



most graceful of the throng was Katel, who danced madly on until one by one her partners sank fainting upon the ground, and death released them from the heartless sorceress who had lured them into her toils.

Thus perished many suitors, until the cruel maiden became

an object of general hatred and horror. When her doings came to the ears of the count, he sternly forbade her to attend any more of the dances. In order to enforce her obedience, he shut her up in a tower, where, said he, she was to remain until she should choose a husband from among such suitors as still persisted in offering her marriage.

Now, Katel had a wizened little page, no bigger than a leveret, and as black as a raven's wing. This creature she summoned to her one morning before dawn, and, with her finger at her lips, she said to him: "Be swift and silent! My uncle still slumbers. Get thee gone by the ladder, and hie thee to the castle of Salaün, who is waiting for a message from her he loves. The guards will allow thee to pass; take horse, ride like the wind, and tell Salaün that Katel calls him to deliver her from this tower before the day dawns."

The infatuated young knight obeyed the summons immediately. In an hour's time he was assisting the lady to mount his horse, after having got her in safety down the rope-ladder. As, from the window of the donjon, the dwarf watched them ride away, he chuckled to himself:—

"Ha! ha! And so they are off to the great ball held to-day in the Martyrs' Meadow! Ah, my dear Salaün! before

I.

LONG, long ago, in the days of good King Arthur, Count Morriss dwelt in the old château of La Roche Morice, near Landerneau, in Brittany. With him lived his beautiful niece, Katel. Although charming in face and figure, this maiden had a somewhat uncanny reputation. For it was said—and with reason—that she was a witch.

The Count had often urged Katel to marry, but in vain. The lady had no mind to lose her freedom. Dancing was the one passion of her life. "When," said she, "I can find a knight who shall be able to dance continuously with me for twelve hours, with no break, to him I promise to give my hand!"

This scornful challenge was proclaimed by heralds in every neighbouring town and hamlet. In response came many wooers to attempt the impossible task. Those whom Katel favoured she made her partners at the rustic fêtes and open-air dances which were then in vogue. In the soft-swarded meadows, by sunlight or starlight, the dancers would meet, and, to the dreamy music of the pipes, eager couples would whirl until the hills around began to blush in the light of the early dawn. The wildest, giddiest, yet

another sun shall rise, your death-knell will be tolled!"

II.

WHEN Katel and her gallant cavalier arrived at the Martyrs' Meadow, they excited general surprise and admiration. Some, however, shook their heads forebodingly, as they heard that Salaün, now Katel's affianced lover, was to be her partner, for they knew that the brave young knight must needs fall a victim to her spell.

The ball began. Some of the most skilful pipers in the land had been engaged for the occasion, and they played gavottes, rondes, courantes, and many other dances, without intermission. But Katel waited until night came and the torches were lit. Then she took Salaün's hand, and they began to dance together.

"Round again! Once more! Ha! ha!" laughed the witch-maiden, as they spun along. "What! are you tired already? Do you give in so soon as this?"

"Never—while I am with *you!*" was the fervent reply. The fatal spell had begun to work.

Thus on they whirled, yet more swiftly than before, so that the other dancers stood aside to watch them. After a time, however, Katel observed that her partner was gradually becoming weaker, and that he would soon be unable to keep pace with her.

"Courage!" exclaimed she, in a bantering tone. "We cannot stop yet; it wants but a very short time to midnight, and then I shall be yours!"

Salaün, although almost exhausted, strained every nerve and muscle in a frantic, final effort to continue the dance. Round the field they flew, at lightning speed; but it was for the last time. The knight's knees shook—his breath came more quickly—then with difficulty he gasped out the words:—

"Oh, Katel! have mercy! I can do no more! Katel, my love, have I not won you yet?"

But as he sank lifeless upon the grass, Katel turned coldly away.



"KATEL TURNED COLDLY AWAY."

His fate was nothing to her. At that moment the clock in a neighbouring tower struck twelve. All the lights flickered and expired; darkness reigned supreme. And through the darkness, shrilling high above every other sound, rang the mocking laugh of the impish dwarf.

III.

"WHAT!" exclaimed Katel, derisively, glancing angrily at the worn-out pipers, who had at last paused in their wild music, "exhausted already by such slight exertions? I wish the Evil One would send me some musicians and dancers worthy of me! Of what use are these miserable, puny creatures?"

As she uttered the words, stamping her foot in her fury, a weird, red light gleamed in the sky; there was a terrible peal of thunder, and a strange stir in the trees. Then suddenly, in the centre of the field, appeared two phantom forms, at the sight of whom the panic-stricken by-standers would fain have fled. To their

horror, however, they found flight impossible; they were rooted to the spot!

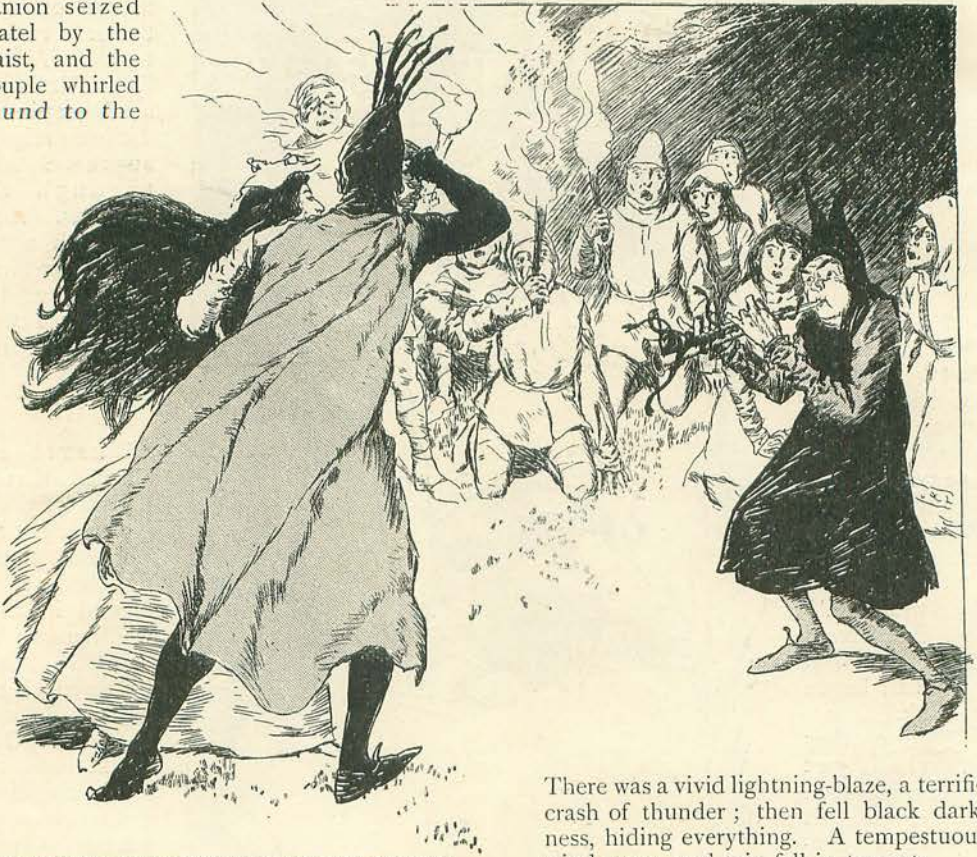
One of the phantoms was attired in a red garment, covered with a black cloak. Beneath his arm he held a large double pipe, coiled around which were five hissing, writhing serpents. The other stranger, who was exceedingly tall, was dressed in a tightly-fitting black suit, and heavy, red mantle, while upon his head waved an imposing tuft of vultures' plumes.

The ghostly piper began at once to play an unearthly dance-tune, so wild and maddening that it made all the hearers tremble. His tall, grim companion seized Katel by the waist, and the couple whirled round to the

torches swam before her eyes, and, in the last extremity of terror, she struggled to release herself from the iron grip which held her so relentlessly.

"What! so soon tired?" cried the spectre, jeering at her. "Do you give in so soon as this? Come! round once more! Ha! ha!"

Thus was Katel treated as she had treated others. She had no breath left wherewith to answer; her last hour had come. She made one more wild, despairing bound, then fell to the ground in the throes of death. At the same moment, the phantoms vanished.



"THE COUPLE WHIRLED ROUND TO THE MAD MEASURE."

mad measure, which grew ever faster and more furious. In an instant the torches were re-lit. A few others joined in the dance; not for long, however. Katel and her phantom were soon the only dancers. Shriller still shrieked the pipes, faster yet grew the music, more and more swiftly spun the feet. Ere long the witch-maiden felt that her strength was deserting her; the

There was a vivid lightning-blaze, a terrific crash of thunder; then fell black darkness, hiding everything. A tempestuous wind arose, and rain fell in torrents.

When the storm had cleared, and the morning sun shone out, those who found courage to visit the spot beheld the forms of Katel and her lover Salaün lying dead upon the shrivelled turf.

Ever since that time, the spot has been shunned by all, and still, by their firesides on the winter nights, the peasants tell the tale of Katel, the witch-dancer, and her fearful fate.