatever—not even the stew; but, as he judged that this complete breach of old customs would make the Countess Bertha proportionably angry, he made up his

mind to quit the castle on the 28th of April, and not to return until the 9th of May.

But he encountered some gentle opposition in carrying out this resolution: fifteen years had passed since Wilbold of Eisenfeld had taken possession of the castle, and during these fifteen years the little girl, whom we have described as entering it in the cradle, had grown up, and was now a charming young lady—mild, gentle, pious, and compassionate—who, from being continually alone, had acquired a soft and gentle melancholy, which accorded well with her countenance, and harmonised admirably with her soft name of Hilda. You might see her daily walking in her garden, listening to the song of the birds which she seemed to understand; or at night, sitting at her window, watching the clouds which, from time to time, obscured the moon, with which she appeared to speak; the hardest hearts felt that they must love her soon, whilst tender hearts felt that they loved her already. Now, when Hilda heard that her father

had this year decided on suppressing the honey-stew, she went to him, and, keeping within the bounds of filial respect, made all possible entreaties to change this resolution; but neither her sweet voice, nor her kind looks, had any effect on the baron, whose heart had been hardened by the counsels of his friend Hans.

On the day he had fixed, he left the castle, telling the steward that the foolish custom of the honey-stew had lasted long enough, and that, on the 1st of the coming May, he had resolved to abolish it altogether,—adding that it was a practice not only disagreeable to himself, but one which was a bad example to others.

Then Hilda, seeing that she could not inspire her father with better feelings, put all her savings together, which just amounted to the sum the Baron had been in the habit of expending. She went on foot to the villagers dependent on the barony, saying that her father being obliged to be absent, could not this year give the honey-stew, but that he had given her the money it

would have cost to distribute amongst the poor, the sick, and the aged.

The peasants believed, or pretended to believe her; and, as they had not a very agreeable recollection of the last repast, they were enchanted to see the scanty dinner changed into a large present, and they blessed the hand by which the Baron Wilbold extended his bounty to them. It was only the spirits of the castle who could not be deceived, and who well understood the pious deception of the beautiful Hilda.

THE HAND OF FIRE.

WILBOLD returned to the castle on the 4th of May. His first care was to ask if any thing had happened during his absence; but, as he learned that all had been quiet, that his vassals had not complained, that the spirits had made no rest, he became convinced that his resistance had wearied out the ghosts, and that he should be free from their embarrassing demands for ever. He

embraced his daughter, issued his orders for the next day, and went quietly to bed. But he was scarcely in bed when there began, within and without the castle, such a noise as human ears have seldom or never heard. Around the castle dogs howled, owls hooted, screech-owls screamed, cats mewed, thunder growled; within the castle there was the dragging of chains, the knocking about of furniture, the rolling of great stones—in short, such a noise, tumult, and disturbance, that one would have been led to suppose that all the sorcerers of the country had been convoked to a general assembly by the great Devil of hell, and had changed their usual places of meeting; so that, instead of assembling on the Brocken, they now held their vigils in the castle of Wistgaw.

At midnight, all noise ceased, and such profound silence reigned, that you could distinctly reckon the strokes as the clock struck twelve one after the other. At the last stroke, Wilbold, a little reassured, drew his

head from under the coverlet of his bed, and ventured to look about him. But, all at once, his hair bristled, a cold sweat came over him, as he saw a hand of fire come out of the wall before his bed, and, with the tip of the finger, write, as with a pen, the following words:—

“ Proud baron of Witsgaw, repent ere too late,
For seven days only are granted by fate
To fulfil the behests Countess Bertha decreed,
While the earth and the heavens both applauded the deed.
Neglect it—and then, hapless bane of thy line,
Witsgaw’s lost for ever to thee and to thine.”

First the hand disappeared, then, one after the other as they had been traced, each word became effaced, and, as the last letter disappeared, the room, which a moment before had been illuminated by these verses of flame, returned to the most profound darkness.

The next morning all the Baron’s servants, from the first to the last, came to ask for their discharge, declaring that they would not any longer remain in the castle.

Wilbold, who in his heart was as anxious to quit as themselves, declared that he would not separate from such good servants; he, therefore, decided to go and live in another domain, and to abandon the castle of Witsgaw to the spirits who seemed so anxious to take possession of it. The same day, notwithstanding the tears of Hilda, they left the old place to go and reside in the castle of Einsinfeld, which was the Baron's in right of his father, and which was situated half-a-day's journey from that of Witsgaw.

THE KNIGHT TORALD.

ABOUT this time there were two pieces of news that made a great noise in the domain of Rosenberg: the first was the departure of the Baron Wilbold, of Einsinfeld; the second, the arrival of the Knight Torald. The Knight Torald was a handsome young man, of one or two-and-twenty years of age, who had already, although so young, visited the principal courts of Europe, where

he had acquired a great reputation for courage and courtesy.

In short, he was such an accomplished knight, that the most wonderful stories were told of his education: people said that, when an infant, he had been confided to the king of the Kobolds, who, himself a very learned prince, had sworn to make Torald an accomplished nobleman. He had, therefore, taught him to read the most ancient manuscripts, to speak all living and even dead languages, to paint, to play on the flute, to sing, to manage a horse, to wield his weapons well, and to joust in the tournament. When he had attained eighteen years of age, the king, his tutor, saw that he had reached the perfection at which he had been aiming, so he gave him the famous horse Bucephalus, which never got tired, the famous lance of the Knight Astolpho, which tumbled from the saddle those who were touched by its diamond-point, and the famous sword Durandal, which crushed, like glass, the strongest and best made

armour. But to all these precious presents he added one more valuable still—a purse, in which twenty-five golden crowns were found every time that it was opened.

You can easily understand the noise that the arrival of so accomplished a knight made in the country; but almost immediately after he had passed through the village of Rosenberg, mounted upon his good horse, and armed with his famous lance and sword, he had disappeared, and nobody knew what had become of him. You may be sure that this mystery much increased the curiosity with which the knight was regarded.

Some said that they had seen him one evening before the castle of Witsgaw, in a little boat, which, notwithstanding the rapid course of the Rhine, remained as motionless as if it had been at anchor. Others, that they had observed him, lute in hand, upon one of the high rocks that faced the windows of Hilda, and upon which eagles and falcons alone had hitherto found a perch. But all these stories were only vague rumours,

and no person could positively say that he had met Torald since the day that, on horseback, and fully accoutred, he had passed through the village of Rosenberg.

THE CONJUROR OF SPIRITS.

THE fiery hand, as you know, my dear little friends, had given Baron Wilbold seven days to repent; but he, always influenced by the bad advice of his friend Hans, had resolved not to retrace his steps; and, to strengthen himself in this resolution, he determined to spend the three last days in feasts and orgies. He gave as an excuse, that it was to celebrate the anniversary of his daughter's birth, which fell on the 8th of May: Hilda was born in the month of roses.

About this time, Sir Hans had a motive for coming more frequently than usual to the house of his friend, Baron Wilbold; in short, he had become in love with the beautiful Hilda; and, although he was forty-five, at least—that is to say, three times the age of the young

girl, this did not at all prevent him from opening to his friend the projects of an alliance. The latter understood nothing of the sensibility of heart and feeling, upon which young persons usually establish their dreams of happiness; he had taken his wife without loving her, and, as the Countess was a very good and pious woman, he had felt perfectly contented and comfortable. He thought that it was not necessary for Hilda to adore her husband to be happy with him. To these reflections were added the great admiration he had conceived for what he believed to be the bravery of Hans, and his perfect knowledge of that knight's fortune, which was at least equal to his own; finally, the taste he had formed for the company of the jovial and boasting knight, was not without its influence; for Hans used to amuse him with endless stories of his battles, his tournaments, and his duels, in all of which, be it understood, he used to describe himself as the conquering hero.

From this time, Sir Hans redoubled his attentions to the gracious lady of his thoughts, who received all his demonstrations of love with habitual modesty, and as if she was quite ignorant what all his compliments meant, or to what purpose they tended.

The fifth day after the apparition of the fiery hand was the anniversary of Hilda's birth; and, according to his intention of passing the three following days in festivity, Baron Wilbold had invited all his friends to a grand dinner, and had not forgotten his favourite and inseparable companion, Sir Hans of Warburg.

The guests having arrived, entered the dining-hall, and were about taking their appointed places at table, when the noise of a horn was heard, and the major-domo announced that a young knight had presented himself at the gate of the castle asking hospitality.

"Indeed," said the Baron, "it is some one with a good nose. Go and tell him he is welcome, and that we await him at table."

Five minutes after the knight entered.

He was a beautiful young man, of one or two-and-twenty, with black hair and blue eyes, and presented himself with an ease which showed he had been in the habit of receiving hospitality from the most distinguished noblemen.

His lofty mien struck the assembled guests; and the Baron, as host, offered him his own place, but the unknown immediately declined this honour; and, having replied to the invitation with the greatest courtesy, took one of the lowest places at the table.

No person knew the knight, and every body regarded him with curiosity. Hilda alone kept her eyes cast down; but it was observed, when he crossed the threshold, that she blushed deeply.

The repast was sumptuous and brilliant; the wines especially were excellent. The courtesy with which Baron Wilbold and Hans drank to each other's health was remarkable.

Dinner could hardly be expected to pass without some questions being asked concerning the ghosts that were said to haunt the castle of Witsgaw. Sir Hans laughed at the Baron for the terror with which the apparitions had inspired him—a terror which he acknowledged with all the frankness of a really courageous man.

“Indeed, my dear Knight,” said the Baron, “I wish you had been in my place when the terrible fiery hand wrote on the wall the six lines, of which I can never forget a single syllable.”

“Illusions!” replied Hans, sneeringly; “the dreams of a disturbed imagination.—I don’t believe in phantoms—not I.”

“You don’t believe, because you have never seen them; but if you had seen one, what would you say?”

“I would conjure it,” said Hans, striking his great sword, “in such a way that it would never again appear in my presence, you may take my word for it.”

“ Well,” said the Baron, “ I will make a proposition, Hans.”

“ What ? ”

“ Conjure the spirit of the Countess, so that she will never again appear in the castle of Witsgaw, and ask what you will of me.”

“ What I most wish for ? ”

“ Yes,” replied the Baron.

“ Take care ! ” said the strange Knight, laughing.

“ Conjure the spirit of the Countess Bertha, and ask boldly.”

“ And anything I ask, you will grant me ? ”

“ On the faith of a gentleman.”

“ Even the hand of the beautiful Hilda ? ”

“ Even the hand of my daughter.”

“ My father,” said the young lady, with an accent of gentle reproach.

“ My dear Hilda,” replied the Baron, whom several glasses of Tokay had somewhat heated ; “ what I have

said, I have said, Sir Hans. I am a man of my word: conjure the spirit of the Countess Bertha, and my daughter is yours."

"And will you grant the same reward, Sir Baron," asked the young stranger, "to him who will accomplish the enterprise when Sir Hans has failed?"

"When I have failed!" called out Hans. "Ah!—Do you suppose, then, that I will fail?"

"I do not suppose it," replied the unknown, in so gentle a voice that you would have thought a woman was speaking.

"You are sure of it then, you mean to say. Indeed, Sir Unknown," said Hans, loudly, do you know you are very impertinent to utter such an insinuation?"

"I merely ask a question, Sir Knight, of the Baron Wilbold of Einsenfeld, which cannot in any way prejudice your matrimonial prospects, since no rival can present himself until you shall have failed."

“And who will present himself to accomplish this enterprise, should Sir Hans fail?”

“I!” said the Unknown.

“But, before I accept your offer, kind guest,” said the Baron, “I must ask, in all courtesy, who you are?”

“I am the Knight Torald,” said the young man.

“This name was so well known, that all the guests rose to salute him who bore it. Wilbold could not avoid passing the usual compliments of courtesy to the young man.

“Sir Knight,” said he, “although so young, your name is already so renowned, that an alliance with you would be an honour to the proudest houses. But I have known Sir Hans for twenty years, whilst I see you for the first time. I cannot, therefore, under any circumstances, accept your offer, without submitting it to my daughter’s approval.”

Hilda blushed to the eyes.

“I have always resolved,” said Torald, “never to marry a woman of whose love I am not certain.”

Ever since the Knight declared his name, Hans remained in profound silence.

“Well, Knight,” said the Baron, “since you submit your proposal to the approbation of my daughter, and leave the first attempt to my friend Hans, I see no reason, except my want of knowledge of your family, why I should not give to you the same promise as to him.”

“My family is equal to the first families in Germany, Baron; and, more than that,” added Sir Torald, smiling, “I tell you a piece of news which you need not doubt—that we are not very distantly related.”

“I, one of your relations!” cried Wilbold, with astonishment.

“Yes, Baron,” replied Torald; “you shall hear all that by and bye, but, at present, the only question is, who will conjure the spirit of the Countess Bertha?”

"Yes," replied Wilbold, "I own that to be the business, which I am most curious to see concluded."

"Well," said Torald, "let Sir Hans make the attempt to-night, and I will try my fortune the night following."

"Indeed," said Wilbold, "this is like coming to the point. Sir Torald, you are a brave young man, give me your hand!" and the knight held out his hand to Wilbold, who pressed it warmly.

All this time Hans remained quite silent. Wilbold turned to him, and saw with astonishment that he was very pale.

"Well, comrade Hans," said he, "here is a proposal certain to please you, and since you are so anxious to drive the spirits away, you ought to thank Sir Torald, who gives you the opportunity of seeing them this very night."

"Yes, certainly," said Hans, "certainly; but it will be no use to lose my time, for the spirits will not come."

“You are mistaken, Sir Hans,” said Torald, in the tone of a person who was quite sure of what he said, “they will come!” Hans became perfectly livid.

“Besides,” said Torald, “if you will give me your turn, Sir Hans, I will accept it with gratitude, and sustain the first fire of the phantom, perhaps they will be less terrible on the second trial than on the first.”

“Indeed, Sir Knight,” said Hans, “the first or the second is quite the same to me; but if you really wish to take the first chance.”

“No, no,” said Wilbold; “I insist on the affair proceeding as they were first arranged. You remember, gentlemen; Hans this evening—Sir Torald tomorrow,—and thus, then.”—(He filled his glass, and stood up)—“To the health of the conjurors of the spirits,” said he.

All pledged the toast, but the Baron saw, to his

astonishment, that the hand of Hans trembled in carrying the glass to his mouth.

“ ’Tis well,” said the Baron, “ after dinner we will set out.”

Poor Hans was like a mouse taken in a trap.

He had at first thought, in undertaking this enterprise, to carry himself through by his usual boasting and blustering; he reckoned upon merely pretending to visit the castle, and after having passed the night in the neighbourhood, to relate the next day all the terrible combats he had fought with the spirits. But now the business was not to pass off so easily; thanks to the interference of Sir Torald, it had assumed a gravity of tone which showed that Hans would be so closely watched, that none of his motions could escape either his friend or his rival.

In short, after dinner, Baron Wilbold arose to announce his determination to accompany Sir Hans himself, and in order that there should be no occasion

for any future dispute, either on the part of the knight Hans, or of the knight Torald, declared that he would lock the champion of the adventure up in the bed-chamber, and keep the key in his pocket.

There was no longer any opportunity for receding without incurring public disgrace. Hans only asked permission to go for his helmet and breastplate, that he might be in a state to resist the enemy, if any enemy appeared: this permission was granted. Hans went into his room, armed himself from head to foot, and then set out for the deserted castle of Witsgaw.

The cavalcade included the Baron of Einsenfeld, Sir Hans, Sir Torald, and three or four of the guests, who, being interested in the event, resolved to await the result in a farm-house which belonged to the Baron, and was situated half a league from the castle.

They arrived at Witsgaw about nine in the evening, a very favourable time for undertaking the enterprise.

Hans felt very uncomfortable, although he was

obliged to keep up appearances. Everything at the castle was plunged in the most profound darkness, and as the silence was not disturbed by the least noise, the gloom seemed itself a spectre.

They entered the deserted vestibule—they passed through the great rooms hung with sombre tapestry, and through the long corridors, which echoed chillily to their tread. At length the door of the fatal chamber was opened. This room was cold, calm, and silent, like the rest of the castle.

They made a great fire on the hearth, lighted candles, and wished Sir Hans good night, the Baron Wilbold having locked the door, sealed it with his ancestral seal, at each end of a band of paper, which joined the door to the post, and which would consequently be torn if any body went out or in.

After this the embarrassed company called out a second good night to the prisoner, and went to sleep at the farm-house.

Hans, when left alone, thought at first to get out, by the window, but that was impossible, as the window looked out upon a fearful precipice, which the darkness of the night rendered still more dark and terrible in its effect.

He sounded the walls, but they returned no sound to indicate a hidden door.

With or without his will he was obliged to remain. Sir Hans felt if all his armour was well fastened on, if his sword was at his side, if his poignard was in its accustomed place, and if his visor worked freely in his helmet. Finding that all was right, so far as his armour was concerned, he, at length, sat down in the great arm chair before the fire. In the meantime, as the hours passed, and nothing appeared, Sir Hans began to feel a little reassured. In the first place, he had reflected that as the walls presented no secret door, and as the principal entrance was locked, ghosts would have as much trouble in getting in, as he would have in getting out. It is true, he had heard it said, that these beings trou-

bled themselves very little about such impediments, but made their way at pleasure through walls and keyholes, without giving the least warning; however he looked upon the fastenings as yielding him some promise of security.

We may even mention, for the honour of Sir Hans, that he had begun to sleep, when he suddenly heard a great noise in the chimney; he immediately threw a faggot upon the fire, which was almost burned down, thinking to roast the limbs of the ghosts if they decided on coming by that way. The fire blazed up anew, and the flames rose to the chimney, crackling, and sparkling, when suddenly Sir Hans saw a plank, about a foot wide, issue from the chimney, which pushed itself forward, growing larger and larger, without it being possible to discover what had set it in motion. The plank then descended slowly in a slanting position towards the ground, and when it rested on the floor, it seemed to form a kind of bridge over the flames. At the same instant a multitude of little Kobolds began to slide

down this bridge, like holiday folks down the hill at Greenwich, headed by their king himself, who, armed at all points, like the great knight Hans, seemed to lead them to battle. As fast as they descended, Hans kept pushing himself back in his arm-chair, so that when the king and his army were ranged in battle before the chimney, Hans had arrived at the other end of the room, prevented by the wall from going farther, though there was still a large unoccupied place between him and his unwelcome visitors.

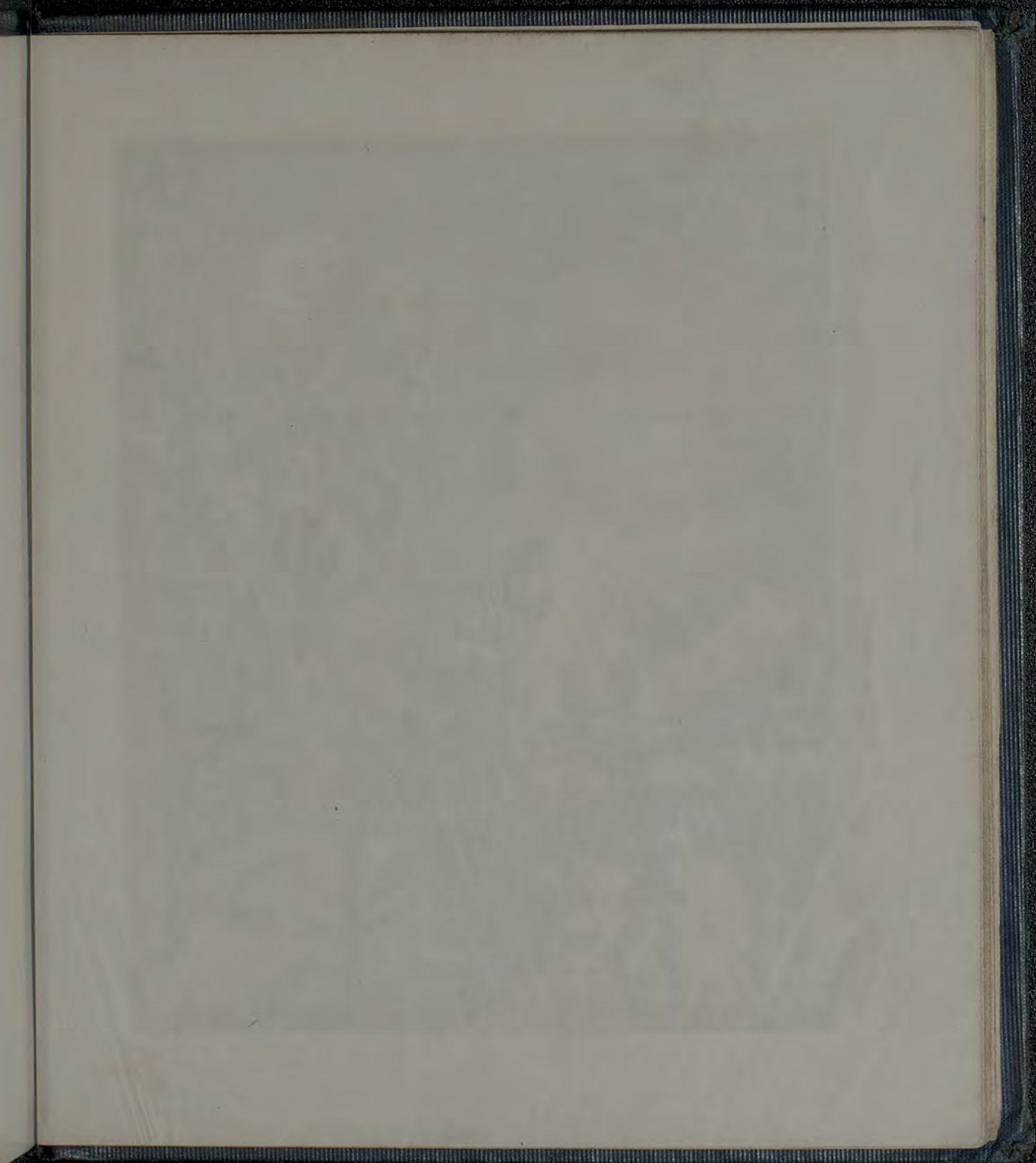
Then the King of the Kobolds, having conferred in a low voice with his general officers, advanced alone into the room.

“Sir Hans,” said he, in an ironical tone of voice, “I have heard you more than once boast of your great courage, and as a true knight cannot lie, I feel convinced that you spoke the truth. In consequence, I have come to offer you single combat; and having heard that you valliantly offered the Baron Wilbold to conjure the spirit who haunts this castle, I have obtained from

this spirit, who is one of my intimate friends, leave to take his place this night. If you conquer, the spirit, through me, engages to abandon the castle, and never to re-appear in it. If I conquer, you are frankly to acknowledge your defeat, and to give your place to Sir Torald, whom undoubtedly I shall have little trouble in defeating, as I have never heard him boast of having cut any one in two at a blow. Therefore, as I do not doubt that you will accept my challenge, behold my glove."

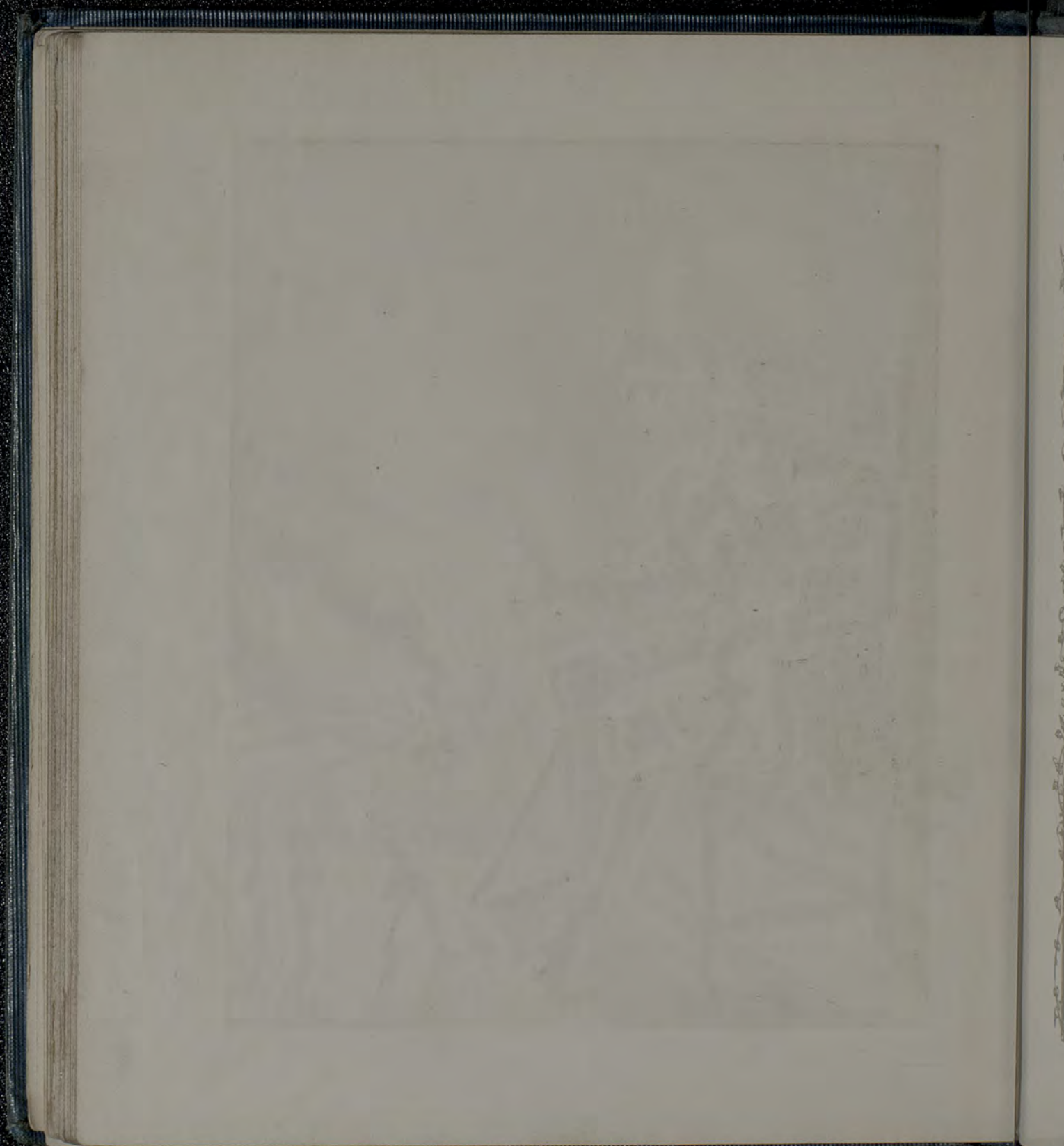
At these words, the King of the Kobolds threw his glove boldly at the feet of the knight.

Whilst the king spoke in a clear little voice, Hans looked at him attentively, and feeling certain that he was not more than six inches and a half high, felt comforted; for such an adversary did not appear very terrible; he, therefore, took up the glove with confidence, and placed it on the top of his little finger to examine it. It was a little glove, cut out of the skin of a musk rat, upon



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which little scales of steel had been sewed with great exactness.

The King of the Kobolds allowed Hans to examine it at his leisure; but after a moment's silence, said: "Well, Sir Knight, I await your reply. Do you accept or refuse my challenge?"

Sir Hans again took a survey of the champion who challenged him to combat, and seeing that he scarcely reached half-way up to his knee, he took courage from the diminutive size of his adversary.

"And what are we to fight with, my little man?" said the knight.

"We will each fight with our own arms—you with your sword, I with my whip."

"How! with your whip?"

"Yes, it is my usual weapon; as I am little, I must have something to reach to a distance." Hans burst out laughing.

"And you will fight against me with your whip?"

“Undoubtedly. Have you not heard me say it is my usual weapon?”

“And you will take no other?”

“No.”

“You promise?”

“On the faith of a knight and king.”

“Well then,” said Hans, “I accept the challenge.”

And he threw, in his turn, his glove at the king's feet.

“It is well,” said the king, who made a few steps backwards, “not to be crushed. Trumpets sound!”

Immediately, a dozen trumpeters, who were mounted on a little foostool, sounded a warlike flourish, whilst an officer brought the king the weapon with which he was to fight. It was a little whip, the handle of which was formed of a single emerald. To the end of this handle, five chains of silver were fastened, about three feet long, each terminated with a diamond about the size of a pea. Putting the value of the material aside, the king's

weapon resembled one of those whips sometimes used for beating clothes and carpets.

Sir Hans, full of confidence in his size and strength, drew his sword.

“When you will,” said the king to the knight.

“At your orders, sire,” said Hans.

The trumpets immediately sounded even a more warlike air than the first, and the combat began.

But at the first blows he received, the knight perceived that he had been wrong in despising his adversary's weapon.

Although covered with armour, he felt the blows of the whip as if he had been naked, especially where the five diamonds struck; they indented themselves into the iron of his armour as if it had been the softest paste.

Hans, instead of defending himself, began to cry, and ran about the room, to get up on the furniture and bed, followed everywhere by the whip of the implacable king, whilst the warlike air which the trumpets had

played, accommodating itself to circumstances, had now assumed the character of a gallopade. It was this same gallop, my dear children, that our great musician, Aubert, found, and without telling any one, placed it in the fifth act of Gustavus.

After five minutes of this exercise, Sir Hans fell on his knees and asked pardon.

Then the King of the Kobolds, giving the whip to his equerry, and taking his sceptre, "Sir Hans," said he to him, "you are nothing but an old woman, and it is not a sword and poignard that suits you, but a distaff and spindle."

At these words, he touched him with his sceptre. Hans felt as if a great change had taken place in his person. The Kobolds screamed with laughter, and all disappeared as in a vision.

THE KNIGHT OF THE DISTAFF.

Hans first looked about him: he was alone.

He next looked at himself, and his astonishment was great.

He was dressed as an old woman; his cuirass was turned into a striped gown, his helmet a night cap, his sword a distaff, and his poignard a spindle.

Understand, my dear children, that with this new costume Sir Hans had preserved his beard and moustaches, which made him as grotesque as he was ugly.

When he saw himself thus dressed, Hans made a horrible grimace, which rendered him more ugly than ever; but he thought he would undress and go to bed, as, by doing so, no trace of what had passed would remain.

He then placed his distaff in the arm-chair, and was going to take off his cap, when suddenly the distaff shot up from the chair, and gave him such hard blows upon

the fingers, that he was obliged to turn round to face this new adversary.

Hans at first defended himself, but the distaff soon had the best of it, and Hans was obliged, in less than a minute, to put his hands into his pockets.

Then the distaff quickly resumed its place by his side, and Sir Hans had a moment's breathing time. He took advantage of it to examine his enemy. It was a real distaff, resembling all other distaffs, except that it was more elegant than others. It was terminated by a little grinning and laughing head which seemed to put out its tongue at the knight. Hans, seeming to smile, gradually approached the chimney, and watching his opportunity, seized the distaff by the middle, and threw it into the fire. But the distaff was no sooner within the bars than it rushed out blazing, and attacking the knight, not only beat, but burned him, until he asked pardon.

Immediately, the flame was extinguished, and the distaff modestly resumed its place in his girdle.

His situation was difficult; day began to appear, and the Baron Wilbold, the Knight Torald, and others would soon be coming. Hans thought for a long time how he could get rid of the tormenting distaff, when it occurred to him that he might throw it out of the window.

He then approached the window singing, not to give the distaff any suspicion of what he intended; and having opened it as if to look at the country and breathe the fresh air of morning, he all at once seized his strange adversary, cast it down the precipice, and shut the window. Suddenly he heard a noise as of glass breaking, and turning towards the second casement, he saw the distaff which he had thrown out at one window enter in by the other.

But this time the distaff was furious; it gave him great blows upon the head, and bruised him all over the body. Hans groaned bitterly, but at length, having fallen into the arm-chair, the distaff took pity on him, and once more placed itself at his side.

Then Hans, thinking to disarm the anger of his enemy, began to spin. The distaff immediately showed great satisfaction, lifted its head, winked its eyes, and began to hum a little song.

At this moment, Hans heard a noise in the corridor, and ceased spinning; but this did not suit the distaff, and some hard knocks on the fingers obliged him to go on with his work. In the meantime the steps came nearer, and the door was opened. Hans was furious at being found in such a dress and such an occupation, but he had no help for it.

Baron Wilbold, Sir Torald, and the friends who accompanied them entered, and were stupified at the singular spectacle which presented itself.

Hans, whom they had left accoutered in the armour of a knight, they now found dressed as an old woman, with a distaff and spindle.

The visitors screamed with laughter; Hans did not know where to turn.

“In faith,” said Baron Wilbold, “it seems that the spirits have been very merry, comrade Hans; tell us what has happened.”

“I will tell you,” said Hans, hoping to aid himself by his usual bravado; “I will tell you what it is; it is a wager.” But at this moment, the distaff seeing that he was about to lie, gave him a violent blow upon the knuckles, which made him cry out.

“Cursed distaff,” muttered Hans.

“It is a wager, I laid. Thinking that as the ghost was a woman, it would be useless to await her with any other arms than a distaff and spindle”—

But at this moment the distaff, notwithstanding the imploring look Hans cast on it, began to tap him on the fingers in such a manner, that Wilbold said to him:

“Hold, comrade Hans, I see that you tell a lie, and that is the reason why the distaff beats you. Tell the truth, and the distaff will be quiet.”

And as if the distaff had understood what the Baron

said it made him a low bow, accompanied by a sign of the head, which seemed to say that the Baron was right.

Hans was thus forced to relate what had happened in all its details. From time to time he wished to stray from the truth, and introduce some episode in favour of his courage; but the distaff, which remained quiet so long as he spoke the truth, whenever he lied, fell upon him with such force, that he was obliged to return to the path of truth from which he had sought to deviate.

The recital finished from one end to the other, the distaff made a mocking bow to Hans, and a perfectly polite one to the rest of the company; it then went out by the door, tripping along on its end, and taking the spindle, which followed it as a child does its mother.

As to Sir Hans, when he was quite sure that the distaff was far enough away, he ran off by the same door, and in the midst of the hooting of all the little boys, who took him for a masquerader, he went to hide himself in his castle.

THE TREASURE.

The following night, Sir Torald was to watch, but he prepared himself for this enterprise with as much of humility and steadiness as Sir Hans had shown of blustering and boasting.

Like Sir Hans, he was taken to the room and shut in, and the door locked and sealed; but he took no arms, saying that against spirits all human resistance would be useless.

When left alone, he prayed fervently, and waited, seated in the arm-chair, until the spirit chose to appear.

He waited thus some hours with his eyes fixed, without either hearing or seeing anything extraordinary; when, all at once, he heard a slight noise behind him, and felt some one gently touch his shoulder. He turned; it was the shade of the Countess Bertha.

The young man, far from feeling frightened, smiled upon her as upon an old friend.

“Torald!” said she to him, “thou art become what I hoped—a brave, good, and pious young man; be rewarded, then, as thou deservest.”

At these words, she made a sign to him to follow her, she advanced to one side of the wall, and having touched it with her finger, the wall opened, and discovered a great treasure, which Count Osmond had formerly hidden there, when war compelled him to leave the castle.

“This treasure is thine, my son,” said the countess, and that it may not be contested, no one but thyself can open the wall, and the word with which thou shalt open it is the name of thy beloved Hilda.”

At these words, the wall shut so closely that it was impossible to see any joining.

The shade then, having given a last smile and gracious sign of the head to the young man, disappeared like a vapour.

The next morning, Wilbold and his companions

entered the room, and found Sir Torald quietly asleep in the arm-chair.

The Baron awoke the young man, who opened his eyes, smiling.

“Friend Torald,” said Wilbold, “I had a dream last night.”

“What did you dream?” asked Torald.

“I dreamt that you are not named Torald, but Hermann; that you are the grandson of Count Osmond, whom we had thought dead, and that your grandmother, Bertha, appeared to you, to disclose a treasure.”

Torald doubted not that this dream was a revelation from Heaven, to remove the doubt of Baron Wilbold; he, therefore, made no reply, but rose up, and making a sign to the Baron to follow him, stood before the wall.

“Your dream has not deceived you, Lord Wilbold; I am that Hermann whom the world believed dead. My grandmother, Bertha, has appeared to me this night, and revealed a treasure, and for the proof, behold it.

And at these words, Hermann (for it was indeed the poor child whom the Countess Bertha had taken from his grave, and confided to the King of the Kobolds) pronounced the name of Hilda, and as the phantom had promised, the wall opened.

Wilbold remained dazzled with the splendour of the treasure. There was not only abundance of gold and money, but also diamonds, rubies, and emeralds.

“Indeed,” said the Baron, “cousin Hermann, I see that you have spoken the truth. The castle of Witsgaw and my daughter Hilda are yours, but on one condition.”

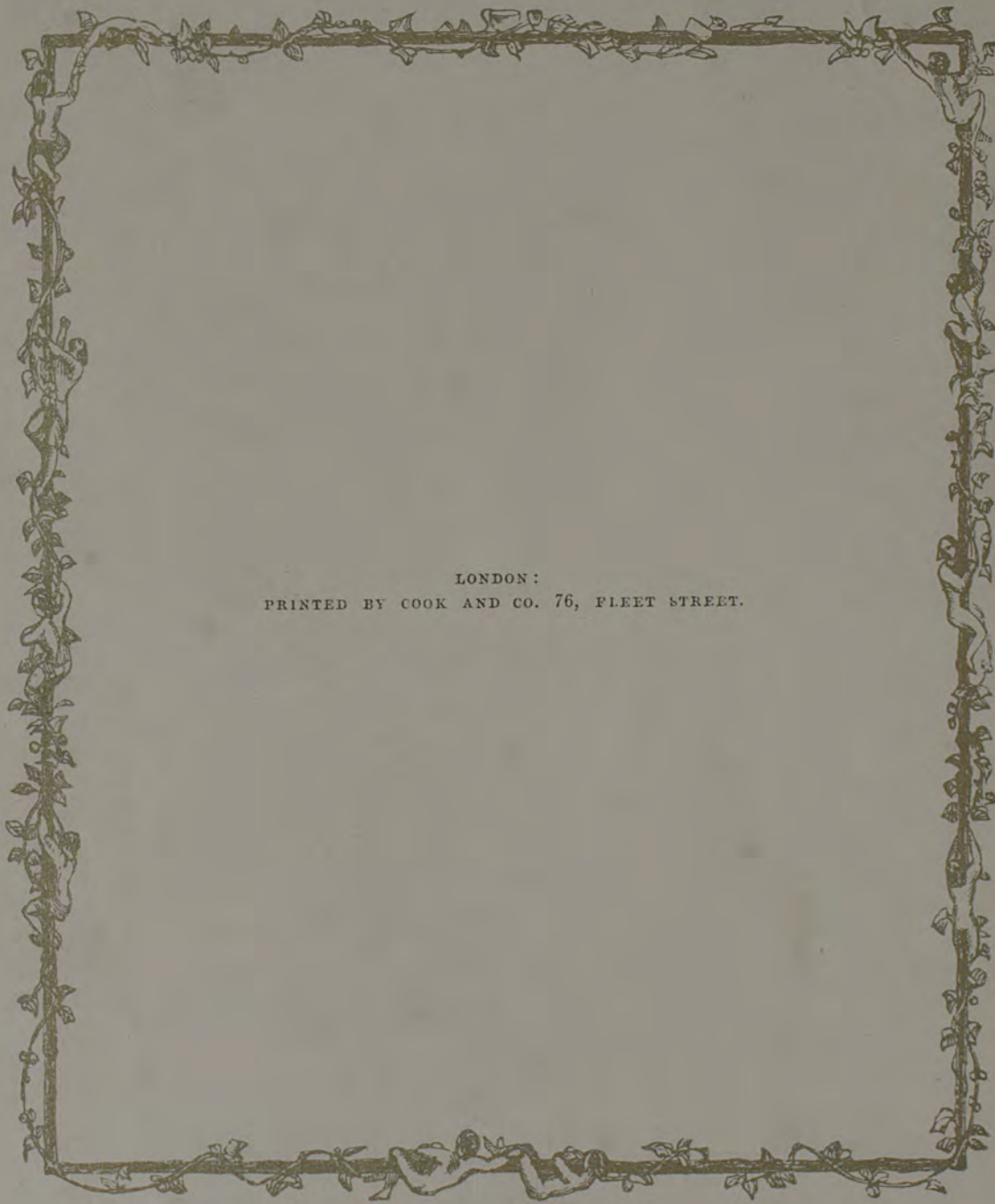
“What?” asked Hermann, with anxiety.

“That you bind yourself on the 1st of every May to give to the peasants of Rosenberg and its environs, the ‘Honey-stew of the Countess Bertha.’”

Hermann, as you will readily suppose, accepted the offer with gratitude.

THE END.

Eight days after Hermann of Rosenberg married Hilda of Einsenfeld; and so long as the castle stood, their descendants gave, generously and without interruption, to the inhabitants of Rosenberg and its vicinity the "Honey-stew of the Countess Bertha."



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