

Plumed and crested are their helmets,
And their swords are keen and brave;
Then the music proudly swelleth,
And their lofty banners wave.

But one face alone is missing,
One is absent from the Hall.
Where art thou, O Beauteous Maiden?
Fairest thou among them all!

Looks a window from that castle,
On the blue and winding Rhine,
On the Drachenfels' high mountain,
On the hills all clad with vine:

At that window stands a maiden,
Watching sadly night and day;
And her brow with grief is laden,
For she mourns for one away.

And the shadows fall around her,
But she heedeth not the gloom;
And her eye hath lost its brightness,
And her cheek its early bloom,

Watching for the white ship's pennons,
Fluttering in the sudden gale:—
But the river floweth onward;
Up the stream no ship doth sail.

Now there rides a mounted courier
Up the steep and rugged hill:
"Speak! What tidings dost thou bear me?
Answer! be they good or ill!"

"He is dead!" the courier answers;
"All thy watching is in vain;
On the field of battle fighting,
Was thy hero, Roland, slain."

"He is dead!" the lady answered;
"Let his death then be my doom;
And my life and woes be buried
In the convent's living tomb!"

"In the cloister's holy shadows,
There alone shall I find rest;
And among those saintly sisters
Shall my weary soul be blest."

Now the solemn rites are ended,
And the Church's aid invoked,
And the vestal vows are taken,
That may never be revoked.

And they chant the *Miserere*,
And they sing the solemn prayer—
When the clang of arms resoundeth,
Songs of triumph cleave the air.

Who outspeeds those stalwart horsemen?
Who so proudly rides ahead?
"It is Roland! it is Roland!
Hath he risen from the dead?"

"I have fought and won your battles,
I have come to claim my bride!"
All the knights beheld in silence,
And no human voice replied.

Then he drew his blood-stained falchion;
But the gentle Abbess said:
"In this cloister's peaceful shadows,
Unto thee thy bride is dead."

"Through long years she waited for thee,
But her watch was kept in vain,
Till at length the rumour reached her,
That in battle thou wert slain."

"Then to higher aspirations
Turned her spirit in its grief;
And in Holy Church's bosom
She hath sought and found relief."

"Nought avails it now to sorrow
O'er the irrevocable past;
Look upon her through this grating,
Let that farewell be thy last!"

Sternly, sadly, then spake Roland,
To the nun he spake with pride:
"I will never look upon her,
Since she cannot be my bride!"

But he built the lordly castle
That looks down upon the Rhine,
Where in Nonnenwerth's still cloister,
Wept his lady at her shrine.

From those lofty castle windows
He would gaze in mournful gloom,
On the monastery's turrets,
On his lady's living tomb.

But that castle now is crumbling
Into ruin and decay;
There the bats fly round at evening,
There the rooks caw all the day.