

THE HISTORY OF
VALENTINE & ORSON.



THE forests Valentine prepared to trace,
To find the man who'd laid the country waste ;
With sword of steel and shield of glittering brass
He sallied forth, and saw wild Orson pass,
Who swift as stag advanc'd, and fought the knight,—
Long, dubious, and conflicting was the fight.

DEVONPORT: PRINTED BY SAMUEL & JOHN KEYS.

1881



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VALENTINE AND ORSON.



PEPIN, King of France, had a sister named Bellisant, whose hand was demanded in marriage by several kings and princes. Her choice fell on Alexander, Emperor of Constantinople, who came to the court of King Pepin, to espouse the princess; and shortly after the marriage, the emperor took leave of King Pepin, and conducted his bride to the city of Constantinople. The emperor's prime minister and favourite was an arch-priest—a selfish and cruel man—who completely governed the em-

peror. The arch-priest, observing the gentleness of the new empress, began to fear that she would acquire too much influence over the emperor, and on this belief resolved to seek her destruction. The emperor was of a suspicious temper, and the arch-priest soon found means to infuse into his mind suspicions of the empress. One day, when the emperor was alone, the arch-priest entered the apartment, and said, "Mighty king, may heaven guard you from the base attempt of treachery! I conjure your majesty to be aware of the designs of your empress, for that dissembling lady is faithless, and is planning your death."

The emperor, giving implicit faith to the priest, could no longer restrain his fury; and abruptly leaving him, he rushed into the apartment of the empress, and in a fierce manner dragged her about the chamber by her hair.

"Alas! my dear lord!" she cried, "what moves you to this outrage.

"Base wretch!" he exclaimed, "I am but too well informed of your infamous proceedings!" Then dashing her against the ground, left her.

The attendants of the empress, finding her bleeding upon the floor, uttered loud screams, which presently brought all the court into the chamber of the empress. Every one pitied the sufferings of their queen; and the state councillors demanded an audience of the emperor, to present to him the wrong he had done to the lady. He answered, "Let no man presume to defend her: she shall die!"

The empress, being recovered, fell on her knees and addressed the emperor: "Alas! take pity on one who never harboured an evil thought against your person. I shall soon become a mother, and I implore your compassion in behalf of my child. Let me be imprisoned until the time of its birth, and then, if your anger be not appeased, do with me what you please; but, oh! save my child!" The emperor answered—"Perish, thou basest of women! thy child would be to me no joy." The courtiers, perceiving nothing could mitigate the rage of the emperor, removed Bellisant from his presence. Her faithful servant, Blandiman, now threw himself at her feet, exclaiming, "Ah, madam, quit this barbarous monarch, and suffer me to conduct you to your brother, the good king Pepin; for if you stay here, the emperor will bring you to a shameful death." "No, Blandiman," the queen replied, "should I steal privately from the court, it might be said I had fled, knowing myself to be guilty."

The emperor, still loving his queen, could not bring himself to pronounce the sentence of her execution, yet he resolved to banish her. He published an edict, forbidding all persons, on pain of death, to assist the unfortunate lady, allowing her no other attendant than her servant, Blandiman. As she passed through the city, she was met by multitudes of people, lamenting the loss of so good an empress. Her servant said to her, "Be not discomfited, but trust to providence."

After refreshing themselves at a fountain, they proceeded towards France. Arriving at the forest of Orleans, the empress was so much

overcome with fatigue, that she sunk down, and was incapable of proceeding farther. Her faithful attendant gathered the fallen leaves and moss, to make a couch for her, and then hastened swiftly away to seek assistance for his mistress.

During Blandiman's absence, the royal lady was delivered of two beautiful sons. She pressed the lovely infants by turns to her bosom, and shed tears of joy over them; when suddenly a huge bear rushed upon her, and snatching up one of the babes in its mouth, hastened into the thickest parts of the forest. The wretched mother pursued the bear with shrieks and lamentations, until, overcome with anguish and terror, she fell into a swoon near the mouth of the cave into which the bear had borne her infant. It happened that King Pepin, accompanied by several lords, was on that day hunting in the forest, and chanced to pass near the tree where the other son of Bellisant lay sleeping. The king was astonished at the beauty of the child, who stretched out his little arms as if to ask protection. "See, my lords," said king Pepin, "this lovely infant appears to solicit my favour, and I will adopt it as my own." He now delivered it into the hands of one of his pages, who took the babe to be nursed, and gave it, by the king's order, the name of Valentine.

Scarcely had the page ridden away with the child, when the king met Blandiman, and demanded what news from Constantinople. Blandiman related the disasters of the empress: king Pepin hearing that the arch-priest had accused her of plotting the emperor's death, said, "Now, by heaven, I cannot believe the arch-priest would

bring a false accusation against any one, and I blame the emperor for sparing the life of the queen: let her beware how she comes in my power." So saying, he proceeded towards Orleans. Blandiman searched the forest for his mistress, and at length espied her, tearing her hair, and uttering piercing cries. She related to Blandiman the birth of her two sons, the sad fate of one of them, and the loss of the other from where she had left it. "And, perhaps," said she, "some more cruel beast has devoured it."

Blandiman communicated his interview with king Pepin, and his unjust wrath against her. This determined her to take shelter in a monastery.

The bear that had carried away the infant, bore it to her cave, and laid it down unhurt before her young ones. The cubs, however, did not devour it; but stroked it with their rough paws; the old bear, perceiving their kindness for the little babe, gave it suck for the space of a year. The child became hearty, and as he grew in strength, began to range the forest, and attack the wild beasts with such fury, that they used to shun the cave where he continued to live with the old bear. He had passed this kind of life eighteen years, growing to such wonderful strength that he was the terror of the country. The name of Orson was given him, because he had been nurtured by a bear; and the renown of this wild man spread all over France.

Valentine, in the mean time, had been educated in all kinds of accomplishments with the king's fair daughter, Eglantine. Nothing could exceed

the fondness of these young people. The king marking Valentine's inclination for arms, gave him a command in the army. Valentine, having conquered the Saracens, returned to the court of king Pepin. The distinctions and favours showered on him, raised the envy and hatred of Henry and Haufry, the king's sons, who plotted together to destroy Valentine. King Pepin presented Valentine to his nobles, saying, "My lords, this brave youth saved my life, and rescued his country from the Saracens; I therefore create him earl of Clermont." Haufry and Henry were more irritated against Valentine by this new distinction, and they determined to effect his destruction. Shortly after a petition was presented to the king by the peasants, praying relief against Orson, the fear of whom was now become so great that the peasants dared not go out to till their fields. The king issued a proclamation, if any man would bring Orson, alive or dead, he should receive a thousand marks of gold. "Sire," said Henry, "I think no person so proper to undertake this enterprise as the foundling, Valentine. Perhaps, if he conquer the savage, you will reward him with the hand of our sister, Eglantine. The king replied, with a frown, "Away! for this speech betrays thy envy." Valentine said, "You give this council to encompass my death. Be it so, I will go to conquer the savage man." "No," said the king, "you shall not rush upon destruction to gratify evil persons. "Pardon me, my liege," replied Valentine, "it concerns my honour. I will encounter this danger to prove myself worthy of your majesty's favour."

At the first dawn of morning Valentine arose,

and putting on his armour, having his shield polished like a mirror, he departed, and being arrived at the forest, he wandered about, and came to a large cave. Valentine climbed a high tree, when he heard Orson roar, who came bearing a buck he had killed. Valentine admired the beauty of his person and agility, and wished it were possible to tame him. Valentine now tore off a branch of the tree and threw it at Orson, who, looking up, uttered a howl of fury, and darted up the tree like lightning. Valentine descended on the other side. Orson seeing him on the ground, leaped down to rush upon him, but Valentine, holding up his shield, Orson beheld his own figure. Valentine lowered his shield, which enabled Orson again to see him, who immediately prepared to grasp his enemy. The strength of Orson was so great, that Valentine was unable to defend himself without having recourse to his sword. Orson uttered loud shrieks of anger and surprise, and tearing up a tree by its roots, attacked Valentine. A dreadful fight now ensued, Orson receiving many wounds from the sword, and Valentine with difficulty escaping from being crushed by the weighty club of Orson. Just at this moment, the bear who had nursed Orson, hearing the cries, came to see what was the matter. Valentine perceiving her, aimed a blow at her, which would have killed her, had not Orson rushed forward, and throwing one arm round the neck of the bear, supplicated mercy for his old friend. Valentine was greatly affected at this generous action, and made signs that he would not hurt the bear; and as a token of kindness, brought some grapes and a bottle of strong

liquor, and presented them to Orson. He no sooner tasted the delicious flavour of the fruit than he gave it to the bear, and afterwards let her drink the liquor, with which she seemed much pleased; while Orson, delighted to see her make such a plentiful repast, threw his arms round her, when the bear uttered a gentle growl to express her satisfaction. Valentine now made signs to Orson, persuading him to go with him.

The strong liquor which the bear had drunk so greedily caused her death. Orson stood for a few moments motionless, supposing that his friend might be only asleep; he endeavoured to rouse her; finding all his efforts ineffectual, his grief was such as can scarcely be described. He uttered piercing shrieks. At length approaching Valentine, he made signs that he would now be his; and while the tears ran down his cheeks for the loss of his bear, he suffered Valentine to bind his hand, and followed him. Valentine took his way towards Orleans; the people perceiving the wild man, ran and hid themselves. Being come to the outer court of king Pepin's palace, the porter, in a fright, barred the gate, and would not open it. Valentine made a sign to Orson, who, tearing up one of the large stone posts, shattered the gate to pieces. The princess Eglantine and all her attendants fled to hide themselves when they heard that Orson was arrived; and Valentine had the greatest difficulty to persuade them to believe that Orson was no longer savage. At length the king permitted him to be brought in; and the whole court gathered in a crowd, and were amused by his wild actions. On Valentine making signs, he kissed the hand of the princess.

Soon after, a herald appeared at the court from the duke of Aquitain, summoning all true knights to avenge the cause of the lady Fezon, who was held in captivity by the green knight: the herald proclaiming, that whoever should conquer the green knight should receive the hand of the lady Fezon in marriage.

This green knight was so famous for his cruelty and his victories, that the young lords all drew back, and seemed unwilling to enter the lists. Valentine, however, offered himself, and engaged to depart the next morning. The princess Eglantine secretly resolved to prevent, if possible, the destruction of Valentine, by combating the green knight herself. She had been accustomed to fence and ride. She contrived to steal away the armour of Valentine while he slept, and mounted a fiery courser; and attended only by a favourite maid, in quality of a page, she proceeded to the castle of the green knight. Valentine learning that the princess was going on so perilous an enterprise, he ordered his horse to be prepared; and followed by Orson, set out in search of the princess; he arrived just as she was almost overpowered in the combat. Valentine rushed with fury upon the green knight. At length Agramont demanded a parley. "Brave knight," said he, "in pity to thy youth, I tell thee unless thou canst remove yonder shield, thou ne'er canst conquer me." Valentine approached the shield; but in spite of all his efforts, he could not loosen it, when the green knight, with a loud laugh, exclaimed, "Know, there is no one living who can subdue me, except he was suckled by a wild beast." Valentine hearing these words, ran to

Orson, led him to the enchanted shield, which on Orson's raising his arm, dropped instantly. The green knight turned pale; he attempted to grasp Orson; but Orson dashed him on the ground, and would have killed him had not Valentine interposed. Orson continued to hold him down until chains were brought, to lead Agramont away prisoner. Finding himself subdued, he said, "This savage is my conqueror, and, therefore, there must be some mystery in his fate. Haste then to the castle of my brother Ferragus, where you will find a brazen head that will explain to you who he is." Valentine and Orson went to the castle of the giant Ferragus.

This castle was guarded by two lions; when Orson appeared, they laid down, and crouched beneath his feet. A little dwarf conducted them to a chamber, where the brazen head rested upon a rich pedestal. It spoke thus:—

"Thou, Valentine the Brave, art the man destined to be the husband of the princess, Eglantine. Thou art son to the emperor of Constantinople, and thy mother is Bellisant, sister to king Pepin. She was unjustly banished, and took refuge in a monastery, where she has resided these twenty years. The wild man, who hath accompanied thee, is thy brother. You were both born in the forest of Orleans. Thou wert found and brought up under the care of king Pepin, thy uncle; but thy brother was stolen and nurtured by a bear. Proceed, Valentine, to France, where thou wilt find the innocent empress, thy hapless mother; at the moment when she embraces thy brother, his speech shall be given to him. Away, and prosper!"

Having thus spoken, the brazen head fell; thunder shook the castle; they were surrounded with darkness; and when the light again burst upon them, they found themselves upon an open plain, and no traces of the castle remained. The little dwarf, whose name was Pacolet, at the same time appeared before them on a winged horse, and said, "Noble youths, I go before you to the court of king Pepin, to prepare your royal parents, who are already there for your reception." Valentine now fell upon the bosom of his brother Orson; they embraced each other, and proceeded towards France.

While these transactions were passing, the emperor of Constantinople had lived in great affliction. The wicked arch-priest, on his death-bed repenting, sent for the emperor, and confessed that he had basely slandered the amiable empress. Nothing could exceed the emperor's grief. He immediately set out to France, to implore king Pepin to assist him in searching for the injured Bellisant, and offered an immense reward to any one who should bring tidings of her to the court.

The empress quitted the monastery, and went to the palace of her brother, where she was received with shouts of triumph,—king Pepin and the emperor both falling at her feet, to implore forgiveness for having believed so unjustly of her.

The noble youths now presented themselves to their parents; and no sooner had the empress Bellisant thrown her arms round the neck of Orson, than the faculty of speech was given to him. The duke of Aquitain, having already come to the palace of king Pepin, to congratulate

his daughter on her rescue from Agramont, the green knight now took the hand of Orson, and presented him to the lady Fezin, as her future husband; king Pepin at the same time joined the hands of Valentine and the princess Eglantine.

Splendid preparations were immediately made for the celebration of these nuptials; and nothing was to be heard of throughout France but feasts and balls, fire works and illuminations, with every other kind of splendid and magnificent entertainment.



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