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THE DEAD GUEST:

A TRADITION OF GERMANY—FROM THE GERMAN OF ZSCHORRE.

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INTRODUCTION.

IN the town, or rather the village, of Herbesheim, lived the Burgomaster Bantes, a rich, merry, self-willed old man, whose best riches was his as yet only daughter, Frederika, the greatest beauty for many miles around; and as amiable as handsome. Now, it happened that the Burgomaster had a foster-son, George Waldrieh, living with him; but he engaged as a soldier in the wars of Napoleon, and after the Battle of Waterloo, he returned a handsomer, manlier-looking young man, and as a captain be-decked with military orders; and happily without a wound. It happened, too, that his company was afterwards ordered to Herbesheim, and he, as commanding officer, was naturally quartered in the best house in the place, which was that of his foster-father. It is useless to add, that he was joyfully received by his old friend, and former playmate, Frederika; but it was with that intense feeling that speaks in looks rather than words. His old comrades sought to renew their acquaintance with him, and his society was solicited by the best families in the neighbourhood.

Valiant, discreet, an excellent tale-teller, draughtsman, dancer, and musician, he was considered the life of society by all the ladies of Herbesheim. Young and old agreed in regarding him as a pretty, pleasant, and very dangerous man. But no beauty could enthral him, though at this time both the handsome and the ugly were busily employed in endeavouring to overcome his heart, which he watched with peculiar care, and would not suffer to be vanquished.

The now closing year was the Centenary (or hundredth year) Feast, or rather the Epoch of the so-called DEAD GUEST, an extremely dangerous visit, particularly to the brides of Herbesheim. Nobody in the vicinity of Herbesheim knew who the Dead Guest was. But the prevailing rumor was, that he would make his

appearance at the end of every hundred years in Herbesheim—remaining from the first to the last Sunday in Advent. He was supposed to harry no one, with the exception of the brides, paying his court to them, but in the end wringing their necks. The next morning, they are found dead in their beds, their appearance much changed.

One circumstance distinguishes this Ghost from all others, which is, that it does not appear at the usual ghost hour, from eleven to twelve at night, but fashionably at mid-day. He has an abundance of gold, and the worst of it is, that when he finds no bride, he presents himself as a wooer, and charms the hearts of poor maidens. But when by his fine speeches, he has turned their heads, they cannot afterwards be set right on their shoulders. No one can give a solution of this mystery.

We may read in the church register, the names of three brides, who, in the year 1716, died suddenly—with this addition: "Their appearance was completely altered after death! God take pity on their souls!" But as the explanation of the church register was no proof to a sensible man, it was evident that the history must have been the same a century before. Unfortunately the early registers were burnt in the succession of the Spanish Wars.

Be that as it may, every one knew the tale—every one took it for an old woman's fable—but every one, notwithstanding, waited with intense expectation, the approaching Advent, to see how far events would verify the tale. The most sensible agreed that there might be something in this mysterious affair. The oldest ghost-tale-tellers spoke more sagely.

"I shall be much astonished if this proves true, since I believe it not; but if it is true, I trust to God I heft such a theme of damage!"

The young gentlemen were the most trifling, and therefore rendered themselves merry on all