

THE
SINGULAR ADVENTURES
OF
SIR GAWEN,
AND THE
ENCHANTED CASTLE.
A FAIRY TALE.



THE
SINGULAR ADVENTURES
OF A
KNIGHT.

Ye powers of darkness and of hell,
Propitious to the magic spell,
Who rule in silence o'er the night,
Be present now——

FRANCIS.

TOWARDS the latter end of the reign of Henry VIII Sir GAWEN a man of some fortune, & considerable curiosity. fond of enterprize, and insatiate of knowledge. travelled through the northern counties of England. The following singular adventure is still extant among the family writings, and is still recorded by his posterity. “It was towards sunset (saith the manuscript) when Sir Gaven after having traversed a very lone and unfrequented path, arrived at the edge of a thick and dark forest; the sky was suddenly overcast, and it began to rain, the thunder rolled at a distance, and sheets of livid lightening flashed across the heath.— Overcome with fatigue and hunger, he rode impatiently along the borders of the forest,

in hopes of discovering an entrance, but none was to be found. At length, just as he was about to dismount with an intention of breaking the fence, he discerned, as he thought, something moving upon the heath, and upon advancing towards it, it proved to be an old woman gathering peat, and who overtaken by the storm, was hurrying home as fast as her infirm limbs would carry her. The sight of a human creature filled the heart of Sir Gawen with joy, and hastily riding up, he enquired how far he



had deviated from the right road, and where he could procure a night's lodging. The old woman now slowly lifted up her palsied head, and discovered a set of features which could scarcely be called human; her eyes were red, piercing, and distorted, and, rolling horribly, glancing upon every object

but the person by whom she was addressed, and, at intervals, they emitted a strong disagreeable light; her hair, of a dirty grey, hung matted with filth in large masses upon her shoulders, and a few thin portions rushed abrupt and horizontally from the upper part of her forehead which was much wrinkled, and of a parchment hue; her cheeks were hollow, withered, and red with a quantity of acid rheum, her nose was large, prominent and sharp her lips thin, skinny and livid her few teeth black, and her chin long and peaked, with a number of bushy hairs depending from its extremity, her nails also were acute, crooked and bent over her fingers, and her garments ragged and fluttering in the wind, displayed every possible variety of colour. The Knight was a little daunted, but the old woman having mentioned a dwelling at some distance and offering to lead the way, the pleasure received from this piece of news effaced the former impression, and getting from his horse, he laid hold of the bridle, and they slowly moved over the heath. The storm had now ceased, and the moon rising, gave presage of a fine night, just as the old woman, taking a sudden turn, plunged into the wood by a narrow path, and almost choaked up with a quantity of briar and thorn. The trees were thick, and save a few glimpses of

the moon, which now and then poured light on the uncounted features of his companion, all was dark and dismal ; the heart of Sir Gawen misgave him, neither spoke, and the knight pursued his guide merely by the noise she made in hurrying through the bushes, which was done with a celerity totally inconsistent with her former decrepitude — At length the path grew wider, and a faint blue light, which came from a building at some distance, glimmered before them ; they now left the wood, and issued upon a rocky and uneven piece of ground ; the moon struggling through a cloud, cast a doubtful and uncertain light, and the old woman with a leer which made the very hair of Sir Gawen stand an end, told him that the dwelling was at hand. It was so, for a Gothic castle placed on a considerable elevation, now came in view ; It was a large massy structure, much decayed, and some parts of it in a totally ruinous condition. a portion, however of the keep or great tower was still entire, as was also the entrance to the court or inclosure, preserved probably by the ivy, whose fibres crept round with solicitous care. Large fragments of the ruins were scattered about covered with moss, and half sunk in the ground and a number of old elm trees, through whose foliage the wind sighed with a sullen and melancholy sound, dropped a

deap and settled gloom, that scarce permitted the moon to stream by fits upon the building. Sir Gawen drew near; ardent curiosity mingled with awe, dilated his bosom, and he inwardly congratulated himself upon so singular an adventure, when turning round to question his companion, a glimpse of the moon poured full upon his eye so horrid a contixture of feature, so wild and preternatural a combination, that smote with terror, and unable to move a cold sweat trickled from every pore and immediately this infernal being, seizing him by the arm & hurrying him over the draw-bridge to the great entrance of the keep, the portcullis fell with a tremendous sound, & the knight starting as it were from a trance, drew his sword in act to destroy his treacherous guide, when instantly a horrible and infernal laugh burst from her, and in a moment the whole castle was in an uproar, peal after peal issuing from every quarter, till at length growing faint, they died away, and a dead silence ensued. Sir Gawen who, during this strange tumult, had collected all his scattered powers, now looked round him with determined resolution; his terrible companion had disappeared, and the moon shining full upon the portcullis, convinced him that any escape that way was impracticable; the wind sighed through the cims:

the scared owl, uttering his discordant note, broke from the rustling bough, and a dim twinkling light beamed from a loop-hole near the summit of the great tower. Sir Gawen entered the keep, having previously reasoned himself into a state of cool fortitude, and bent up every power to the appalling enterprise. He extended his sword before him, for it was dark, and proceeded carefully to search around, in hopes either of discovering some aperture which might lead to the vestibule or staircase or of wreaking his vengeance on the wretch who had thus decoyed him. All was still as death; but as he strove over the floor, a dull hollow sound issued from beneath, and rendered him apprehensive of falling through into some dismal vault from which he might never be able to extricate himself. In this situation, dreading the effect of each light footstep, a sound, as of many people whispering struck his ear; he bent forward listening with eager attention, and as it seemed to proceed from a little distance, before him he determined to follow it: he did so, and instantly fell through the mouldering pavement, whilst at the same time peals of horrid laughter again burst with reiterated clamour from every chamber of the castle. Sir Gawen rose with considerable difficulty, and much stunned with the fall, although

fortunately the spot he had dropped upon was covered with a quantity of damp and loft earth, which gave way to his weight. He now found himfelf in a large vault arched in the gothic manner, and fupported by eight mafly pillars, down whole fides the damp moisture ran in cold and heavy drops, the moon fhining with great luftre through three iron-grated windows, which although rusty with age, were ftrong enough to refift the efforts of Sir Gawen. who after having in vain tried to force them, looked around for his fword, which during the fall had started from his grasp, and in fearching the ground with his fingers, he laid hold of and drew forth the frefh bones of an enormous fkeleton. yet greafy and moist from the decaying fibres: he trembled with horror—a cold wind brushed violently along the furface of the vault and a ponderous iron door flowly grating on its hinges, opened at one corner and difclofed to the wandering eye of Sir Gawen a broken ftaircase down whole fteps a blue and faint light flafhed by fits, like the lightning of a fummer's eve. Appalled by thefe dreadful prodigies Sir Gawen felt, in fpite of all his refolution, a cold and death like chill prevade his frame and kneeling down, he prayed fervently to that Power, without whole mandate, no being is let loofe upon another, and feeling himfelf more

calm and resolved, he again began to search for his sword, when a moon beam falling on the blade at once restored it to him.

Sir Gawen having thus resumed his wonted fortitude and resolution, held a parley with himself, and perceiving no other way by which he could escape, boldly resolved to brave all the terrors of the staircase, and once more recommending himself to his Maker, began to ascend. The light still flashed, enabling him to climb those parts which were not broken or decayed. He had proceeded in this manner a considerable way mounting, as he supposed, to the summit of the keep, when suddenly a shrill and agonizing shriek issued from the upper part of it, and something rudely brushing down, grasping him with tremendous strength; in a moment he became motionless, cold as ice, and felt himself hurried back by some irresistible being; but just as he had reached the vault a spectre of so dreadful a shape stalked by within it, that straining every muscle, he sprang from the deadly grasp: the iron door rashed in thunder upon its hinges and a deep hollow groan resounded from beneath. No sooner had the door closed, than yelling screams and sounds which almost suspended the very pulse of life issued from the vault, as if a troop of hellish furies, with their chains untied, were dash-

ing them in writhing frenzy, and howling to the uproar. Sir Gawen stood petrified with horror. a stony fear ran to his very heart, and dismayed every sense about him; he stared wide with his long locks upstanding stiffly, and the throbbing of his heart oppressed him. the tumult at length subsiding, Sir Gawen recovered some portion of strength; which he immediately made use of to convey himself as far as possible from the iron door, and presently reaching his former elevation on the staircase, which, after ascending a few more steps, terminated in a winding gallery. The light, which had hitherto flashed incessantly, now disappeared, and he was left in almost total darkness, except that now and then the moon threw a few cool rays through some broken loop-holes, heightening the horror of the scene. He dreaded going forward, and fearfully looked back. lest some yelling fiend should again plunge him into the vault. He stood suspended with apprehension; a mournful wind howled through the apartments of the castle. and listening, he thought he heard the iron door grate upon its hinges; he started with terror, the sweat flood in big drops upon his forehead, his knees smote each other, and he rushed forward with desperate despair, till having suddenly turned a corner of the gallery, a taper, burning

with a faint light, gleamed through a narrow dark passage : Sir Gawen approached the light ; it came from an extensive room, the folding doors of which were wide open : he entered ; a small taper in a massy silver candlestick stood upon a table in the middle of the room, but gave so inconsiderable an illumination, that the one end was wrapped in palpable darkness, and the other scarcely broken in upon by a dim light that streamed through a large ramified window, covered with thick ivy. An arm chair shattered and damp with age, was placed near the table, and the remains of a recent fire were still visible in the grate. The wainscot of black oak, had formerly been hung with tapestry, and several portions still clung to those parts which were near the fire ; they possessed some vivacity of tint, and with much gilding, yet apparent on the chimney piece, and several mouldering reliques of costly frames and paintings, gave indisputable evidence of the ancient grandeur of the place. Sir Gawen closed the folding doors, and taking the taper, was about to survey the room, when a deep hollow groan from the cark end of it smote cold upon his heart ; at the same time the sound as of something falling with a dead weight, echoed through the room. Sir Gawen replaced the taper, the flame of which was agitated, now quiv-

ering, sunk, now streaming: flamed aloft, and as the last pale portion died away, the scarce-distinguished form of some terrific being floated slowly by, and again another dreadful groan ran deepening through the gloom. Sir Gawen stood for some time incapable of motion, at length summoning all his fortitude, he advanced with his sword extended to the darkest part of the room: Instantly burst forth in fierce irradiations a blue sulphurous splendour, and the mangled body of a man distorted with the agony of death, his very fibre racked with convulsion his beard and hair stiff and matted with blood, his mouth open, and his eyes protruding from their marble sockets, rushed on the fixed and maddening senses of Sir Gawen, whose heart had beat no more, had not a hiss as of ten thousand fiends loud and horrible, roused him from the dreadful scene, he started uttering a wild shriek, his brain turned round, and running he knew not whither, burst through the folding doors. Darkness again spread her sable pall over the unfortunate Sir Gawen, and he hurried along the narrow passage with a feeble and faltering step. His intellect shook, and overwhelmed with the late appalling objects, had not yet recovered any degree of recollection, and as he wandered in a dream, a confused train of horrible

ideas passed unconnected through his mind : at length however, memory resumed her function, resumed it but to daunt him with harrowing suggestions ; the direful horrors of the room behind and of the vault below, were still present to his eyes, and as a man whom hellish fiends had frightened, he stood trembling, pale and staring wild. All was now silent and dark, and he determined to wait in this spot the dawn of day, but a few minutes had scarce elapsed, when the iron door, screaming on its hinges, bellowed through the murmuring ruin. Sir Gawen nearly fainted at the sound, which pausing for some time again twined upon the wind, and at last died away in shrill melancholy shrieks ; again all was silent, and again the same fearful noise struck terror to his soul. Whilst he was thus agitated with horror and apprehension, a dim light streaming from behind, accompanied with a soft quick and hollow tread, convinced Sir Gawen that something was pursuing him, and struck with wildering fear, he rushed unconscious down the steps, the vault received him, and its portal swinging to their close, sounded as the sentence of death. A dun sæid smoke filled the place, in the centre of which arose a faint and bickering flame. Sir Gawen approached, and beheld a corpse suspended over it by the neck, its fat dropped, and

the flame' flashing through the vault, gleamed on a throng of hideous and ghastly features, that now came forward through the smoke. Sir Gawen, with the desperate valor of a man who sees destruction before him, ran furious forward: an universal shriek burst forth; the corpse dropped into the fire which rising with tenfold brilliance, placed full in view the dreadful form of his infernal guide dilated into horror itself,



her face was pale as death, her eyes were wide open, dead and fixed, a horrible grin sat upon her features; her lips black, and half putrid, were drawn back, disclosing a set of large blue teeth, and her hair,* stand.

ing stiffly erect was of a withered red. Sir Gawen felt his blood freeze within him, his limbs forgot to move, the face, enlarging, as it came, drew near; and swooning he fell forward on the ground.

Slow passed the vital fluid through the bosom of Sir Gawen, scarce did the heart vibrate to its impulse; on his pallid forehead sat a chilly sweat, and frequent spasms shook his limbs; but at length returning warmth gave some vigour to his frame the energy of life became more suffused, a soothing languor stole upon him, and on opening his eyes rushed neither the images of death, or the rites of witchcraft, but the soft the sweet and tranquil scenery of a summer's moon-light night. Entraptured with this sudden and unexpected change, Sir Gawen rose gently from off the ground, o-



ver his head towered a large and majestic

oak, at whose foot, by some kind and compassionate being, he concluded he had been laid. Delight and gratitude dilated his heart and advancing from beneath the tree, whose gigantic branches spread a large extent of shade, a vale, beautiful and romantic, thro' which ran a clear and deep stream, came full in view. he walked to the edge of the water, the moon shone with mellow lustre on its surface, and its banks fringed with shrubs, breathed a perfume more delicate than the odors of the east. On one side the ground covered with a vivid, soft and downy verdure, stretched for a considerable extent to the borders of a large forest which sweeping round finally closed up the valley; on the other it was broken into abrupt and rocky masses swarded with moss, and from whose clefts grew thick & spreading trees, the roots of which, washed by many a fall of water, hung bare & matted from their craggy beds.

Sir Gawen forgot in this delicious vale, all his former sufferings, and giving up his mind to the pleasing influence of curiosity & wonder, he determined to explore the place by tracing the windings of the stream. Scarce had he entered upon this plan when music of the most ravishing sweetness filled the air sometimes it seemed to float along the valley, sometimes it stole along the surface of the water now it died away among the

woods, and now with deep and mellow symphony it swelled upon the gale. Fixed in astonishment, Sir Gawen scarce ventured to breathe, every sense save that of hearing, seemed quite absorbed, and when the last faint warblings melted on his ear, he started from the spot, solicitous to know from what Being, those more than human strains had parted: but nothing appeared in view, the moon full and unclouded, shone with unusual lustre, the white rocks glittered in her beam, and filled with hope, he again pursued the windings of the water, which conducting to the narrowest parts of the valley continued their course thro' the wood Sir Gawen entered by a path, smooth but narrow and perplexed, where although its branches were so numerous that no preference could be given, or any direct route long persisted in, yet every turn presented something to amuse, something to sharpen the edge of research. The beauty of the trees through whose interstices the moon gleamed in the most picturesque manner: the glimpses of the water, and the notes of the nightingale, who now began to fill the valley with her song, were more than sufficient to take off the sense of fatigue, and he wandered on still eager to explore, still panting for further discovery. The wood now became more thick and obscure, and at

length almost dark, when the path taking suddenly an oblique direction. Sir Gawen found himself on the edge of a circular lawn whose tint and softness were beyond compare and which seemed to have been lightly brushed by fairy feet. A number of fine old trees, around whose boles crept the ivy and the woodbine; rose at irregular distances, here they mingled into groves, and there separate and emulous of each other, they shook their airy summits in disdain. The water, which had been for some time concealed now murmured through a thousand beds and visiting each little flower, added vigour to its vegetation, and poignancy to its fragrance. Along the edges of the wood and beneath the shadows of the trees, an innumerable host of glow-worms lighted their innocuous fires, lustrous as the gems of Golconda, and Sir Gawen, desirous yet longer to enjoy the scene, went forward with light footsteps on the lawn; all was calm, and except the breeze of night that sighed soft and sweetly through the world of leaves a perfect silence prevailed. Not many minutes however had elapsed, before the same enchanting music, to which he had listened with so much rapture in the vale, again arrested his ear, and presently he discovered on the border of the lawn, just rising above

the wood, and floating on the bosom of the air. Being of the most delicate form; from his shoulders streamed a tunic of the tenderest blue, his wings and feet were clothed in downy silver, and in his grasp he had a wand, white as the mountain snow. He rose swiftly in the air, his brilliance became excessive from the lunar rays, his song echoed through the vault of night, but having quickly diminished to the size and appearance of the evening star, it died away, and the next moment he was lost in æther. Sir Gawen still fixed his eye on that part of the heavens where the vision had disappeared and shortly had the pleasure of again seeing the star-like radiance which in an instant unfolded itself into the full and fine dimensions of the beautiful Being, who having collected dew from the cold vases of Saturn, now descended rapidly towards the earth, and waving his wand as he passed athwart the woods, a number of like form and garb, flew round him, and all alighting on the lawn, separated at equal distances on its circumference, and the shaking their wings, which spread a perfume through the air, burst into one general song. Sir Gawen, who apprehensive of being discovered, had retreated within the shadow of some mossy oak, now waited with eager expectation the event of so singular a

Scene. In a few moments a bevy of elegant nymphs dancing two by two, issued from the wood on the right and an equal number of warlike knights, accompanied by a band of minstrels from that of the left. The knights were clothed in green, on their bosoms shone a plate of burnished steel, and in their hands they grasped a golden targe and lance of beamy liltre. The nymphs whole form and symmetry were beyond whatever poets dream



were dressed in robes of white, their zones were azure, dropt with diamonds, and their light brown hair decked with roses hung in ample ringlets. So quick, so light and airy was their motion, that the turf, the flowers,

shrank not to the gentle pressure, and each smiling on her favorite knight, he flung his brilliant arms aside & mingled in the dance.

Whilst thus they flew in rapid measures o'er the lawn, Sir Gawen forgetting his situation and impatient to salute the assembly, involuntarily stept forward, and instantaneously a shrill and hollow gust of wind murmured through the woods. the moon dipped into a cloud, and the knights the dames and aerial spirits vanished from his view leaving the amazed Sir Gawen to repent at leisure, of his precipitate intrusion; scarce however, had he time to determine what he should pursue when a gleam of light flashed suddenly along the horizon and the beautiful Being, whom he first beheld in the air, stood before him, he waved his snowy wand, and pointing to the wood, which now appeared sparkling with a thousand fires, moved gently on. Sir Gawen felt an irresistible impulse which compelled him to follow, and having penetrated the wood, he perceived many bright rays of light, which darting like the beams of the sun through every part of it, most beautifully illuminated the shades of the trees. As they advanced forwards the radiance became more intense and converged towards the centre; and the fairy Being turning quickly round, commanded Sir Gawen to kneel down and having squeezed the juice

of an herb into his eyes, bade him now proceed, but that no mortal eye, unless its powers of vision were increased, could endure the glory that would shortly burst upon them. Scarce had he uttered these words, when they entered an amphitheatre; in its centre was a throne of ivory inlaid with sapphires, on which sat a female form of exquisite beau-



ty a plain coronet of gold obliquely crossed her flowing hair, and her robe of white satin hung negligent in ample folds. Around her stood five & twenty nymphs clothed in white and gold, & holding lighted tapers; beyond

these were fifty of the aerial beings, their wings of downy silver stretched for flight, & each a burning taper in his hand, and lastly, on the circumference of the amphitheatre, none one hundred knights, in mail of tempered steel, in one hand they shook aloft a large targe of massy diamond, and in the other flashed a taper. So excessive was the reflection that the targes had the lustre of an hundred suns and when shaken, sent forth streams of vivid lightening; from the gold, the silver, and the sapphires, rushed a flood of tinted light, that mingling, threw upon the eye, a series of revolving hues. Sir Gawen impressed with awe, with wonder and delight fell prostrate on the ground, whilst the fairy spirit advancing, knelt and presented to the queen a chrystal vase. She rose, she waved her hand, and smiling bade Sir Gawen to approach. Gentle stranger, (she exclaimed) let not fear appal thine heart for to him whom courage truth and piety have distinguished our friendship and our love is given. Spirits of the blest we are, our sweet employment is to besfriend the wretched and the weary, to lull the torture of anguish and the horror of despair. Ah! never shall the tear of innocence or the plaint of sorrow, the pang of injured merit, or the sigh of hopeless love, implore our aid in vain

Upon the moon beam do we float, and light
 as air, pervade the habitations of men, and
 hearken, O favored mortal! I tell thee spi-
 rits pure from vice are present to thy inmost
 thoughts, when terror, when madness when
 spectres, and when death surrounded thee,
 our influence put to flight the ministers of
 darkness we placed thee in the moon-light
 vale, and now upon thy head I pour the plane-
 tary dew, from Hecat's dread agents, it will
 free thee from wildering fear and gloomy su-
 perstition' She ended, and Sir Gawen im-
 patient to express his gratitude was about to
 speak, when suddenly the light turned pale
 and died away, the spirits fled and music soft
 and sweet was heard remotely in the air. Sir
 Gawen started, and in place of the refulgent
 scene of magic he beheld a public road, his
 horse cropping the grass which grew upon its
 edge, and a village at a little distance, on
 whose spire the rising sun had shed his earli-
 est beams.

F I N I S.