

BALLADS OF THE RHINE.

BY ANDREW L. PICKEN.

ST. JOHN OF HEIDELBERG.

It is the eve of all the year—the eve of good Saint John,
When the Geister-seher at midnight keepeth vigil dark and lone,
And nooked within the oriel porch, peers out into the gloom,
To note the corpse-lights as they glide to some appointed tomb.
The weird-owl wounds the silence with her high and boding call,
But she brings nor halt nor hindrance to the phantom funeral.

Whose garments like the March bloom hurried down upon the breeze,
Or a drift of snow-flakes wildly spent, flash through the linden trees ?
I would not be the fluttered heart that throbs those folds beneath,
For any jewelled crown of earth or patriarchal wreath.
For the world's wave bears it onward—darkly breaking—on its way,
And dreary superstition yields it calmly to decay !

She hath come from out the roses—she hath shaken down the dew,
And she trembled at the guilty sounds when forth from home she flew ;
The echo of her tiny feet, and the ocean of her sigh,
Through every cavern of her heart have sent a warning cry.
The bats skirr out—the toads look up with a glare of dull surprise,
But Gretchen seeks the Geister-lichts and mortal fear defies.

She stands within the oriel porch, her hand upon the font,
Yet she traces not the holy sign, her faithful finger's wont ;
Her heart is laboring with a dream, she summoneth the gloom,
For she dares, yet dreads, to see on earth, the meisters of the tomb.
And a wild delusive memory hath wrapt her like a shroud,
And the call within is voiceless—voiceless—but oh ! how loud !

"Come back, my Karl ! if thou art stretched on ocean's amber floor,
I've conned the Lurlein spell for thee—I've conned it o'er and o'er ;
Come back, my sailor ! for, for thee I'll bear my penance well,
And what the lone heart's penance is, let earthly teachers tell.
Let those pale hands, you likened to the roseate Indian shells,
In their clasping anguish call thee back from ocean's wizard cells.

"They rise—they rise—there's not a form in all the dreary line,
That hath the ever-bending grace, yet noble haught of thine.
I knew it !—Sunlight lingers still amid thy radiant hair,
It cannot be that faithful love is left to dull despair—
It cannot be—(though thou wert ever, wanderer, like the sea,
Dark, weariful and wonderful,)—thou should'st be torn from me.

"I've borne, and I would bear again, the shadow and the slight
Of hearts estranged and bosoms changed, the winter and the blight !
Come back—and make *my* bosom bloom—I care not for them all,
If you bring a laugh of summer waves for wedlock's festival ;
My lips, like clustering cherries, still will welcome thy return,
And my humble heart shall hold thee, like the hearts that holiest mourn."

I do not know—in fact, if fairly told—I never knew,
How Margaret from good Saint John her happy omen drew ;
I'm sure she said some foolish words and did some foolish things,
But women's thoughts and intellects are bound in wedding rings.
So, as Karl said, when he came back, and made her all his own—
"We had best look to the harvest, for our summer seed is sown."