

THE WHITE LADY OF THE BERLIN CASTLE.

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THREE days before the German Emperor recently fell sick, a sentinel declared that he had seen, exactly at midnight, the "White Lady," or Ancestress, pass down the corridors of the Royal Palace. Hence a great deal of awe among superstitious people; for the *Weisse Frau*, or *Ahn-Frau*, of the House of Hohenzollern is reckoned to be a harbinger of death whenever she thus walks through the Castle at the ghostly hour.

Few people have, probably, very clear ideas about the mythic connection of this spectral apparition. Yet the gruesome tale has its root in a creed once common to the forefathers of Englishmen, Germans, and Scandi-

navians—a creed whose divine figures have, in course of time, been changed into hobgoblins and spukes. This is a fact well known to, and well worked out by, specialists in matters of mythology and folk-lore. All the greater is the pity that among the masses the results of these researches are utterly ignored. And so it now and then happens that some soldier, fresh from the country, and rather green, suddenly mistakes, in his frightened fancy at night, a belated cook in his or her white apron for the terrible Ancestress. Even among some better-educated people, especially among women, the strange superstition is difficult to eradicate. So great is the hold that these ancient forms of faith have on the public mind, until the light is spread by a scientific explanation.

To put the Berlin story at once into its proper connection, it may first be mentioned that the White Lady is by no means peculiar to the Prussian House, but that similar wraiths are from olden times reported to haunt various princely palaces, as well as noblemen's castles, all over Germany. Only a few years since, the *Weisse Frau* was said to have appeared in the Hofburg at Vienna. There was much excitement, lest some sudden case of death, or some terrible event, should happen in the Imperial and Royal House of

Habsburg. Inquiries were diligently set on foot; but nothing came of them.

From early youth I remember that in south-western Germany the White Lady was spoken of, in words of affright, as playing a similar part in the ruling house of the Grand-Duchy of Baden. Any one conversant with the pedigree of that royal family will easily understand why there should be a White Lady also in the case of the House of Zähringen. The fact is, in its pedigree there figures a semi-mythic ancestor (Berchtold), whose name at once suggests that of the heathen goddess (Berchta) of whom I shall presently have to speak as the prototype of all the ghostly and castle-haunting Ancestresses. From boyhood I furthermore recollect some amusing stories as to the doings of this White Lady. Once she was personated by a wily schemer at Court, for the purpose of attaining certain political objects, through working upon the poorly cultivated minds of some "exalted personages." Upon this notable occasion, the Woman in White was bodily "collared" at Karlsruhe, when it was found that she was a *man!* This made the ghostly survival look extremely ridiculous, and even punishable at law.

Turning away from such meaner aspects of the legend, the question arises as to how a supernatural lady, clad in white, comes to be a herald of death in so many royal and noble families of Germany. The answer is not far to seek. It is clearly contained in the pre-Christian faith of our forefathers, of which there are even now the most remarkable remnants in the folk-lore, the popular beliefs, and the castle traditions of our country, as well as of other Teutonic nations.

Almost in every case, very few excepted, in which a White Lady is mentioned, she is called Bertha. This noteworthy fact at once points to the great German goddess, Perahtha, Perchta, or Berchta (in modern German, Bertha), whose very name means Shining Light, as typified by the white colour. She is the same as the northern Goddess of Love, Freyja (in German Freia, Freia-Holda, or simply Holda), who was equally represented in *white* garments. In a great many tales still current in German folk-lore, she appears, not only as clad in white, her white head-gear and robe being moreover covered with a white veil which falls from her golden hair; but also as of snow-white body—a perfect Woman in White.

Now this Bertha or Freia-Holda, besides being a Teutonic Venus, was also a Goddess of Domestic Virtue, and at the same time a Mother of Life, in whose beautiful gardens the Unborn dwell. As usual with Mothers of Life in mythology, she is, moreover, a Mistress of Death. In the heathen Norse creed we find one-half of the departed assigned to Freyr, for her palace Folkwang, whilst the remnant of the dead went up to Walhall, to be with Odin; or to Thrudheim, where the God of Thunder resided; or to

Alfheim, which was the heavenly palace of Freyr, the God of Peace, Love, and Fertility, and brother of Freyja; or to Gefion, who received those that died unmarried. Thus we see in Freyja a white-robed deity in her double quality of a progenitress or ancestress, and of a ruler of the dead. The transition to a similar phantom, haunting castles, is easy.

Actually, Bertha, or Freia, being a Mother of Life, was fabled, in heathen German antiquity, to be the supernatural ancestress of noble and royal families. In Norse myth she bears, of course, as such, the name of Frigg; the original deity in question having, in Scandinavia, branched off into two figures: Freyja (the Love-Goddess and consort of Odur), and Frigg (the consort of Odin); whilst in Germany, Freia-Fricka has remained one and the same. Kingly races, it need not be said, have grown out of aristocratic ones. For the sake of better impressing and governing the crowd, they always appear, in the dawn of history, as being of heavenly descent. Anglo-Saxon, Norwegian, Danish, German princely families trace their origin to "Woden, whom we call Oden." So the Norse Royal Genealogy (Langfedgatal) has it. This Woden or Oden, it is true, if we look closely at the Icelandic "Heims-Kringla" record, is a semi-historical army leader who, from his kingdom near the Black Sea where he was said to have had a fortress called Asgard, went forth through Gardariki (Russia) and Saxony (Germany) for the conquest of Scandinavia. But the image of this semi-mythic, semi-historical Odin is somewhat confused in the northern tale with the god of the same name.

Be that as it may, there can be no doubt of a great many "Berthas" occurring in the ancestral legends of Teutonic ruling families. Almost invariably these progenitresses are of a mythic character. Bertha was said to have been the name of the mother of "Charlemagne," as the French call him, though the Frankish emperor, Karl the Great, was a full-blooded Teuton, careful of his German speech, and usually dressed in his national Frankish garb. The Bertha who is alleged to have been his mother, belongs not, however, to history, but to the circle of myths of pre-Christian times.

A stag (so the tale runs) led Pipin, the father of Karl the Great, to a forest glade where Bertha had found an asylum, after her would-be murderers had regarded her as dead. In an old French record she is curtly and most ungalantly described as *Berthe as grand piès*—that is, Bertha the large-footed. The expression corresponds with the old German *Berhte mit dem fuoze*—i.e., "Bertha with the foot." This large foot of the legendary elder-mother of the House of the Carolingians, or Kerlings, was represented in sculptures of old French (Frankish) and Burgundian churches as a swan's foot—or rather as a goose-foot! The queen in question is therefore called *Reine aux piès d'oison*; clearly not a human being, but a fairy-form belonging to mythology.

But why a goose-foot, or a swan's foot? Here, again, the explanation is to be found in the "grand

and weird creed," as Southey calls it, of our Teutonic forebears. In her earliest form, Freia-Holda-Bertha was figured as a Storm-Goddess, the wife of the Ruler of the Winds and the Clouds, by whom she is chased—even as the cloud is by the wind. Minor cloud-goddesses, or cloud-women, surround her; in some myths they are conceived as swans or mares. They are the swift-running, fast-sailing cloudlets, of sombrero or more silvery hue. Freia-Bertha herself was in this way at first regarded as a Walkyrian Swan-Virgin, or even as a downright Swan.

Later on, when the nature-myth changed into a more human-like representation of deities, nothing remained of the characteristics of the Swan-Virgin, or of the Swan, but the foot. Under a new deterioration of the tale, a goose-foot is substituted for the swan's foot. The goose-foot, again, is afterwards changed into a flat-foot, a large foot—nay, into a club-foot. And so, out of a white-robed Goddess, Freia-Bertha—an Elder-mother of All Life and a Mistress of Death, who originally was a Swan-Virgin—we get Berthas, ancestresses of kings, who are represented as swan-footed, goose-footed, flat-footed, ay, club-footed; as well as White Ladies who are harbingers of death in royal palaces.

It is a peculiarity of the tales referring to the divine circle among all nations, that certain heavenly figures show double qualities apparently opposed to each other. Apollo is a dispenser of bliss and fertility, as well as a far-hitting bringer of death. Under a southern sky, this twofold conception of a Sun-God can be easily understood. Hel,* the Norse Mistress of the Underworld, who hides the dead, is at the same time a secretly-working Mother of Life. This, again, explains itself from the fertilising character of the lower regions of the Earth or Underworld. In the Edda, Hel is half black and half of the colour of human flesh. Death and Life are combined in her. This, so to say, Darwinian, but also old Greek and old Hindoo, notion of the incessant changes wrought in all things, was thus symbolised by a divine figure among the Germanic nations. So also we meet with, in Frankonian and Swabian tales, a Hilda-Bertha, in whose name Darkness and Light, Death and Life, are united. The same quality pertains to Bertha, the Ancestress and the Messenger of Death.

In the legends of German castles, the White Woman, or Ancestress, sometimes carries a heavy, tapping walking-stick. Her ghostly approach is thus heard from afar. This characteristic, too, is explainable from an attribute of the goddess on whose type the spectral apparition in question had been moulded. As a representative, not only of amorousness but also of housewifely accomplishments, Perchta, or Bertha, was figured with a distaff. She is in this, as well as in some other respects, like the Trojan Athene, of whom we hear a great deal that is new and highly interesting, in the works of that indefatigable explorer, Dr. Schliemann, who, in addition to his previous matchless labours, has a few months ago made a fresh

* In English dialectic speech, "to *hèle*" means, even now, to conceal, or to hide.

wonderful discovery of a vast pre-historic palace at Tiryns, in the Peloponnese.

The distaff of the former German goddess Perchta still plays its part in current folk-tales. About Twelfth-night—it was once believed, and it is believed even now in some dark nooks and corners where superstition lingers—a fairy, called Freia or Berchta, visits the households, looking after the industry of the maidens at the spinning-wheel. No wonder, "Bertha with the Distaff" is the name of that mythic mother of Karl the Great; her image having been evolved out of the ancient Teutonic creed rather than out of historical fact. In the usual course of the deterioration of tales, the distaff of Freia-Bertha, the White Goddess, has degenerated into a heavy staff carried by a spectral white woman.

It will thus be seen that the phantom whose apparition, in German castles, is said to portend the death of some member of the family, or some other tragic occurrence, is none else than the fabulous Ancestress of the heathen faith, who either calls back her descendants to the region she herself inhabits, or wishes to give them important warning. As usual in such legends, they become, after awhile, loaded with all kinds of extraneous historical matter. For instance, in the story of the lordly family of Neuhaus and Rosenberg, the Ancestress—whose name, of course, is Bertha—is said to have built the Castle of

Neuhaus in the fifteenth century; promising the workmen, if they got things all right, a festive treat, which is even now annually given to the poor, in her remembrance, on Maundy Thursday. This festive treat, however, consists exactly of the viands which once were sacred to the goddess Berchta, and which are still eaten, in some parts of Germany, at Twelfth-night, or Twelfth-day—which is there called *Berchtentag*, or Berchta's Day!

In the same way we find at Oxford University, even now, a Boar's Head Dinner, the origin of which is explained from an alleged adventure a student had with a wild boar in the forest of Shotover; whereas the Boar's Head Dinner was in reality once a religious ceremonial feast among all Teutonic races—Anglo-Saxon, German, and Norse—in honour of Freyr (the brother of this very Freyja-Berchta), whose sacred animal was the golden-bristled, swift-running boar, representing the sun in his career over the sky.

If the scientific treatment of these tales—which under a cover of ghastliness have sometimes traits of considerable charm—were popularised and brought home to the understanding of the masses, superstitions would soon vanish and nocturnal scares become impossible. Nothing would then remain of them but the poetic enjoyment of their contents; and White Ladies at Berlin, Vienna, or in noblemen's ancestral mansions, would cease to trouble a frightened fancy.

A BLIND MAN'S SONG.



WEET buttercups and daisies
That gem the grassy plain,
With warm, soul-filtered phrases
I'll sing you once again.

You stand like children hear'ning
To one that's loved you long;
But twilight shades are dark'ning,
And gloom blights many a song.

But list, a song I'll tend you—
An old man's vesper strain—
If stammerings won't offend you,
Nor flutterings give you pain.

For why should night's relation,
Poor me—so apt to rove—
Not tell my admiration
To gemlets from above?

To eyes now growing sightless
You're losing all your wiles,
Yet in my soul your brightness
Has photographed your smiles.

In youth I've danced around you
Till nature sued for rest,
And then in chaplets bound you
For them that loved the best.

Companions of the lea-land,
Companions old and true,
There's not in this our free land
Two older friends than you.

So give the cup a charging
Of morn's refreshing wine,
And from the goblet's margi
I'll drink to love divine.

Then though the burthen crazes,
I'll sing to nature's lute—
Praise, buttercups and daisies—
Praise God when man is mute.

In youth give praises tender,
But in maturer hours
Praise Him with Eden's splendour—
The eloquence of flowers.

Praise Him, ye pastoral singers,
On harps of Flora's mould—
Praise Him with pearly fingers
And bells of fragrant gold.

Though none but your Creator
And bards may catch the strain—
The rhapsodies of nature
Will not ascend in vain.